

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the issue of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, has gained increasing attention at the national, regional and international level. In the Mekong sub-region, the socio-economic and political changes that have taken place in countries like Cambodia and Vietnam in the past decades have been accompanied by greater mobility of people internally as well as across borders. Experience from a country like Thailand have shown that the movement of people, particularly women, into various types of labour and service sectors including marriage has been increasingly accompanied by deception, coercion, and exploitation.

The Research and Action Project on Trafficking in Women in the Mekong Region – in short the RA Project – was a response to the growing concern over the increasing number of women who had been “trafficked” in Cambodia and Vietnam in the late eighties / early nineties. At that time, there was a general lack of reliable data on the trafficking situation as well as the lack of appropriate strategies to provide support to affected women.

The basic framework of the RA Project was based on a project that had been done in Thailand. *The Research and Action Project on Traffic in Women in Thailand (RATW)* was an action-oriented research project carried out by the Foundation For Women (FFW). This project was designed to develop a reliable database about trafficking in women in Thailand and to define workable strategies to fight this problem. When the results of the RATW Project were presented during the International Workshop on Migration and Traffic in Women held in Chiang Mai, Thailand in October 1994, participants from Vietnam and Cambodia expressed their concern over the emerging problems of trafficking in their countries. They also expressed a strong interest in and a need to carry out a similar project to the RATW in their own countries. This was the inception of the RA Project.

The main objectives of the RA Project were to document the situation of trafficking in women in Cambodia and Vietnam and to develop appropriate strategies to address the problems and support the women concerned. The methodology employed was one of action research with a feminist and participatory approach. This methodology had been shown to be effective in giving involved women a voice and a chance to improve their conditions through taking actions for themselves. The Project was divided into two phases: a research phase and an action phase. It was implemented by three partner organisations; in Cambodia (by the CWDA), in Northern Vietnam (by the Youth Research Institute) and in Southern Vietnam (by the Women’s Unions of Ho Chi Minh City and Tay Ninh province). GAATW acted as a coordinating agency providing assistance and facilitating the Project. More details about the project design and methodology will be presented in Chapter 1.

When the RA Project was implemented in early 1997, there had been very few projects or studies carried out on trafficking in this region and in addition the issue was perceived to be a very sensitive one in a certain political environments. These factors impacted on the implementation, as well as outcome, of the project. In this sense, the project as a whole was challenging and a learning process for all involved. Nevertheless, this four-year-long project (1997 – February 2001) has brought about a number of tangible positive outcomes.

A specific advantage of the RA Project

One special feature of the RA Project was that it was an initiative of local organisations. GAATW recognises that there have been a number of research projects carried out and reports published on the issues related to trafficking in women in the Mekong region. However many of these research projects were completed by external consultants rather than by local organisations working in the country. Such research reports contain useful information on the situation of trafficking (e.g. experiences of trafficked women, their families and communities; forms and patterns of trafficking; trafficking networks; and working conditions). They also make policy recommendations and suggest programmes to address the problem. However, the discussion in the reports may not necessarily reflect the perception of the issue by local groups and affected women.

In the RA Project, it is important to note that to a large extent the findings presented in the implementing agencies' reports reflect the understanding of the issue of that local group, as well as the particular mandate of that organisation. Although there was a common framework (e.g., research methodology) set out at the beginning of the project, each partner carried out the project within their own specific context. Thus the actual project implementation (e.g., research methods employed and framework for working with women) may not have strictly follow the methodology or approach set out for the project. Such variations in the research procedure may be perceived as a weakness in the project, in that the methodology may not work or may work differently in certain social, political or cultural context. Nevertheless, this realisation itself provides valuable input for future project design.

Content of the RA Project Report

The report presents both the process and the outcomes of the RA Project. The main objectives of the report are:

1. to provide an overview and analysis of situation of migration and trafficking in women in Cambodia and Vietnam as identified by the implementing agencies;
2. to provide an analysis of the findings presented within a conceptual framework;
3. to discuss the process used and activities carried out by the implementing agencies in a framework of Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) methodology.

The report is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter 1 overviews project design and process, information on the partner agencies and research areas, as well as describing the methodological framework of the Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR).

Chapter 2 provides a brief country profile of Cambodia and Vietnam giving some background to the historical, economic, political, social and cultural conditions in each country as they relate to the issue of trafficking in women.

Chapter 3, 4 and 5 present the research findings on the situation of trafficking in women in Cambodia, Northern Vietnam and Southern Vietnam. They are compiled largely from the information given in the project reports prepared by each implementing agency. These reports contain both the implementing agency's analysis of the findings from the field research and details of the activities they implemented during the project period. The format/style of the reports from each implementing agency differ somewhat. While report from the Cambodian team largely contains statistical information, the reports from the two Vietnamese teams are more descriptive. Furthermore, the levels of the completeness differ between the reports. This could be attributable to a number of factors including:

- 1) the type of information presented in each report reflected the level of information sort by the research teams based on their understanding and analysis of the issue, and also what was allowed to be published by the implementing agency,
- 2) the technical expertise of the research teams in compiling/writing the information,
- 3) the human resources available to prepare the report.

These issues are discussed in more details in the Analysis Chapter.

In order to present the situation of trafficking as seen by each of the local partners, these chapters retain most of the information presented in the research reports of the implementing agencies. Where necessary, information is reorganised for clarity and easy reading.

Chapter 6 presents the range of activities used by the three partners in the action phase. This "action" component is an important aspect of the project which set out to involve "affected" women in the formulation of strategies and activities to address their situation and to empower them. This chapter discusses the process and outcomes in terms of the given methodological framework and reflects the differing contexts of Cambodia and Vietnam.

In Chapter 7, GAATW provides analysis on the following three issues: the conceptual understanding of trafficking; factors contributing to trafficking; and the application of FPAR methodology in the research of trafficking in women.

As mentioned earlier, the RA Project is probably the first of its kind in the region. The project set out to achieve many objectives. The process toward achieving these objectives was certainly a challenging one due to the complexity of the issue as well as the particular socio-political contexts of Cambodia and Vietnam. Despite many difficulties and limitations, the RA Project has brought about number of tangible outcomes, which will contribute to further understanding and discussion both on the issue of trafficking and on the FPAR methodology. We hope to share these experiences in this report.

CHAPTER 1 PROJECT DESIGN

1.1 Inception of the Project

In 1992, the Foundation For Women (FFW), a Thai NGO, started an action-oriented research project in Thailand. The aim was to create a more reliable database and to define workable strategies to fight trafficking in women.

When the results of *the Research and Action Project on Traffic in Women in Thailand* (RATW Project) were presented during the International Workshop on Migration and Traffic in Women held in Chiang Mai, Thailand in October 1994. At that workshop participants from Vietnam and Cambodia expressed their concern over the emerging problems of trafficking in their countries. They also expressed a strong interest and need to carry out a similar project to document the situation of trafficking in women in Vietnam and Cambodia in order to develop appropriate strategies to address the problems and support the women concerned.

The Director of the Cambodian Women's Development Agency (CWDA), a representative from Centre for Family and Women's Studies in Hanoi worked together with resource persons from GAATW and FFW and an external consultant to develop a project proposal. The Netherlands's Ministry of Development Cooperation granted full support for this project which officially started in January 1997.

1.2 Objectives of the Project

General objectives of the project:

1. to investigate systematically the situation of trafficking in women in the Mekong region namely Vietnam and Cambodia, applying the methodology developed in the previous Action Research Project in Thailand, in order to prevent further spread of the phenomenon and to develop appropriate services for the trafficked women;
2. to formulate strategies and policy recommendations for the improvement of government measures in Vietnam and Cambodia to combat traffic in women and improve legal, social and health support for victims and potential victims of trafficking;
3. to formulate policy recommendations for the improvement of co-ordination between the governments and the non-governmental organisations in the Mekong region to combat traffic in women at local, national and regional levels;
4. to document forms of human rights violation committed against trafficked women.
5. to formulate appropriate actions in partnership with women and community to provide support to trafficked women and prevent internal and cross-border trafficking of women.

During the course of the project, certain objectives were revised. The aim to formulate strategies and policy recommendations at the regional level for example was reviewed and decided against after Phase I. Implementing agencies were only able to address some policy issues at the national level. This was because data collected did not give a clear indication of cross border issues. There were also initiatives taken by a number of international agencies that focused on regional policy issues on trafficking that GAATW felt addressed this objective of the project. Therefore, instead of looking into regional policy issues, the aim of the project shifted to address the emerging needs of local groups more directly.

In addition to these general objectives, each country team put forward their specific objectives for this project reflecting the different situation and needs in their respective contexts.

1.3 Context and Understanding of Trafficking

At the time when the project was conceived and throughout its implementation period there had been no internationally agreed definition of trafficking. The perception of the issue and the problem was, for Vietnam, related to increased female labour migration and the vulnerability of them being trafficked into prostitution or as brides of foreign men. For Cambodia, concern over trafficking in women and their human rights violation was connected to the growth in prostitution which was perceived to be a result of the economic and political transition of the country including the presence of UNTAC peacekeeping force.

To set a common conceptual framework for the research, GAATW as the co-ordinating agency shared an analysis of the issues of migration, trafficking and prostitution based on the research experience in Thailand carried out by FFW. After the initial process of data collection in Phase I, GAATW organised a meeting to synthesise and share the findings. During the presentation of the finding by each team, it became clear that there was a need to discuss and analyze the terms and concepts that each research team was using. Terms such as trafficker, brothel owner, pimp, matchmaker/recruiter, buyer, prostitute/sex workers were used in describing those involved in the trafficking process while the elements of trafficking were not clearly identified. There was generally no or little distinction made between voluntary migration and trafficking in the presentations given by each research team.

As there seemed to be a lack of a clear understanding of what constitutes trafficking, GAATW shared a two part definition of trafficking which was used in the International Report Project on Trafficking in Women (1997) coordinated by GAATW and the Foundation Against Trafficking in Women (STV).¹

Trafficking in Women:

¹ This report had been submitted to the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women

All acts involved in the recruitment and/or transportation of women by means of violence or threat of violence, abuse of authority or dominant position, debt bondage or other forms of coercion.

Forced Labour and Slavery-like Practices:

The extraction of work or services from any woman or the appropriation of the legal identity and/or physical person of any women by means of violence or threat of violence, abuse of authority or dominant position, debt bondage or other forms of coercion.

GAATW shared the experience that the term trafficking is often used to describe situation of illegal migration and/or situations of women going into prostitution. It should be recognised that each of these phenomenon is separate although they may be interrelated. It was important, for clarity therefore, that the research team be very specific (or give detailed explanations) when describing a situation. The team must consider the elements which make explicit the distinction between voluntary migration and trafficking. The elements of trafficking were identified and discussed as follows:

1. Deception (usually about the nature of work), coercion in recruitment;
2. Force, coercion and or the threat of violence during transportation process;
3. Force, coercion and violence or threat of violence at destination, e.g., work sites;
4. Deprivation of freedom (of movement and personal choice);
5. Abuse of authority/dominant position - e.g., a mother may use her position to get her daughter to work in prostitution. She may know or not know what it involves. It may also be government officials, teacher, village head, etc;
6. Debt bondage – a situation where a woman is told that she is now indebted to the person who facilitated her travel and that she must pay back the debt by working in prostitution or other forms of work. Equally, the situation where the deduction of the debt was not done in a reasonable manner (possibly in order to ensure that the woman remained in debt for as long as possible).

Throughout the project period, several discussions took place between GAATW and the project partners particularly the researchers and the implementing agencies in Vietnam on what was considered “trafficking”. It became very clear that for the partners in Vietnam, “prostitution and trafficking in women are closely related and they share [similar] characters”. The ideological position/perception of the partners in Vietnam have quite heavily influenced the type of research participants, the nature of the findings and as well as development of strategies and activities developed in Phase II.

1.4 Organisational Structure of the Project

Coordinating Agency

GAATW was responsible for the coordination of the project. This mainly included providing technical support to the implementing agencies, sharing lessons learned from the RATW Project in Thailand with the project partners as well as facilitating learning and sharing of experiences with the project partners and the women at the grassroots. One full time project coordinator was employed by GAATW.

Implementing Agencies

The roles and responsibilities of the implementing agencies included the selection of a project coordinator and researchers, identification of the research sites, provision of local training to the research team and the development and facilitation of activities in Phase II. In addition, they were also responsible for management of the budget, reporting on progress of the project activities and for preparing a country report (separate reports were required for Northern and Southern Vietnam).

GAATW felt that it was important to work with organisations that had the capability to facilitate the continuity of the project after its official completion. At the same time, they believed the project should also contribute to capacity building of local people. In this regard, the involvement of local organisations as implementing agencies was imperative.

Cambodia

In Cambodia, the Cambodian Women's Development Agency (CWDA) was responsible for carrying out the project. CWDA is a local non-profit, non-governmental organisation with a strong feminist agenda. It is dedicated to promoting self-sufficiency and self-reliance of women in Cambodian communities through the advancement of women's economic and social rights. CWDA's main programs include: promotion of women's rights; health education program; HIV/AIDS awareness program; literacy program; vocational training program; income generation program; and participatory communication. Prior to the RA project, CWDA already had some experience in working with trafficked women and women in prostitution.

Vietnam

For Vietnam, it was initially planned that the project would be under the responsibility of the Centre for Family and Women's Studies in Hanoi who would oversee the project for both the northern and southern part of the country. However, during the preparation stage it was decided that for practical purpose the project would be implemented by two different agencies. The Youth Research Institute (YRI) became the implementing agency in Northern Vietnam instead of the Centre for Family and Women's Studies; a change that was proposed by the Centre itself.

In Southern Vietnam, the Women's Union of Ho Chi Minh City was recommended as an appropriate body to undertake this project. The Women's Union of Ho Chi Minh City proposed to also work with Women's Union of Tay Ninh province in order to cover the bordering area.

◆ *Youth Research Institute – Hanoi (YRI):*

The YRI is a department within the Vietnam Youth Union – a mass organisation -- in Hanoi. They have experience in social science research, mostly working on problems of young people and street children in Hanoi and the northern Vietnam. The YRI also provides training for specialists in the field of adolescents and youth research.

◆ *Women’s Union (WU) of Ho Chi Minh City and Tay Ninh Women's Union:*

The Women's Union offices are also mass organisations affiliated to the Communist Party. The main activities of the Women’s Union include: organising vocational training for women; provision of financial aid for women; and organisation of courses on issues regarding health, violence and children. Although they had little experience in doing research, they had facilitated various welfare-oriented activities such as skill-training at the local level.

1.5 Implementation Design and Timeframe

The RA project was divided into two phases: a research phase and an action phase.

Phase I – the research phase (January 1997 - March 1998) was divided into three stages: preparatory stage; field research; and report writing. The preparatory stage involved the recruitment of researchers and the training. Then the field research was conducted by research teams from each implementing agency in selected areas. The information collected through the field research was analysed by each implementing agency and presented to the coordinating agency in the country reports.

A regional meeting for the three research teams was organised to share their findings and do a comparative analysis of the findings. The implementing agencies also organised National Workshops in their countries to disseminate the findings from field research.

In **Phase II – the action phase**, (March 1998 - Dec 1999), the focus was on the development and implementation of strategies to prevent and mitigate trafficking in women and to improve the situation of trafficked women. A specific design for the Phase II was drawn up after the completion of Phase I. The strategies were formulated in partnership with the women concerned. It aimed to strengthen and develop the women’s own initiatives and participation in addressing trafficking in women and in improving their situation. Strategy development was based on the findings of the Phase I and on the needs of affected women. The process of planning and implementing of activities would be a participatory one.

The initial timeframe of the project was to be two years from 1997-1998. However, a longer timeline was deemed necessary by the implementing agencies in order to complete planned activities in Phase II as well as to initiate a number of new activities that were not originally planned. Thus the project was granted a zero budget extension to February 2001. During this extension period the activities that were carried out also enabled learning and sharing of

experiences between the project partners, as well as among local women who had participated in the project. This process was significant in the capacity building of the local project team members as well as enhancing their conceptual understanding of the issues involved. During this time also, the project partner in Southern Vietnam was able to collect additional data in the survey on situation of women married to Taiwanese men, rendering up-to-date information on that situation.

Project activities were completed around the end of year 2000.

1.6 Research Teams and Project Sites

Cambodia

In Cambodia, a total of eleven researchers were recruited by CWDA for the work in the Phase I. The researchers worked under supervision of the CWDA Director and the project coordinator appointed by CWDA. All the researchers were local people with experience in dealing with the sort of social issues found in the provinces that were identified as project sites. Most researchers had primary and secondary level of education.

The project sites included ten villages and sixteen brothel areas in Battambang, Ko Kong, Kampong Som (Sihanoukville), Banteay Meanchay and Phnom Penh. Each team consisted of two researchers except in Phnom Penh where there were three researchers.

During Phase II, CWDA decided to exclude Banteay Meanchay because the researchers dropped out and they could not find any replacement. In Phase II, CWDA arranged to have only one researcher for each site to oversee activities in the remaining four provinces. Among these four researchers, two were involved from the first phase of the project, while the other two joined the project in the beginning of Phase II.

Vietnam

◆ Northern Vietnam team - Youth Research Institute (YRI)

All the researchers of YRI were university graduates and had some research experience. During Phase I, six researchers worked in eight communes and towns in three provinces of Quang Ninh, Hai Duong and Lang Son under the supervision of YRI Director and the appointed project coordinator.

In Phase II, three out of the eight project sites including two communes in Lang Son province and one commune in Hai Duong province were selected for project implementation. One new commune in Quang Ninh province was selected to replace the one under research during Phase I as the latter was reported to have unreliable sample of returnees. A team of two researchers was responsible for each project area. Some of the researchers joined the project only during the second phase.

◆ Southern Vietnam team – Women’s Union in Ho Chi Minh City and Tay Ninh Province

During Phase I, there were six researchers in the Southern Vietnamese team responsible for the project sites which included two districts in Ho Chi Minh City and three communes in Tay Ninh province. The researchers were either members of the HCMC Women's Union and Tay Ninh Women's Union or were recruited from the other Women's Union offices in the selected research areas. An external project coordinator with experience in social science research was appointed to be responsible for the technical and scientific aspect of the research and a senior staff member of the Women's Union was appointed to be the overall project coordinator.

During Phase II, additional staff members overseeing the loan management programme of the Women's Union were assigned to the project. The project sites remained the same as in the Phase I.

During the project extension period (1999-2000), additional surveys on situation of Vietnamese women marrying foreigners were carried out in two districts in Ho Chi Minh City and four communes in Tay Ninh province.

1.7 Methodology – Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR)

Research methodology included both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Questionnaire surveys were carried out during the project extension period on situation of Vietnamese women marrying foreigners. Secondary information was also collected from published reports and newspapers. However, the project relied mostly on primary data gathered from interviews with women and other informants.

The project framework was one of action research with a feminist and participatory approach, which would give women a voice and a chance to improve their living conditions (or to address their situation) through taking actions themselves. The section below provides a brief overview of the key concepts to the methodology of the project.

Participation

Participation is a powerful but slippery concept. Within the context of development projects it may mean anything from having people contribute to the project with cash or labour, to involving them in planning and decisions, or taking part in research and evaluation of projects.

Clearly this last type of involvement means that people are able to share ideas about problems and possible solutions. The participants are seen as “insiders”; they are not simply sources of data or sanctioners of studies and reports, but actively codetermine every phase of the research process. Through this form of research the participants' knowledge and experiences are valued and their confidence in themselves being able to analyse their situation is enhanced.

Another, very important aspect of participatory research is the involvement of participants as a group, not just as individuals. By encouraging participants to share information and analyse

problems among themselves, it is possible to develop an even clearer view on the issues being studied. In this way, the research process can function as a conscientization process.

The importance of working with groups of participants rather than with individuals only, is reflected in the methods specifically developed for participatory research. Almost all of these methods, or techniques, have been adopted to be used in group discussions.

Such techniques are also useful in social science research. They can yield very valuable information, not only for the researcher but notably also for the participants themselves. As each of them contributes to the activity, they will share views and discuss and clarify their ideas. At the same time the techniques can assist in clarifying ways of taking action.

Participatory action research

The purpose of participatory research is not only to describe and interpret social reality in a more reliable way, but to radically change it as well. Moreover, it aims to transform reality “with” rather than “for” oppressed people. This is the concept of “partnership approaches”.

Participatory action research combines three activities: investigation, evaluation and action. The link between research and action is the most important aspect: when people are directly involved in and analysis of their situation, it follows that they want to find solutions to the problems they have identified. In the action process new insights and new solutions may emerge. Not only the participants, but also the researcher can change ideas about social reality. By taking action, the participants and the researcher can work together to change the existing social structures.

An important aspect of action research is its cyclic nature: it starts with studying, learning, and an analysis of the situation and problems. From this emerges planning of possible solutions, and then action is taken. The result of the action is then evaluated, a new analysis of the changed situation is made, new planning with new action follows, and so on. These repeated assessments further improve and consolidate the action. By bringing research and action together in this way, it is possible to study the process of change over a long period of time.

This type of research is supposed to break down the distinction between the “knowers” (researchers, scholars, experts) and “not-knowers” (peasants, women, poor people; in short, all those who are “subjects” of research). Outcomes and knowledge coming from the research is directly processed and used by the participants, with support and assistance of the researcher.

Participatory action research contrasts sharply with the conventional model of research, in which participants are treated mostly as passive subjects only, and sometimes as receivers of the results. It is not always recognized that this still unconventional type of research can also enhance the validity of the findings. Causal inferences about the behaviour of people are likely to be more valid and able to be acted upon when they themselves take part in developing and testing them.

Clearly, participatory action research not only requires considerable skills of the researcher in using participatory techniques as indicated above, but also open mindedness and a pleasant manner with the participants. Her attitude and her role are different from that of a “traditional”

researcher: she not only gathers information, but also clarifies, stimulates, supports, assists. Her work will always include a transfer of organizational, technical and analytical skills from the researcher to the participants.

Feminist research

The most important premises which govern this research can be summarized as follows:

- a focus on the lives, the opinions and the experiences of women; this includes women's relations with children and men;
- a focus on possibilities for changes in thinking and behaviour, in order to fight against oppression and exploitation and to improve living conditions and interpersonal relationships;
- to abandon the conventional idea that knowledge is something that exists by itself and for itself, free of the scientist or researcher and his or her background and environment (sex, culture, language, position, etc.);
- knowledge should be accessible to everyone, not only to the researcher or the scientific community.

Comparing these premises with the principles of participatory research and action research described above, it becomes clear that there is a considerable overlap in basic thinking for all three research modes. Feminist research is mainly different in its main focus on women, and in rejecting any male bias or androcentrism in research. This grew out of the feminist critique of social sciences, when it was found that in many theories and studies women's experiences are omitted or falsely represented. It is believed that looking at the world through the eyes of women and studying women's experiences will adjust the male-biased view on reality which is still not uncommon in the social sciences.

An important aim of feminist research is to understand the extent, the dimensions, the forms and the causes of exploitation and oppression of women. Then, it is also thought important to study the means through which women may already challenge systems and institutions which limit their choices. Oppression is an extraordinarily complex process in which women (and people in general) are not necessarily totally powerless, in that they may utilize a range of resources – verbal, interactional and others – as forms of everyday resistance.

Because feminism is committed to changing the conditions of exploitation and oppression, a large section of feminist research focuses on possibilities for such changes. This requires new methodologies, new approaches in doing research, as have been developed in the participatory and action research approaches. Central in these approaches are, firstly, sharing of data and findings with participants, and secondly, using the research as a means toward conscientization, for both the women participants and for the researcher. A heightened awareness, and enhanced skills to analyse their situation, will then encourage and empower the women to take action, to find solutions to their problems and to change their lives.

These concepts are far from those usually accepted in conventional research, where knowledge and theories are supposed to be detached from any practical use. Not only feminists, but also those advocating participatory and action research take the opposite view: research should be

executed to serve the interests of the participants in the first place, who will use the knowledge gained for their own empowerment.

Another important requirement in conventional social science is that researchers must be objective, their personal ideas are not supposed to “colour” the research. Feminist scholars point to the impossibility and even the undesirability of this view. Researchers should look not only at their own ‘hidden’ values on moral issues, but take a clear stand in reciprocity and solidarity with the participants in their research.

It is also generally agreed that it is preferable that women researchers should be working with women participants. Female researchers usually have an advantage over males in communicating with other women; in addition they may share a set of common experiences with other women and therefore be able to identify with their situations and problems.

1.8 Preparation and Training

In preparation for the implementation of the project, GAATW organised a five day *Orientation Workshop for Project Co-ordinators and Advisory Task Force Members* to discuss the project framework and draw up a common workplan for Phase I. Following this workshop, an *Orientation and Training Workshop for Field Researchers* was conducted in Cambodia and Vietnam by an external consultant contracted through GAATW. In Cambodia, this training lasted for two weeks while in Vietnam the training had to be condensed to 3 days each in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. In all training, theories of participatory feminist action research were discussed followed by some exercises on data collection techniques. After the training provided by GAATW, each local project co-ordinator organised *localised training for researchers* in their respective countries. The two Vietnamese research teams had single training during which a common checklist for field research in Northern and Southern Vietnam was developed.

For Phase II, no training was conducted in Cambodia. GAATW facilitated a study trip for the Cambodian researchers to visit local women's and community organisations in Thailand to help them in planning for work in Phase II.

For Vietnam, two separate training were organised for the Northern and the Southern team. The training focused on techniques in developing/initiating activities together with participants in communities. GAATW also organised study trips for the Vietnamese teams to visit women's and community groups in Thailand.

CHAPTER 2 CONTEXT

In order to clearly understand the context in which the RA Project took place, this chapter provides some background to the historical, economic, political, social and cultural conditions in Cambodia and Vietnam as they relate to the issue of trafficking in women. The aim here is to briefly overview the particular contexts of each country as presented in the available literature on issues relating to trafficking.

2.1 Cambodia

It is commonly understood that trafficking in women is a new phenomenon that has been dramatically increasing in Cambodia over the last decade. The CWDA report traced this rise “to the economic and social changes associated with the transition from a closed socialist to a capitalist enterprise system.”² The presence of UNTAC (1991-1993) after decades of civil war also created a huge demand for the sex industry and was seen as contributing to the expansion of trafficking business.

In its historical context, however, many social problems that Cambodia faces today, including trafficking in women, are somehow related to its turbulent history. The recent history of Cambodia -- decades of civil war and political and economic upheaval -- has had a major impact on the lives, status and roles of both women and men within the household as well as society as a whole.³ For example, significant and widespread human loss during the Khmer Rouge regime had created high levels of disintegration of both families and communities.⁴ It is reported that single females head 29% of urban households in comparison to 20% in rural areas. It is also estimated that more than 200,000 children are orphans.⁵ These figures indicate that there are fewer support systems, than exist in an extended family situation or in the community, to help poor families or those with problems. This situation, as pointed by Sean and Barr (1997), can be seen as one of the contributing factors to the development of trafficking of women in the country.

Poverty and Migration in Cambodia

Cambodian society is identified as overwhelmingly rural with more than 80 percent of the population engaged in agricultural activities. Thus “the sustainability of rural productivity is vital for the survival of the nation and its people.”⁶ This is of particular relevance to women who make a significant contribution to rural production in Cambodia. The current

² CWDA, 1999: p7.

³ Center for Advanced Study, *Gender Issues in Contemporary Cambodia*, Cambodia Report, v.II, no..3, Nov-Dec. 1996.

⁴ It is estimated that approximately 2 million people had died through disease, starvation and mass execution. (Sean and Barr, 1998: p16)

⁵ Sean and Barr, 1998: p16.

⁶ CWDA, 1999, p7.

statistic indicates that 90 per cent of employed females in the rural area are in the agricultural sector.⁷

However, since 1960s, a number of factors have severely diminished people's access to sufficient and safe land to ensure basic survival. War, landmines, environmental degradation, and the concentration of land ownership in to fewer hands have heavily impaired traditional land use practices.⁸ This is one of the strongest factors contributing poverty in Cambodia. Consequently many Cambodians who previously depended on farming are now forced to find other means of subsistence, often requiring migration to urban areas. This financial insecurity and physical instability makes people – particularly women -- increasingly vulnerable to deception and exploitative working conditions.

While some female migrants accompany their male family members, the main group of female migrants is that formed by women and girls seeking work themselves. The recent economic transition to the capitalist system has created some new job opportunities for the women, but most of the jobs are unskilled, repetitive work such as in the growing manufacturing sector. Because work and education options are so limited for women especially from rural areas, they have little choice but to stay in hazardous, short term and poorly paid work. This yet again leaves them vulnerable to abuse or to the false promises of trafficker.

Legal system in Cambodia

Cambodia has a law on trafficking, namely *the Law on Suppression of the Kidnapping, Trafficking and Exploitation of Human Beings*, which was promulgated in 1996. Although the law does provide some important measures to combat trafficking, it has been criticized for 'lacking in procedures sensitive to the victims to encourage them to prosecute or give evidence against the traffickers.'⁹

The other flaw that exists in the legal system is insufficient law enforcement.¹⁰ Major problems result from the lack of trained and experienced officials (e.g., police officers, prosecutors and court personnel), too many incentives for corruption, and the supposed involvement of officials in trafficking networks. These problems have created a lack of public trust in legal system and make it difficult for people to access to the system to seek help.

Society and Culture

Cambodian society, as elsewhere, is characterized by a culture of male dominance. Cultural rules and norms dictate that females should be passive and subservient to men. According to traditional customs within the family, it is the man, as the head of the family, who has absolute power over his wife and children. Women play a prominent and essential role in taking care of children and

⁷ UNESCAP, 1998.

⁸ CWDA, 1999.

⁹ Muntarbhorn, 1997: p25.

¹⁰ For more information on legislation in Cambodia, see Muntarbhorn (1997) and Yoon (2000).

the day-to-day household routine. Buddhist doctrine also assigns a superior status to the man; the woman owes loyalty and obedience to her husband.¹¹

It is also commonly thought that children are property, therefore the parents have rights to make any decision over them. Girls, in particular, are more dispensable and less valued than are boys. One indicator of this is that women and girls suffer a large educational disadvantage relative to men. Although the data indicates that considerable progress has been made in female literacy in the past 15 years, the gender gap in the literacy rate is still considerably large. Among the population aged 15 and over, 82 per cent of males are literate and only 58 per cent of females. This is because in general boy's education is more valued. Girls are expected to fulfil the obligation to support her family – i.e., helping households, making financial contribution, etc. rather than attend school longer. Between the ages of 7-14 female school enrolment rates are nearly as high as those of males, but drop sharply after that to a level approximately two thirds that of males. The situation is even worse for girls in rural areas.¹²

In so-called traditional Khmer ideals, unmarried girls would not have been allowed to travel far from their home. Women's virginity is highly valued; therefore the family has to take care that their unmarried daughters be 'good' daughters. In cases where a girl is raped, some communities blame the girls and their parents, rather than viewing it as a violent act against the girl. However, in today's Cambodia, women's roles have changed as rapid economic and social changes have forced women to undertake any employment opportunity, even far away from home, in order to help earn a living for her family. This seems to be in contradiction to the traditional Khmer ideals, but in this way a girl can fulfill the obligation to support her family. It is commonly thought that girls, in comparison to sons, have the main responsibility for the support of the family.¹³

Prostitution in Cambodia

Cambodia has its long history of prostitution as elsewhere. It is a rather common and acceptable practice for men, both married and single, to have several mistresses or to frequent brothels. On the other hand, the common view of prostitutes is that they are bad, sinful, criminal, unclean, marginal, diseased and ill fated.¹⁴ Since traditional Khmer culture highly values virginity, girls who are sold into prostitution are considered to be no longer "good" and marriageable. Many Buddhists, including prostitutes themselves, believe that prostitutes must have done something in a past life to deserve their current fate.

Already common in the society, these practices of prostitution were reinforced and made easier in times when Cambodia was less isolated, both before and after the Khmer Rouge regime. The presence of United States forces during the Vietnam War in the 1960s, UNTAC forces in the

¹¹ Center for Advanced Study, *Gender Issues in Contemporary Cambodia*, Cambodia Report, v.II, no.3, Nov-Dec. 1996: p7-.

¹² UNESCAP, 1997.

¹³ IOM, 1999: p72.

¹⁴ Sean and Barr, 1998: p16.

1990s, and people from other Asian countries working in Cambodia in the 1980s and '90s have all increased the demand for prostitutes in the country.¹⁵

A number of literature have overviewed the government's approach to prostitution over the past decades.¹⁶ Between 1975 and 1979, prostitution and all extra marital sex was banned by the Khmer Rouge regime. During the Republic of Kampuchea period (1980-1989) commercial sex workers were all arrested and sent to the island of Koh Kor near Phnom Penh for "re-education" and "rehabilitation", with mixed success. After the Vietnamese withdraw in 1989, the Cambodian Government maintained these strict policies towards prostitution until 1991. From 1991-1993, during the UNTAC period, the Koh Kor island-prison was closed down and prostitution dramatically flourished. In many ways, the presence of the approximately 22,000 UNTAC personnel created new social and economic divisions within the local community. "To meet the demands of some highly paid UNTAC staff, associated newly rich and powerful Cambodians and foreign business people, increasing numbers of women and girls entered into prostitution."¹⁷ It is estimated that approximately 6,000 sex workers were in Phnom Penh in 1991; by 1992 perhaps 20,000 were working in the city.¹⁸

Despite the lack of clear policies and guidelines on prostitution, the tendency of law enforcers is to punish and harass women in prostitution. During the past years the government initiated yearly or twice-yearly crackdowns on brothel areas, primarily in Phnom Penh. The first Cambodian law on trafficking passed in January of 1996 has been used to prosecute some brothel owners after these raids. Within weeks of each crackdown, however, the brothels reopen as usual.¹⁹

2.2 Vietnam

In the existing literature on the issues related to trafficking in women in Vietnam,²⁰ recent economic reform in the country has predominantly been seen as the main factor contributing to trafficking. However, economic factors alone cannot completely explain the issues related to trafficking in Vietnam. Historical, political, social and cultural conditions in the country need to be looked at for a real understanding of the problem.

In its historical context, similar to that of Cambodia, over three decades war in Vietnam (1945-1975) has had a significant impact on the lives, status and role of women within the household as well as in society as a whole. The most obvious indication of this is seen in the sex ratio of the population. Due to significant loss in the male population during the Vietnam War, Vietnam today has one of the lowest sex ratio in the world.²¹ As a result, women, particularly in rural

¹⁵ Sean and Barr, 1998: p12-13.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ CWDA, 1999: p5.

¹⁸ Sean and Barr, 1998: p20.

¹⁹ Ibid., p20-21.

²⁰ For an extensive literature review see Kelly and Le, 1999.

²¹ According to the UN ESCAP report, at the time of the 1989 census there were only 94.2 males per 100 females in the country, one of the lowest sex ratio in the world. (UN ESCAP, 1998: p96)

areas, face a “marriage squeeze” which results in quite a few women remaining single due to a shortage of men of similar age.²² As pointed out in several articles, including the YRI reports, this phenomenon creates a lack of security in the social condition of women, and therefore contributes to an increase in vulnerability of women to trafficking.

Women in Vietnamese Economy

Women make a large contribution to the Vietnamese economy through their high rate of labour force participation. In the past, the gender division of labour was not as strong in Vietnam’s state-owned sector as in some Asian market economies and Vietnamese women had high rates of participation in the formal sector workforce under the centrally planned system. However, this pattern is likely to be changing with the shift to a market economy under *Doi moi* (“Open Door Policy”).

In December 1986, the 6th National Congress of the Communist Party adopted a number of measures to shift the economy of Vietnam from one that was centrally planned to one with a market mechanism but still under state control. Collectively the measures were called *Doi moi*. Since then Vietnamese economic and social life has undergone a period of extensive restructuring. Some of the key reforms have included the liberalisation of most prices, the rationalisation of state-owned enterprises, reductions of state subsidies and of the state budget deficit, the liberalisation of external trade and the passage of a law encouraging foreign direct investment (FDI). Despite wide agreement that the reform process has achieved benefits for the population as a whole through increased incomes and economic diversification, it is also pointed out by many researchers that it has created some negative impacts on the society, including an increase in the problem of trafficking in women.

One of the major impacts of *Doi moi* on women in Vietnamese society, as pointed out by Truong, has been that it has accelerated the process of gender disparity in the society in many ways. While women made gains in rights and political space during the struggle for independence and revolution, the recent reforms have caused women’s alternatives and options to narrow, which could erode further their socio-economic position.²³

It is possible to say that in some extent the gains in gender equality were sacrificed through a trade-off for economic sufficiency under the market economy system. For example, as Beresford stated, “the employment preferences of foreign investors are likely to be increasingly reflected in Vietnamese joint ventures. Thus the development of capital intensive, heavy industries would be more likely to favour male employment, while a shift towards labour intensive export industries is more likely to favour women.”²⁴ As a result, women working in the industrial sector are moving towards positions that are more labour-intensive, lower paid and have less security.

²² While over 90 per cent of men in each age group from 30-35 years up to 60-64 years are currently married, among women in 1989 the maximum proportion married was 84 per cent at ages 30-34. (UN ESCAP, p98)

²³ Derks, 1998: p9.

²⁴ Beresford, 1997: p42-43.

Currently women are estimated to make up 70 per cent of the informal sector workforce – i.e., activities in services and low-tech industries, raising livestock and fish and cultivation of small plots of land.²⁵ Workers in this sector are said to have low incomes and enterprise owners have only small amounts of capital. Beresford explained that many of them in the sector are “workers who have lost jobs in the formal sector as district-level state-owned enterprises and industrial cooperatives have been closed under the impact of *Doi moi*.”²⁶

In addition to the increased gender disparity in the labour force, women in general suffer from lack of skills to improve their incomes. High rates of participation in the formal sector workforce under the centrally planned system did not lead women to a dynamic process of skills development or to improved incomes because of the long-term stagnation of the sector. Consequently, increased insecurity of income and the lack of sustainable alternatives for these women have given rise to increased vulnerability of women to exploitative working conditions and trafficking.

Migration in Vietnam

Prior to the introduction of *Doi moi*, most migration in Vietnam was organized or controlled by the State. Migration usually occurred as the allocation of labour to areas where it was needed. Persons moving as part of this organized migration were often Government or state enterprise employees. They often had relatively high educational qualifications and moved with their families.

With the introduction of *Doi moi*, the migration pattern in Vietnam dramatically changed. Migration was no more organised or controlled by the State, and migrants were more likely to move without their families and to take jobs as labourers or in the informal sector. They were generally less educated than earlier migrants and earned lower wages. Certain sales and service occupations opened new opportunities for female migrants. This was because of a number of new employment possibilities in private businesses and private employment brought by *Doi moi*. At the same time, restrictions on movement and residence were eased, so it became possible for persons to live and work in cities without obtaining permanent residential permits.²⁷

According to the UN ESCAP report, most female migrants to Ho Chi Minh City apparently entered occupations at the bottom of the scale in terms of qualifications required and income earned. Of the recent female migrants, 75 per cent work in manufacturing, as sales workers or as domestic workers.²⁸ (also see *Women and Vietnamese Economy*)

As for cross-border migration, Vietnamese have migrated to Cambodia during different times in history and for different reasons. Migration in the past was facilitated by political ties between the two countries but is currently facilitated through familial, geographic and cultural ties. In

²⁵ Beresford, 1997: p20.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ UN ESCAP, 1998: p124-133.

²⁸ Ibid.: p128-129.

addition, Cambodia is now perceived as a country where money can be easily earned, especially since the opening up of the country for the liberal market economy induced an economic boom which was stimulated through the large-scale UNTAC operation in 1992-93.²⁹

Education

Vietnamese women, like women in Cambodia, are educationally disadvantaged in comparison with men. For example, the literacy rates show a substantial difference between males and females. The Living Standards Measurement Survey cited in the UNIFEM report indicated that for persons over 10 years of age literacy rates were 82 per cent for females and 91 per cent for males. The overall rates were higher in the northern part of the country, although women's literacy remained about 10 per cent lower than that of men. In two southern regions, the rates of female literacy were substantially lower. In the Tay Nguyen (a central mountain region) female literacy rate was only 56 per cent and in the Mekong River delta it was only 77 per cent of male literacy.³⁰ There was a noticeable decline in female literacy rates in the over 30 age group, compared with a much smaller drop in the male literacy rate, reflecting that greater discrimination against girls existed in earlier generations.

Although the disadvantaged position of women in education has improved over the decades, it has been pointed out that *Doi moi* has brought some negative impacts on the public education system, particularly on girls. The recent statistics clearly indicate that a higher rate of drop out from school has emerged.³¹ This is mainly because of the increasing cost of education, "directly through the imposition of fees at levels above primary school and indirectly through income forgone by keeping children in school".³² The government cannot support high quality education system under heavy pressure to reduce its budget deficit in order to control inflationary pressures. Under such circumstance, girls, particularly in rural areas, are more likely to drop out of school and enter the labour force at an early age in order to support their family.

Statistics indicate that women enter the labour force at an early age in Vietnam. Female economic activity rates, especially in rural areas, exceed those of males up to age 20.³³ Statistics cited in the UN ESCAP report indicated that nearly all girls in rural areas entered the labour force as soon as they completed or discontinued their education. In rural areas, 42 per cent of girls ages 13 and 24 were economically active, as were 79 per cent of those ages 15-19. In contrast, among women ages 15-19 years in urban areas, 53 per cent were in the labour force and 27 per cent were currently attending school, leaving 20 per cent in neither category.³⁴

²⁹ Derks, 1998: p8.

³⁰ Beresford, 1997: p29.

³¹ See UNICEF study cited in Beresford, p29; also UN ESCAP report, p112. For example, in 1989, only 13 per cent of males and 9 per cent of females 10 years old or over had completed secondary school. Among the urban population 24 per cent of males and 21 per cent of females had completed at least secondary school. In rural areas, however, only 8 per cent of males and 5 per cent of females had done so.

³² Beresford, 1997: p30.

³³ This is common in Southeast Asia. (UN ESCAP, p119).

³⁴ UNESCAP, p120.

Society and Culture

As Derks pointed out, the deterioration of so-called traditional values is often mentioned as an important contributing factor to an increase in trafficking in women in Vietnam. The introduction of a market economy and the broadening relations with other countries are said to stimulate consumerism and promotion of enjoyment, as well as a loss of social control and family functioning.³⁵

However, others see the so-called traditional values as one of the contributing factors to trafficking in women, because they maintained disparities between rich and poor, men and women, and different groups in the society. These are mainly from the Confucian norms based on five relationships: the subordination of subject to ruler, son to father, wife to husband, and younger brother to elder brother, and the mutual respect between friends. These norms influenced the evolution of Vietnam as a hierarchical, authoritarian society in which Confucian scholarship, monarchical absolutism, filial piety, the subordinate role of women, and the family system were regarded as integral to the natural order of the universe.³⁶ For centuries the Confucian norms were knit into Vietnamese society as principle cultural norms and determined the role and status of women in the society.

Laws and policies on trafficking

In Vietnam there is no specific legal instrument addressing trafficking in women. Although the Criminal Code stipulates “the crime of trafficking in women”, the major problem here is that officially trafficking is addressed as a problem of illegal migration or prostitution. Both human trafficking and prostitution are considered as “social evils” and the government has taken a strong stance particularly against prostitution with arrests and forced rehabilitation. In recent years, the issues around trafficking are being raised and efforts to address the abuses of Vietnamese trafficked across borders and further abroad are being considered. This is especially so after the issuing of a Directive (No. 766) Assigning Responsibility for Carrying out Measures to Prevent the Illegal Sending of Women and Children Abroad in 1997.³⁷ However, there still remains some uncertainty about what defines trafficking and what are appropriate interventions.

³⁵ Derks, 1998: p9.

³⁶ Source: US Library of Congress.

³⁷ Caouette, 1998: p23-24.

CHAPTER 3

TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN IN CAMBODIA

During the field research in Phase I, CWDA conducted interviews with 233 sex workers, 95 women returnees, 16 local authority officials, 16 military staff, 5 judges and 12 NGO workers. The report submitted by CWDA, *Situation of Trafficking in Women – Cambodia (1999)*, however, mostly discussed the findings from the interviews with the 233 women in prostitution, yet did not include the information gathered from villages. According to CWDA this was mainly

due to time/personnel constraints in processing raw data from field research in villages onto a database. However the interview records of the 233 women were submitted to the coordinating agency (GAATW) together with the report and whilst the report mostly summarized the findings into statistical data, the interview records themselves provided extensive information on the situation of women working in prostitution in Cambodia.

According to the CWDA report, trafficking in women has “dramatically increased in Cambodia since 1989.” The report traced this rise “to the economic and social changes associated with the transition from a closed socialist to a capitalist enterprise system” and to an increased demand for the sex industry largely created during the UNTAC period (1991-93).³⁸ It was clear from the report that the main perception and concern over the issue of trafficking in women in Cambodia was that it was associated with the growth in the sex industry.

3.1 Background of Women in Prostitution

The report provided statistical information about the general socio-economic background of the 233 women interviewees working in prostitution, in five provinces (Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, Phnom Penh, Kompong Som (Sihanoukville), and Koh Kong) in Cambodia. The interviews were conducted between February and July, 1997.

Age

Of 233 women interviewed there was a concentration of relatively young women; with the age range being from 15 to 30 years old. Of the group interviewed, 87% were aged between 16 and 24 and 31% were under the age of 18.

Origin

86% of the interviewees said that they were born in Cambodia. Among the remaining 14%, 9% was made up of women from Kampuchea Krom (referring to ethnic Khmers from the Mekong Delta in southern Vietnam) and 5% were born in Vietnam. According to the report, “all but 5 interviewees who stated they were born outside of Cambodia actually were trafficked from their country of birth.”³⁹

Family Background

Both the report and the interview records clearly showed that many women had family problems before entering prostitution – e.g., separation from parent(s)⁴⁰, domestic violence, unfaithful husbands, divorce, trouble with stepparent(s), quarrels within the family, etc. Quite a few had

³⁸ CWDA, 1999: p5.

³⁹ Ibid.: p21.

⁴⁰ The report showed that only a half of interviewees had both parents, 22% had no father and 15% had no parents at all. (CWDA, 1999: p22)

troubled relationships with men: some were abandoned by their “boyfriends” after they lost their virginity, which led them to leave home and some were actually “sold” into brothels by their “boyfriends”. 4% of the women decided to leave home after they were raped.

It was also commonly observed during the interviews that women referred to themselves as “having to shoulder the burden for the family”.⁴¹ The report concluded that girls from large families were more likely to be encouraged to go into prostitution as means to supplement the family income, especially for their parents and siblings.⁴² Most of the women (85%) - including all the single women - had no children, presumably because it was easier for a young single person “to migrate for employment in order to generate revenue for the rest of the family, in a sense they are more flexible.”⁴³

Education Level

The report showed that 90% of the interviewees had less than 6 years of school education, and that 34% of them had no school education at all. Various sources of information clearly indicated that in Cambodia women were disadvantaged in education compared with men. Adult literacy rate for women in Cambodia was only 58%, while for men it was 81.8%. The proportion of females attending school was about 10% less than males, and the mean number of years of school completed by females was 50-60% of the male rate.⁴⁴ This mainly came from “the two-tiered value system of Khmer culture that invest more in boys than girls”.⁴⁵

Previous Jobs and Family Income

The report described that the previous types of occupation of the interviewees was concentrated in “exploitative and the lowest paid jobs” and therefore many of them were forced to find an alternative and consequently became vulnerable to deception. 50% of the interviewees were working as agricultural laborers and 33% as vendors before entering prostitution. Others were working as construction workers, waitresses, maids and factory workers. 6 people were unemployed.

In terms of family income, the majority claimed that “the income was not enough for the family to survive”, even though some interviewees were earning “what in Cambodian terms is a good salary, from \$100-\$250”.⁴⁶ Interestingly, when asked further, many said that they “wanted to

⁴¹ CWDA, 1999: p29.

⁴² Statistic showed that almost 90% of the interviewees came from families with more than 3 siblings.

⁴³ Ibid., p21-22.

⁴⁴ from Demographic Survey of Cambodia, 1996 General Report, National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, cited in the CWDA report.

⁴⁵ CWDA, 1999: p23.

⁴⁶ CWDA, 1999: p25.

improve the plight of family”, and for others “material items were important in order to raise the social status of the family in the eyes of the villages.”⁴⁷

3.2 Movement of Women and Networks

In country movement for prostitution

The major provinces from which the interviewees came were Phnom Penh (20.3%), Battambang (12.1%), and Kg Cham (10.8%). The major final destinations to which the interviewees went were Koh Kong (29.9%), Sihanoukville (22.9%), Battambang (18.6%), and Phnom Penh (18.2%). For the process of trafficking, the report described that “rural women migrating unassisted to work as house maids or construction workers or in factories, from this vulnerable situations, they are then trafficked to other towns to work as prostitutes”.⁴⁸

Cross-border movement

To Thailand

There were no cases indicating this type of movement in the interview records. However, some interviewees said that they had planned to migrate to Thailand to get a “better” job, or they that knew people migrating there. The report stated that “their (trafficking) network in Cambodia propagandize among poor and vulnerable households in both rural and urban areas”.⁴⁹ The main routes to Thailand were through the south-west and the north-west of Cambodia, such as at Koh Kong, Banteay Meanchey and Udor Meanchey, where the border exchanges were made. Some women were transferred from these border areas to the sex industry in Bangkok or other cities in Thailand, while others remained in the border towns where they were forced to work as prostitutes. Together with Cambodian women, Vietnamese women were also frequently brought to Thailand’s sex industry. The report also referred to forms of trafficking of women other than for prostitution, saying “many women (including elderly women and children) are being trafficked into other types of jobs, including beggars”.⁵⁰

To other countries

According to the report, some women trafficked into Thailand worked there only temporarily and then were taken to other countries such as Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong as sex workers, laborers, domestic servants and brides. Bride-buying, especially by Taiwanese men, had been developing as a recent phenomenon in Cambodia and was cited in the report as a form of international trafficking. The report stated that there were some “bride agencies” in Phnom Penh, which specialized in procuring Cambodian brides for Taiwanese men. The report cited official

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p31.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p30.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p31.

figures provided by district authorities that “from 1996 to early 1997, there had been hundreds of marriages between Cambodian women and Taiwanese. Of the recorded marriages, only 124 of them had undergone the legal process of seeking permission. Even so, those permissions were endorsed only by the district authorities.”⁵¹

From Vietnam

The majority of women from outside of Cambodia come from the provinces in South Vietnam of Can Tho, Sok Trang, An Giang, Hatien, Long Binh, Vinh Long and HCM city which share the border with or have close access to Cambodia. Crossing the border was not difficult and there were various legal and illegal passes along the border both by land and by river. The crossing fee per person ranged between \$2 and \$3 but in some instances people paid \$10 to \$60 to border guards for their illegal crossing.

From Thailand

There were no cases in the interview records indicating movement of women from Thailand to Cambodia. The report only stated that “most prevalently (Thai) women entered via Banteay Meanchey/Aranya Prathet, Koh Kong/Trat, and Udor Meanchey/Surin, where a day-entry permission is effortlessly obtained. Very few claimed they arrived via Pochentong International Airport with legal documents, these women are trafficked to work in the more sophisticated establishments such as night clubs where there is go-go dancing.”⁵²

Agents

It was discovered that parents, relatives, husbands, lovers, friends and neighbors were involved in the recruiting and deceiving process. The report showed that 84% of the interviewees said they were ‘trafficked’ by the persons they already knew. Of the 84%, 28% said they were “trafficked” by a person from the same village, 28% by friends or boyfriends, 18% by family members such as parents, husbands and relatives, and 10% by brothel owners.

Many parents were tricked into selling their children, while the others willingly “sacrificed” their daughters to the sex industry because of the cash offered to them. The parent(s) of a family where there was a heavy debt were particularly vulnerable. And in addition, “the daughter assumes her role as a prostitute knowing this will assist her siblings and parents”. The following story told by one of the interviewees clearly illustrated such a case: “...my parents received money for me but they did not know that I would have to suffer to give back that money. Now I get enough money and I can help my family and brothers and sisters, I do not feel pity, I can help my family, this is my duty”.⁵³

⁵¹ CWDA, 1999: p31.

⁵² Ibid., p30.

⁵³ Ibid., p27-28.

It was also discovered that women played a quite significant role in networks as recruiters, procurers or brothel owners. There were even cases in which women forced or coerced their own daughters into prostitution.

The report and interview records also indicated strong involvement of local authorities with the networks. These may have included the police, military soldiers, village heads or government officials. In the interview records quite a few women claimed that they were deceived by motor taxi drivers who approached them pretending to offer some help on their way to a new place.

Recruitment Process

According to the report, the top three reasons for women leaving home were; “a promised job” (37%), “seeking work/income” (24%), and “emotional/domestic problems” (15%). (See Table 1) When asked about entering prostitution, 66% of the women interviewed said they entered prostitution by “deception”.⁵⁴ 20% of the women reported they were bonded and 2 individuals reported they were “abducted”. The most common tricks of deception included; being promised a job as a waitress, cook, maid, shop seller or factory worker; being offered an opportunity to start a new business; or the promise of marriage. It is clear from the interview records that deception could happen anywhere along the migration process - at home, on the way, or at destination.

Table 1: Motives for leaving home

Motive	%
Job Promised	37%
Seeking work/income	24%
Emotional/Domestic Problems	15%
Poverty	7%
Followed Boyfriend	6%
Raped	4%
In Debt	2%
Visit Relative	1%
Other	4%

(Source: CWDA, 1999, p26)

⁵⁴ “In Phnom Penh, our researchers were told about localities which operated as what appeared to be legitimate beauty parlours and perfumeries, however, were also engaged in recruiting women for prostitution by offering ‘glamour’ jobs as sales representatives.” (CWDA, p27)

13% of the interviewed women responded that they entered prostitution “voluntary”. The report provided an analysis on the situation of “voluntary prostitutes” as follows: “Some women feel impelled to initially attempt to tolerate working as prostitutes because of their sense of responsibility and obligation towards their families, or indeed their children. The findings highlighted cases where women are compelled to work as prostitutes in order to provide income and financial support for their husbands and boyfriends whilst maintaining a relationship with these men.”⁵⁵ “Many women agree to work as a prostitute because the reality is they have no better means to earn the same amount of money in a ‘legitimate’ profession, providing there is job opportunities, but even if they do agree to work as prostitutes they most certainly do not agree to violence, debt and slavery.”⁵⁶

3.3 *Conditions of Women in Prostitution*

The findings revealed that most of the interviewees (92%) were living in brothels. Of the remaining 8%, 6% lived in a rented room, 1% lived at home, and 1% lived on the street. It should be noted, however, that this number did not necessarily represent the whole living situation of women in prostitution in Cambodia. The choice of the research cited and accessibility to informants could have heavily impacted upon this outcome.

Living Condition in brothels

The living conditions in brothels depended on the class of brothels, but basically many live in “small-dark rooms, compounded by jammed surroundings with little ventilation.” (p33) They lived in brothels because brothel owners are afraid of them fleeing and so put them under their strict surveillance until they “pay back” their debt. 67% of the interviewees said that they had no freedom of movement and no contact with outside world. Some women could go outside only when clients take them out. 82% of the women interviewed felt that they were not receiving enough food or sleep.

Working Condition

Most of the interviewees (91%) had no right to chose their own clients or to decide how to conduct their “business”. They were forced to have clients at anytime from morning to night, even when they were sick or during their menstrual cycles. Clients were both local men and men from abroad (i.e., Western, Japanese and those from neighboring countries)⁵⁷ but a high proportion of the clients were police, military and government officials. The report also described a reported case that some women had received young boys as young as 12 and 13 years old as

⁵⁵ CWDA, 1999: p28.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p29.

⁵⁷ Referring to sex tourism in Cambodia, the report described that “ Cambodia is an attractive destination for men with purchasing power to buy women for sexual gratification. There are efforts to expand the tourist industry in order to attract strong foreign currency. Cambodia has already been portrayed as a ‘sex paradise where anything goes’ including sex with children. Women are marketed as ‘submissive and willing’”. (CWDA, 1999: p34)

their clients. On average each interviewee served 3.9 clients per day, 85% served 5 or less clients a day. Condoms were rarely used - only two interviewees stated that all their clients used condoms. On average condoms were used by 50% of the all clients.⁵⁸

50% of the interviewees were in debt which ranged from \$30-\$400. Usually the brothel owners accumulated a debt for the advanced payment of traveling costs, clothes and cosmetics. Debt for rent, food, medical supplies, police bribes and for loans were added to this. "Debt bondage is used to perpetually ensure the highest profit can be gained from the woman. Commonly just before she repays her debt she is sold once again to another brothel, hence commencing the cycle of repaying her debt once again."⁵⁹

The report stated that the majority of women in prostitution did not stay in one brothel for more than 3 months, and usually no less than 2 weeks. "If the girl is bought as a virgin for between \$150 - \$300, she is sold for \$400 - \$700 to a client who keeps her for one week. Her fate after that week is determined by the amount of revenue the brothel owner can fetch from a prospective buyer who is usually another brothel owner in the same location or another location."⁶⁰ Consequently, women received much less money than they actually earned.

Abuse

Women working in prostitution were very often subjected to abuse. It was clear from the report that not only clients but also brothel owners and guards abused them and for any reason – e.g. for disobedience, being slow in receiving clients, for being too long in the shower, or for consuming too much water and power, etc. They projected their anger at the women when they lost gambling or when anything else irritated them. They used belts, rods and electric wires to beat the women and they raped them. Some women were even forced to take drugs.

In addition to their poor health conditions associated with unsafe sex, inadequate food and sleep, the women did not have access to adequate health care. Some were forced to undergo operations to make them appear to be "virgins". Some were forced to have a blood test but results were withheld from them. They were given toothpaste from brothel owners for treatment of STD. In many cases the medication provided by the brothel owners had already expired or was harmful. Various women claimed that they were forced to have abortions and to receive clients right after the operation. Even in these cases the women had to pay the medical fee themselves or it was added to their debt.

3.4 Situation upon Return⁶¹

⁵⁸ "This figure corresponds with survey results and strong anecdotal evidence from organisations and government departments which work with sex workers and HIV/AIDS awareness". (CWDA, 1999: p34)

⁵⁹ CWDA, 1999: p34.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p32.

⁶¹ It should be noted that this section was based on the researchers' observation in villages. They did interview some returnees but no detailed information was provided because CWDA felt "all the returnees

The report stated that after a long absence the majority of the women had undergone differing degrees of negative experiences upon their return to their village. Commonly once a woman returned to her village after a long absence she was viewed suspiciously and any slight change in her dressing or behaviour would be criticized. Women who had worked as prostitutes were particularly looked down on and their family were alienated by the community, partly because prostitutes were viewed as the root cause of HIV/AIDS.

Long absences from home also caused family breakdown. Some women left their children with other family members while they were away from home, which caused the children to feel lost and to miss out on proper care. In some cases families lost their property, houses or farming equipment in order to pay fees to the agents who promised jobs to their family member.

In a few cases women managed to bring money back, to renovate their houses and/or to buy products such as TVs, radios and motorcycles. In these cases the women and their families were more accepted by the community, although sometimes other people tried to gain benefits by befriending them. The role of such women may have changed to become an important decision-maker and the head of the household. Some women chose not to return to their village but sent gifts to their relatives and on some occasions made considerable donations to the Pagoda.

CHAPTER 4

TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN IN NORTHERN VIETNAM

The reports submitted by the Youth Research Institute (YRI)⁶² presented two main phenomena of “trafficking” in Northern Vietnam:

- 1) to China for marriage
- 2) into prostitution (within the country and across borders).

tried to hide their bad experiences and make up good story for themselves” in order to avoid neighbors’ rumors. Also it was not clear whether or not these returnees were victims of trafficking or not.

⁶² Two reports titled *Prevention of Trafficking in Women in Vietnam* were submitted by YRI in 1999 (draft version) and 2000.

The emphasis of the report was mainly on cases of marriage with Chinese men⁶³ and most of the cases discussed fell into this category. Cases of women entering into prostitution were also briefly discussed in the report, but most of the information on this particular movement seemed to have come from other sources, such as research done prior to the project.

In addition to the primary data which was “directly collected by the researchers through interviewing the trafficked women”, the report largely relied on secondary data “collected through newspapers, magazines and bulletins at national or provincial levels.”⁶⁴ There were many stories of women and others cited from documents by government agencies, such as the People’s Supreme Court and other provincial courts.⁶⁵

4.1 Background of Women Interviewed

According to the YRI, the interviews conducted during the field research were with 57 women returnees, 24 fathers of the women, 32 mothers of the women, 15 brothers and sisters of the women, 12 previous husbands of the women and with 118 local leaders and others. It was conducted in ten different areas over three provinces. All of the 57 women returnees had returned from China and the information regarding their date of birth, village of origin, education level, prior marital status, time of leaving northern Vietnam and of return was also provided to the coordinating agency (GAATW). This information is presented below in the tables 2 - 5.

As the tables clearly show, the details of the background of the women returnees varied. For example, although the average age of the women leaving the country was 26 years, the actual ages ranged from 13 to 50 years (Table 2). Variation was also found in the women’s level of educational and marital status and in their village of origin (Table 3, 4 and 5).

Table 2: Ages of the interviewees

Age	# of women
10s	16
20s	20
30s	15
40s	3
50s	1
Age unknown	2

⁶³ Information on interviewees’ background provided by YRI showed that some women claimed that they were trafficked to China for ‘forced labour’. However, none of this type of ‘trafficking’ was discussed in the report.

⁶⁴ YRI, 2000, p42.

⁶⁵ It is important to note that the report sometimes presented information without referring to its source.

Total # of women	57
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Table 3: Village of origin of the interviewees

Provinces	Villages	# of women
Quang Ninh	Hai Ninh	13
	Cam Pha	12
	Ha Long City	2
	Trang An	9
Lang Son	Mai Pha	8
	Cao Loc	1
	Hop Thanh	2
	Luc Binh	1
Ha Bac	Bac Giang	1
Ha Tinh		1
Hai Duong	Tuan Hung	2
	Kim Xuyen	5
Total # of Women		57

Table 4: Education Level of the interviewees

Education Level (yrs)	# of Women
2	1
3	4
4	8
5	11
6	6
7	15
8	4
9	2

10	4
BA	2
Total # of women	57

Table 5: Marital status of women before leaving home

	Have children	No children	Total #
Not married*	3	24	27
Married	21	1	22
Divorced	5	3	8
Total #	29	28	57

(*it is unclear whether or not ‘not married’ includes all those who were single, widowed or had partner)

4.2 Movement of Women

As explained earlier, two types of movement of women from northern Vietnam were identified in the report as follows: (1) to China for marriage; and (2) into prostitution within the country and across borders.

Female migration to China was reported to have taken place since the late 1980s with the peak period being between 1990- 1994.⁶⁶ General statistics on the number of women having migrated from their community was available mostly from local authorities such as borderguards or district police. These figures did not clearly distinguish between those women who were “trafficked” from those who “illegally migrated”. According to the YRI report, these women either got married to Chinese men or became prostitutes.

The report claimed that most of the “trafficked” women came from all rural areas of the country. In the early 1990s most of the women who migrated to China came from the Vietnam-China border areas, but since 1995 a higher number of them have originated from inland provinces. According to the information cited in the report, there have been a number of women from big cities such as Hai Phong, Thanh Hoa and Hanoi also among those expelled by Chinese authorities through the northern border.⁶⁷

To China for marriage

As mentioned earlier, all of the 57 women interviewed during the field research were returnees from China and most of them were married to Chinese. The report stated, “according to

⁶⁶ YRI, 2000: p57-63.

⁶⁷ YRI, 2000: p79.

incomplete statistics, about two third of Vietnamese women who came to China were forced or volunteered to marry Chinese men. They concentrated in Sia Che, Ping Tcheng, Wing Ming, Tsang Tsach, Kon Chung, Ai Khau, Khai Phang and Nan Ning”.⁶⁸ The report identified the general origin and transit points for the Vietnam-China border route included the northern provinces of Lang Son, Ha Giang, Quang Ninh and Lao Cai. Women from inland provinces and local women all migrated to China through these routes. Between 1990 and 1999, about 2,000 Vietnamese women and children were detected being trafficked to China along the Chinese border for coerced marriages or other purposes.⁶⁹ Also, “Nearly 2,000 out of the 3,000 Lang Son women who illegally migrated to China married Chinese men. The Cao Loc district had 1,060 women illegally come to China and two thirds of them married Chinese men.”⁷⁰

Into prostitution

Within the country

The report discussed the movement of women into prostitution mainly from rural to urban areas in the northern part of Vietnam, yet it provided no findings from the field research clearly indicating this type of movement. The report only connected the movement with the current expansion of prostitution in the country. The data from the National Committee for the Advancement of Women showed that in 1990, 40,000 prostitutes were detected; in 1992 there were 100,000; and in 1994, 130,000.⁷¹

The current expansion of prostitution in urban areas was seen in relation to the rapid growth in the migrant population. Among many of the big cities, Hanoi was still the most popular destination for those in search of better opportunity. As the migrant population in Hanoi had increased, “prostitution in Hanoi has now become the most serious situation of the northern provinces.”⁷² The report cited that the Social Evils Prevention and Control Department gave the number of prostitutes detected in 1990 as 5,000; of whom more than 70% came from other provinces.⁷³ Prostitution could also be found in “almost all resort and tourist centres”, such as Sam Son -- a famous beach in the north. These newly developed areas had attracted many rural women because jobs such as dish washing and waitressing were available to those who had little education and skills.

The report also suggested the possible movement of women into prostitution *within* rural areas, referring to the recent phenomenon of prostitution having spread to rural and mountainous areas.

Cross border to China

⁶⁸ Ibid., p97.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p50.

⁷⁰ YRI, 1999: p75.

⁷¹ IYRI, 2000: p95.

⁷² Ibid., p82.

⁷³ YRI, 2000: p82.

None of the findings from the field research in northern Vietnam indicated a situation of women migrating or being trafficked into prostitution outside of the country. The report only cited information from other sources, including a police report of the Hai Ninh district (Quang Ninh province). This police report stated that as many as 70-80% of cases of women trafficked to China through Hai Ninh were to serve in the sex industry there.⁷⁴ It was also reported that women who were trafficked to Tong Ching, China were “forced” to work as prostitutes. The report noted that many Vietnamese women were working as prostitutes along Chinese roads from the border gates to cities such as Ping Tcheng.⁷⁵ However, none of the above statements were supported by specific cases.

4.3 Agents and Networks

The report indicated that most of the “middle persons” were kith-and-kins, such as relatives, brothers and sisters, even mothers, fathers and husbands of the women. They were not professional but rather got involved whenever they saw a possible profit. Their relationship to the woman i.e. friends, acquaintances and family members, made their “job” easier as they were familiar with the woman’s situation and found it easy to earn her trust. Indeed, the family of many of the women told the researchers that they did not doubt that their friends or other family members “deceived” the women.⁷⁶

The police records cited in the report show that the detected offenders of trafficking came from various social backgrounds, amongst whom jobless people made up about 60%. The rest included farmers, workers, service providers (particularly hotel attendants, state employees, pensioners, intellectuals and others). Women accounted for up to 70-75% of the detected offenders.⁷⁷

The report explained the reasons why women were playing a particularly important role in the “networks” as:

- 1) the appearance of female recruiters in the villages or other public places did not attract as much public attention as that of males
- 2) it was easier for many women to have a female to accompany them in sensitive situations like when they were looking for a husband
- 3) many female recruiters were prior victims of “trafficking” and so were more able to deceive women by calling on their own experiences and telling convincing stories.

According to the report, no large-scale trafficking in women networks had been detected in the northern provinces. Instead, there were small networks closely linked to both countries. For example, many “middle persons” in northern areas were Vietnamese women who were married to Chinese men or Vietnamese citizens who had Chinese acquaintances. They acted as a middle person by linking the buyer and a woman directly. Sometimes Chinese men, who needed a

⁷⁴ YRI, 1999: p99.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p96.

⁷⁶ YRI, 2000: p101-107.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p101.

Vietnamese wife, or Chinese “trafficking rings” contacted them directly to get women. Then the middle person themselves came to Vietnam or contacted their relatives and acquaintances in Vietnam to find women. After these middle persons got some experience, they might become a professional or a regular recruiter. They not only provided women to each buyer but also sold them in the markets. By doing so they had created networks between Vietnam and China.

The report also stated that most of the domestic recruiters had close relationships with brothel owners. They came to rural areas to find women, then deceived or abducted them and sold them directly to brothels. However, recently “this method is rather more dangerous than sending the women to a foreign country, as many victimized women can denounce them to the police.”⁷⁸

Recruitment Process

From the information provided in the report, the common tricks used to deceive women can be categorized as follows:

Promising to find a good job

According to the report, 70% of the interviewees were deceived to China with the promise of a good job. Findings from previous research on prostitution have also showed that between 60 and 65% of rural women were deceived by the promise of a good job in the cities. Such jobs included particularly those in coffee shops, restaurants, shops or hotels. These were ideal jobs for rural women with low education and less skills to make more money than they could in their home villages.

Promising to find a husband

The report stated that the promise to find a husband “became a common trick by the traffickers over the last few years when trafficking in women cases have been exposed and not many women listened to their promise to find a good job”.⁷⁹ The report explained that recruiters directly approached rural women who were “on the shelf” or those with some family problems and promised to find them an ideal husband in a foreign country. Quite a few women had fallen into their trap but dared not expose their scheme as they had “voluntarily left the country to find husbands’ and ‘wished to change their lives.”⁸⁰

Pretending to help her family problem

Recruiters tended to approach a woman who was in an “awkward” situation. They took full advantage of the situation by pretending to be helpful e.g. by encouraging the woman to go to

⁷⁸ YRI, 1999: p102.

⁷⁹ YRI, 2000: p111.

⁸⁰ YRI,2000: p99.

China to buy medicine for her sick father, by offering to help to find her missing husband, etc. Such a trick was employed to deceive a mother who was in search of a missing daughter. In this case the “trafficker” approached the woman, gave false information about her daughter’s whereabouts and took her to China and sold her to a Chinese man.⁸¹

The report also presented other tricks including: asking women to go on a trip but then selling them in China; or by drugging and abducting women and selling them in China.

After the recruiters successfully persuaded women to come with them, then they typically “led them crossing mountains and streams to a certain place before they disappeared. The victimized women were abandoned, threatened, coerced, detained and had to do what the buyers wanted them to. These activities took place quickly and drastically and the women did not have any right to say or to benefit from them.”⁸²

In some cases, a group of women were put up for sale together in a place like “market” and Chinese “buyers” would come to choose from the group. Two women who were sold in this type of circumstance described the scene:

“I was taken to a place together with other Vietnamese women and 5-6 people came to see us and bargain the price... It was like selling vegetable and fish in the market”

Even though some women voluntarily made a decision to be the wife of Chinese man, in many cases they were not free to choose their partner. One woman said that “*I wanted the man who lives in the city but they made me go with a farmer. Perhaps he paid more. They gave me some money but I didn't want it.*”⁸³

4.4 Conditions at Destination

Life of Vietnamese Wives in China

One of the biggest constraints in the field research was that the researchers were not able to investigate the situation of Vietnamese women in China. The researchers only collected information from the returned women who had been either handed over by Chinese authorities or had fled back to Vietnam. They also collected information from the “traffickers” who, to some extent, witnessed the life of Vietnamese women in China.

According to the information in the reports, the women lead tough lives in China. Separated from their family, friends, and familiar environment, they faced enormous difficulties in living in a strange place. Many returnees reported being put in slavery-like situations by their husbands and in-laws. Based on the information in the report, the difficulties the women faced in China could be categorized as follows:

⁸¹ Ibid., p79-80.

⁸² Ibid., p98-99.

⁸³ From an interview note taken by GAATW project coordinator during the field trip to project sites.

Life as “child-bearing machines”

According to the data cited in the report, from 1999 to the year 2000, China had about 80-100 million men who could not marry due to the shortage of women. This was largely a result of the implementation of the “one-child policy” since the 1960s, which strongly favoured having a son to keep the family line in a patriarchal society. Ironically, this sex imbalance made it difficult for Chinese men to find a wife who could bear a son for them - especially those men who were poor, with little education and who lived in rural, mountainous, and remote areas. This situation created a high demand for getting a wife from outside of the country – Vietnam. These women were forced to bear a son for the family and were even sold again from one family to another or to be the wife of many sons in a family simply to be a “child-bearing machine.”⁸⁴

“ I have been trading in fruits as other women. One day my neighbor Ms. Luyen who married a Chinese man in 1982 took me to her house to discuss our trade activities. Later her husband and herself coerced me to marry a Chinese man. I did not agree, then Bau Pin (her husband) said, ‘you are in our hand now, you cannot but accept our proposal. We have discussed with Mr. Lam Tchi Tshien who will take you as daughter-in-law. No one will protect you. If you want to be alive, you should marry them, if not, there is no way for you to come back to Vietnam.’ I had no choice but to stay. I thought that I had to marry one man. But to my astonishment, Mr. Tshien had 3 sons whose ages were only 1 or 2 years different. They all considered me their wife. Every night they took turn to sleep with me.

For more than 2 years I did not bear them any child. They always lashed out at and brutally beat me. I could not endure then I fled to Vietnam”⁸⁵

Since most of the male buyers desperately wish to have children, particularly sons, they often put their wives under surveillance until they gave birth to a child. Some men even promised to let the woman visit her parents or even to go back to stay in Vietnam, on condition that she bore him a son and left the child with him. That is why quite a few Vietnamese women had to flee back to Vietnam leaving their children in China. Those who could not bear children were often maltreated, beaten or left hungry. In this sense, “many Vietnamese women are not only considered a sex slave but also ‘a child-bearing machine’ for their husbands and the in-law families.”⁸⁶

The report also stated that “many trafficked women had to marry old men, or men with disabilities or even mental diseases.”⁸⁷

Life as “illegal immigrants”

Most of the Vietnamese women – especially “trafficked” women - had to live in China illegally as a result of entering across the border illegally. Consequently they were not allowed to move freely as Chinese citizens and always faced possible arrest and deportation by the Chinese

⁸⁴ YRI, 2000: p90.

⁸⁵ Case of Ms. Nguyen, presented in the YRI report (2000), p78-79.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p123.

⁸⁷ YRI, 2000: p124.

authorities. The “buyers”, therefore, tried to keep the women under strict surveillance because they were afraid of either the women fleeing or of police intervention. This situation put women in a “cramped” position, with some not seeing anybody besides her husband from the day she went to China to the day she returned to Vietnam. In addition, since they were living in China “illegally”, they could not receive any community assistance in terms of culture, health and education.

Poverty and hard work

In general, most of the returned women told about having a hard life in China. Many “buyers” were farmers living in high mountainous areas who also had to work very hard to earn their living. Many women felt as if they were unpaid labourers for these families.

Language and cultural barriers

With some exceptions,⁸⁸ the language barrier was a real problem for the women married to Chinese men. Living in China, they were complete strangers to the language, customs, and even eating and other domestic habits. It caused many difficulties and misunderstanding between the married couples and within the community. The women were even left hungry as they did not get used to the local habit of eating rice gruel during lunch and dinner.

*“The people there were very dirty. They did not allow me to sweep chicken and ducks shit in the house for fear of losing joss gift. They only ate gruel. They cooked a big pot of gruel then ate for the whole day. My husband went to the field, I followed him to the field to work. He decided everything. That is why I decided to return to Vietnam.”*⁸⁹

However, not all the trafficked women were mal-treated by their husbands and the in-laws. Some women were lucky to be loved by their husbands and the in-laws, and had better lives compared with the one in Vietnam. Nevertheless, it was still difficult for them to overcome their language and cultural barriers and the feeling of being homesick. Many women missed their families so much that they ended up fleeing back to Vietnam.

Life of Women in Prostitution

In the report there was no clear cases illustrating the life of Vietnamese women in prostitution, either in Vietnam or abroad. The report only provided some general information and statistics on prostitution both in Vietnam and China.

In Vietnam, there were various forms of prostitution, and the working conditions of a prostitute depended upon what form of prostitution the woman belonged.⁹⁰ According to

⁸⁸ This refers to some ethnic groups who share a common language with those in China.

⁸⁹ Case presented in the YRI report (1999), p95.

⁹⁰ **The report categorized prostitution in Vietnam into: brothels; dance halls; hotels and guest houses; service shops such as massage and hair-dressing shops, steam baths and Karaoke places;**

the report, brothels had been operating openly in Vietnam since early in the 20th century. Now they were “very diversified and flexible depending on the brothel capacity and ‘initiative’ of their owners.”⁹¹ Because prostitution was illegal, brothel owners themselves worked out their own rules for their activities. The report explained that the management and operation of brothels in the north were very strict and brutal while in the south a prostitute still had some freedom; particularly in HCM City.

The report also briefly described harsh living and working conditions of Vietnamese women who were “forced” to work as prostitutes in brothels, coffee shops and restaurants along the Chinese side of the border. They received almost nothing other than meals, clothes and cosmetics. These women had no protection and could be expelled to Vietnam by Chinese police at any time.

4.5 Impact upon Women and Family

Life of Returned Women

It was often not clear in the interview records exactly when the women left and returned to the country. But with the information given, it is estimated that among the 57 women interviewed the average of length of stay in China was approximately 3 to 4 years. While some had been there only for a few months, a few women claimed to have stayed there for more than 10 years.

According to the report, the number of women being deceived and “trafficked” to China had been on the increase since the 1990s. Also a large number of women had returned to their own community. The means by which they returned differed: some were handed back by local Chinese authorities; some came back after having made an agreement with their Chinese husbands and the in-laws; and some had fled away from their husband and his family or from brothels. In many cases, the agreement with the Chinese husbands included leaving the children - mostly sons - behind in China. Some Chinese husbands, on the other hand, agreed to let the woman return to Vietnam if they could not bear children for them. Of the women who fled back, some of them were arrested by the Chinese police on the way. One woman told her story in which she had sold blood to get some money before fleeing from her husband's home. Together with that and some money given to her by her husband she had about 1,200 Yuan. But then she was arrested by the police and was detained for 10 days. The police also took away all her money.⁹²

Most of the women who returned faced a much tougher life than before they had left their home. The report said, “in the first days after returning from China, these women faced with numerous moral and physical difficulties. Before going to China, most of them were from poor families or

restaurants and bars (popular rice restaurants, special dishes restaurants, beer and coffee shops); cigarette and fruit sellers; and those working on their own.

⁹¹ YRI, 2000: p131.

⁹² Information obtained from raw interview by GAATW Project Officer during the field trip to project sites.

had broken love or marriage. After coming back with bare hands, their morale was sinking, disappointed and they also had an inferiority complex of their ‘mistake’.”⁹³ There were some cases in which women committed suicide.

“Inferiority complex”

The report described that many returned women felt ashamed and even blamed themselves for having been “easy” and “careless” enough to be deceived. They often hesitated to go back to their old work or to get a new job, or to socialise with people. The report described this as an “inferiority complex” – which was seen by the researchers as one of the main obstacles to the women restarting a new life.

*“After completing grade 12, I attended an on-the-job course of Law and graduated. After returning from China I found that all my classmates succeeded in life. They are now working in the Tax Office, the Court and People’s Inspectorate while I am nobody. I feel ashamed. I am very unhappy because of the gossip in the neighborhood, especially here in rural areas. I think of applying for a job, but I still feel ashamed so again I think of going to trade to avoid meeting my classmates.”*⁹⁴

Suffering from the gossip of neighbours

During these difficult days when the women first returned home, quite a few neighbours tried to slander and insult them, considering the “women of easy virtue” who had been “a wife of a foreign man” or “a prostitute”. These insults hurt not only the women and their children but also their parents and relatives. Some were cursed and abused with innuendoes by their neighbours who even threw stones or dirty things to their houses to “give vent to their dislike”.⁹⁵

Broken family and relationships

Upon returning to their home, many women found their families broken, their husbands had new wives, their parents had fallen sick out of distress and children were spoiled for lack of good care. On the other hand, as it was observed in the Hop Thanh commune in Lang Son province, for example, some women were luckier and reunited with their old husbands or found new partners. This helped them overcome their bad experiences and rebuild a new life.⁹⁶ The report also described that “some woman still keep contact with her Chinese husband, sometimes he crosses the border to visit her, stays with her for some days then returns to China.”⁹⁷

Financial difficulties

⁹³ YRI, 2000: p202.

⁹⁴ Case of Ms. Hoang in Mai Pha Commune, Lang Son Province, presented in the YRI report (1999), p118.

⁹⁵ YRI, 1999: p203.

⁹⁶ YRI, 2000: p205-206.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p206.

Considering the fact that many women were already poor or jobless before they left their home, and that there were not enough jobs available to them in their community, it was extremely hard for the women who returned to earn a living and start a new life.

For example, after a long absence, some state or local policies did not allow returnees to have farmland upon their return. So many ex-farmers who returned faced the problem of losing their land. According to the report, provision of land and a job for the returnees who had previously been local farmers was not a simple task for a community. In communes such as Kim Xuyen and Trang An, farmland was allotted as stipulated by State regulations. After a long absence, land was re-allotted by State to others. Without their own land and jobs, many women and their family were forced to move out on their own and live in poverty.

Facing legal problems

In addition to the land provision problem mentioned above, many women had returned to face legal problems. This was particularly the case of those women who returned from abroad. For example, quite a few women returned from China with their Chinese-fathered children for whom it was difficult to get a birth certificate issued. Statistics released by Lang Son border guards showed that “between Jan. 1993 and Nov. 1996, as many as 3,117 women were expelled to Lang Son border communes, 1,925 others fled back home. Among these women 1,829 took with them 200 small Chinese-fathered children.”⁹⁸ In these cases local authorities could not issue birth certificates because there was no policy to cover this situation. Lack of a birth certificate affected the children’s schooling and other official matters.

Impact on families

When women suddenly disappeared without any notice, it brought enormous emotional and financial difficulties to their families. When the family members went in search of the victim, not only was there travel costs but they were also in danger of being robbed or beaten on the way. As explained earlier, there were even cases where mothers in search of their daughters were trafficked away themselves. Considering many of the women were young and the bread-winners in the family, their disappearance meant that they left behind their small children and old parents without anyone to take care of them. This resulted in the impoverishment of many families.

It is not only the loss of their family members, but many families also suffer from village gossip. They felt ashamed because a member of their family was “wandering in a foreign land”. They did not know if they were alive or dead and if dead, where the tomb was. Nor did they know who was taking care of their family member. Many locals believed that if a member of the family clans died and his/her tomb was missing, it was a bad omen for the clan.

When a woman had been trapped into prostitution, the pain and distress for the family was multiplied. Because prostitution is socially stigmatised, the family was likely to be humiliated, criticised and despised by their community. As the report described, parents of women in

⁹⁸ Ibid., p121.

prostitution could not even show their faces to greet neighbours and her sisters of these women would find it hard to get married.

CHAPTER 5

TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN IN SOUTHERN VIETNAM

For the research team in Southern Vietnam, trafficking in women was seen very much as women going into prostitution. Based on this widespread understanding of the local team, the initial focus of the research was placed on women who entered prostitution. There was little distinction made between women who entered prostitution “voluntarily” and those who were deceived or sold into it. During the later stage of the project, the research team identified cases where, through various arrangements, Vietnamese women were marrying Taiwanese men. Two surveys were then carried out in Ho Chi Minh City and Tay Ninh province to look at this situation.

The initial stage of research was begun by the Vietnamese Women’s Union (VWU) and was completed in 1997. The research teams interviewed 136 persons including 110 “victimized” women. Some of these women were still working in prostitution and some were those who had completed their terms at the “re-education” centres and “have returned to normal life”. Included also were those women who had returned from China and Cambodia and those who had been trafficked within the country.

The second stage which was the action phase started in 1998 and continued until the end of the project extension period in the year 2000. During this stage also the project staff were able to collect additional information while carrying out activities with the women. The final stage of the project covered the period from the end of 1999 to April 2000 during which the surveys were

carried out on the situation of women marrying foreigners. There was a total of 854 surveyed cases of Vietnamese women marrying foreigners carried out in two districts of Ho Chi Minh City and another 102 cases surveyed in Tay Ninh province. Background details of the women interviewed are included in Appendix A.

Five preliminary reports made on the findings by the research teams of the VWU of Southern Vietnam have been submitted to GATTW.⁹⁹ The section below discusses the situation of trafficking in women in Southern Vietnam as identified in these reports and term “trafficking” is used in accordance with the meaning conveyed in the reports by the research teams.

5.1 Major Phenomena Found

Findings from the research teams in Southern Vietnam pointed out two main phenomena:

a) Trafficking of women into prostitution both within the country and across borders.

According to the 1997 report, “very scarcely do women voluntarily take the path of prostitution but often they are victims of women trafficking cases. They are forced to accept prostitution without any other options. In Many cases they are sold by their families.”¹⁰⁰ At the southwestern border of the country, more and more young women were being enticed and sold across the border to Cambodia into brothels and prostitution zones.

The 1997 report stated that poverty and indebtedness were two key reasons which resulted in young women being trapped by trafficking and prostitution networks. Women from poor families and those whose families were heavily in debt had no alternative but to turn to prostitution. They were either sold by their families into prostitution or had to choose it to support their family.

b) Women marrying foreigners.

The 1999 report referred to statistics of the Ho Chi Minh City Justice Service that there were about 13,056 Vietnamese married to foreigners during 1996-1998. 93% of these marriages were between Vietnamese women and foreign men.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ The following five reports were submitted by the implementing agencies to GAATW:

1. *A Preliminary Report (1997)*;

2. *The Research and Action Project on Traffic in Women in Ho Chi Minh City and Areas of the South (October 1997)*;

3. *The Second Phase Report of the Research and Action Project on Traffic in women in The Mekong Region (1999)*;

4. *Report of Extension Phase Research and Action Project on Trafficking in Women in District 8 and District 11 Ho Chi Minh City (2000)*;

5. *The Tay Ninh Survey Report (2000)*.

¹⁰⁰ VWU, 1997: p35.

¹⁰¹ VWU, 1999: p42.

According to a VWU officer, Vietnamese women marrying foreigners was a normal phenomenon in this society and it was accepted by law. However, many marriages came from self-seeking motives including a wish to improve economic conditions and/or a desire to go abroad. These motives were contrary to the genuine intentions of marriage. Most of such marriages also did not reach the goal of love or progress to happiness. At the same time, the women were deceived in the process of trying to fulfil these dreams.¹⁰²

In the view of some officers the main reasons that marriage with foreigners lacked unanimity was as follows:

- **The inequality of income between Vietnamese and foreigners.**
- **The pragmatic lifestyle, cultural and social morality are not yet improved;**
- **The young women were poorly informed about marrying foreigners;**
- **There were no enforced punishments for the enticement of women into marry foreigners.**

Based on the above reasoning, the 2000 report pointed out that “many marriages clearly manifested elements of trafficking with women suffering loss and sorrow ” and that trafficking in women is hidden under the form of “marrying foreigners”.¹⁰³

It should be noted however, that the report also mentioned situations where women were happy in their marriage with foreign men.

The research also noted a few cases of women from Southern Vietnam who were deceived into going to China for marriage.

5.2 Movement of Women and Networks

Into prostitution

The VWU 1997 report discussed the general phenomenon of prostitution in the context of Vietnam and provided some illustrations of how women became engaged in prostitution in Ho Chi Minh City and abroad. This was seen to be largely due to difficult family economic circumstances. The report also stated that “there are those girls being deceived but there are also girls who hesitantly volunteer to do (prostitution) to have money to support their parents and they consider it a way to show their gratitude to their parents.”¹⁰⁴

◆ Within the country

¹⁰² VWU, 2000: p1.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p17.

¹⁰⁴ VWU, 1997: p39.

The movement of women from rural areas to the cities for prostitution was discussed briefly in the 1997 report of the Phase I. The report pointed out that due to State policies on industrialisation, farm lands had been transformed into export processing zones, industrial zones and factories. Thus the women labourers in rural areas had migrated to the city in search for jobs and a better life. Agents went to rural districts and villages to recruit young girls, especially those from poor families. According to the report, these girls were promised jobs in Ho Chi Minh City but often found themselves in debt and deceived into working in prostitution.¹⁰⁵

The report did not provide cases to illustrate this phenomenon. However, the 1995 UNICEF report cited in the IOM report¹⁰⁶ discussed the pattern of women and girls from the rural villages being deceived and recruited to cities for prostitution.

◆ **Cross-border movement**

To Cambodia

Vietnam shares a long border with Cambodia. In Tay Ninh province, the Moc Bai international border has a long official control area of 17 km . The border is adjacent to Ba Vet village of Chan Rieng district in Svay Rieng province of Cambodia. The two governments agreed to allow border crossing for people living the border areas if they had special ID cards. Another type of permit was required for going beyond the bordering villages. Other important crossing points included the Tinh Bien border in An Giang province, the Loc Ninh border in Binh Phuc province and the Moc Hoa border in Long An province.

According to the 1997 report, Vietnamese girls and women migrated or were trafficked across these borders to Cambodia in large numbers each year. The report stated that “while many girls and women were deceived and sold into prostitution, there were also those who, due to poverty, voluntarily went abroad to be sex workers.¹⁰⁷ According to the information provided by the research team in Tay Ninh province, some girls were taken to Cambodia with the promise of various kinds of jobs but ended up being sold into brothels. Others went with agents to work in brothels in Cambodia in order to pay off the debt - the advance money that their families received from agents. Only one girl indicated that she followed a friend to work as a sex worker in Cambodia. Many girls were between 15-17 years old when they first went or were trafficked to Cambodia.

To other countries

The 1997 report cited that there were 11 sex- tour rings taking women abroad to work as prostitutes. Five rings took women to Cambodia, three rings took women to Macao and one ring

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p43.

¹⁰⁶ *Trafficking of Vietnamese Women and Children to Cambodia* by Annuska Derks, March 1998.

¹⁰⁷ VWU, 1997: p55.

each took women to China, Taiwan and Singapore.¹⁰⁸ However, there were no cases illustrated this activity in the VWU reports.

◆ **Agents & Recruitment**

It was reported that agents who recruited or trafficked women into prostitution included friends, acquaintance and strangers. “They will appear as helpful people and they even lend money to families of those girls and promise the girls good jobs if these girls follow them to the city or across the border.”¹⁰⁹ The crossing of the border was described to be quite simple. Many times, it took only a motorbike ride through unofficial paths to cross the border.

Marriage with foreign men

During Phase I of the project in 1997, the research team was informed by a local Women’s Union cadre of a ring trafficking women from rural areas in Minh Hai province to Ho Chi Minh City. The girls were enticed with the promise of a high wage to go to the city to work as domestic helpers. According to the women cadre however, they were sold to Taiwanese men who came to Vietnam for business or travel. The term “selling” was used in the report to describe the situation because although there were marriage ceremonies for the Vietnamese brides and Taiwanese grooms, they were not official (legal) marriages.¹¹⁰

The 1997 report recorded that the phenomenon of Vietnamese women marrying Taiwanese men could be found in all the areas researched in District 1 and 4 of the areas in Ho Chi Minh City and in Tay Ninh province.

◆ **Marriage network in the country**

Further research into the situation in 1999 and 2000 indicated that a number of women from Ho Chi Minh City as well as from the provinces got married to Taiwanese men under various arrangements. Most of the marriage arrangements took place in Vietnam.

A survey conducted in 2000 in Tay Ninh province among 102 women married to Taiwanese men identified three major types of marriage networks as follows.¹¹¹

a) The introduction of friends or relatives living overseas.

Quite a number of women (38 out of 102 women) got to know their future husbands through their relatives or friends who were already married to Taiwanese men.

b) Marriage through match-making agents.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p50.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p42.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p44.

¹¹¹ Findings presented in *Tay Ninh Survey Report (2000)* by the research teams.

In this arrangement, the women gave their picture to the local match-making agent. The picture was then given to the agent's network in Taiwan who advertised pictures of women through match-making agencies there. If there was interest, the company would then organise a trip to bring the Taiwanese clients to meet the women in Vietnam.

In Vietnam the local agent brought the women to Ho Chi Minh City to meet their prospective husbands. If the man agreed, then the agent would organise a wedding ceremony. Thirty seven women in the survey got married through this channel.

c) Meeting in wedding ceremonies of friends.

When a woman married a Taiwanese man, she invited her friends to the party. The groom also invited his friends who may wish to find a Vietnamese wife. If a man was interested in a particular woman, he would contact an intermediary to carry out the appropriate arrangements (see below).

◆ Arrangement of the agents

In situations when women sort the service of match-making agents or when they met a prospective partner at a wedding ceremonies, it seemed that there was also active facilitation of an intermediary.

Mrs. Nguyen Thi T. L, 22 years old from Tay Ninh province talked about how she got married to a Taiwanese men through a match-maker.

"I married a Taiwanese men through the match-making service and the match-maker is an acquaintance of my cousin. At first, I followed the match maker to Saigon for meeting the future husband. He is a Taiwanese, 40 years of age. He agreed to marry me and my family went to Saigon to attend the wedding ceremony. My mother agreed to let me marry the man in the hope that I would have a well-to-do life. The match-maker got US\$ 800 and mother received US\$ 1,000 as capital for her small business. Nowadays, there are many women // marrying Taiwanese men, so I see it quite normal." ¹¹²

While it was well documented that the agents or match-makers who operate professionally, organised and profited from marriages between Vietnamese women and Taiwanese men, the report did not clearly describe how marriages between couples who were introduced through friends or relatives living abroad were arranged.

The 1997 report also mentioned that there were a number of young women voluntarily working as prostitutes, and they had agreed to marry foreigners in order to be able to go abroad legally. However, there were no cases cited to illustrate this situation. According to the report, the

¹¹² VWU, 1997: p45.

women interviewed who married Taiwanese men were just temporary wives or mistresses of Taiwanese men when they came to Vietnam for holiday or business.¹¹³

It should be noted that most of the marriages between Vietnamese women and foreigners were officially registered in Vietnam.¹¹⁴ During a consultation with GAATW in December 2001, an official of Ho Chi Minh City's Women Union informed us that there were still large number of marriages between Vietnamese women from the city and Taiwanese men in the official record. There had been fewer cases of deception among these marriages. However, the number of Vietnamese women from the rural southern provinces, who may have been deceived into marrying Taiwanese men, had increased. At the same time, GAATW was informed about the possible decline in number of Vietnamese women going to or being trafficked to Cambodia for prostitution. However, it was not clear, whether the change in these phenomena were related.

◆ Going abroad

To Taiwan

While a number of women who got married to Taiwanese men ended up staying back in Vietnam, many of them follow their partners to Taiwan.

The Tay Ninh Survey Report indicated that among the 102 identified cases of marriages between Vietnamese women and Taiwanese men, there were only about 10 cases in which the women stayed at home. The rest of the women left home after the marriage. Most of them had gone abroad with their husbands although some may have been living in Ho Chi Minh City. It was documented that after marriage women stay in Ho Chi Minh City for a period of time to learn Chinese and to make travel arrangements before they followed their husbands to Taiwan. It was clear in the report that in many cases, such arrangements were made by the marriage agents.

"A 19 years old Phan Ngoc Thuy P. made acquaintance with a 34 years old Lin Tien Hsiang for 2 days before they agreed to get married and register at Ho Chi Minh City's Justice office. After the marriage, the couple stayed together in a hotel for 2 months before Mr. Lin returned to Taiwan. Mr. Lin then arranged for the visa application for his wife to come and live in Taiwan".¹¹⁵

To China

¹¹³ Ibid., p47.

¹¹⁴ VWU, 2000: p6.

¹¹⁵ VWU, 1999: p50.

Aside from movement of women from the southern areas of Vietnam to Taiwan for marriage, the research identified a few cases of women from the south who were deceived into going to China for work or marriage. According to the stories of women interviewed, some of them were deceived about getting a job in China but once there they were forced to marry Chinese men.

A married woman with three children told her story that:

".. because of my difficult economic situation, I wanted to have stable income. A couple who lived near my area promised that they would introduce me and other women to pick tea in China with the wage of 30,000 VND¹¹⁶ per day and 2 meals covered by the employer. I would receive 100 USD first to leave for my family then I would pay back by working in China. I accepted the offer and was then taken to China together with other women who were also promised a job on a tea orchard.

When we arrived in China however, we were picked up by other people and then taken to remote villages in the mountainous region. We were forced to walk through the forest quietly in order not to be caught by Chinese police. When we arrived at the place, we did not work on the tea orchard but we were sold as wives of Chinese men. We also had to work in the field".¹¹⁷

Other women, however, wanted to go to China to get married but later found that their lives at the destination did not meet their expectation and they managed to return to Vietnam. From the interviews it was also found that some of the women from Ho Chi Minh City who went to China were from Chinese origin and could speak and understand the language.

*"I was 45 years old but was not married. An acquaintance came and told me that it was easy to get married if I went to China and I agreed. I was introduced to a Chinese man, aged 68 whom I would marry. After living in my husband's family, I realised that I had been cheated because he was already married and was living with his wife and children. He wanted to marry me so that I could be an unpaid servant. Since I could speak Chinese, I knew the situation. So I asked the person who brought me to take me back to Vietnam."*¹¹⁸

5.3 Conditions of Women

Within the country

◆ In prostitution

The report described that those engaged in prostitution worked in various kinds of establishments including "hugging" beer bars, hotels, restaurants, karaoke bars, dance halls, barbershops and

¹¹⁶ Exchange rate at the time of the interview: 13,000VMD = 1 US\$.

¹¹⁷ Case presented in the Preliminary Report (1997).

¹¹⁸ VWU, 2000: p7.

massage parlours. The income and working condition of the women also varied according to the types of establishments and the circumstances they were in.

◆ **As wives**

The report described the situation of Vietnamese women who married Taiwanese men as temporary wives or mistresses. The women stayed in Vietnam with her husband for a period of time. Then the husband returned to his country and came back to Vietnam from time to time. In some cases, the men just disappeared and the women were left to take care of the children with no support. After a long absence of the husband, some women filed for a divorce.

There were also cases where the women, after agreeing to get married or after meeting the prospective husband, changed their minds. These women found themselves in trouble with the match-making agents who asked them to pay back the expenses incurred for all the arrangements. The women could not return the amount which was rather large. The women's families had to ask the local authority to intervene so that the women could pay back in small amounts.¹¹⁹

Abroad

◆ **Brothels**

Women who were sold into brothels in Cambodia seemed to find themselves in the most difficult situations. The 1997 report described the “sex industry zone” around Kilometre Stone No. 11 in Svay Pak area in Phnom Penh as an area where over 3000 prostitutes gathered. Most of them were Vietnamese women and children who had been sold across borders to work in prostitution.

*A woman who was deceived to Cambodia told that “...at the brothel, I was forced to sleep with guests at the command of the brothel owner. I wanted to flee to homeland but I did not have money and could not escape the watch of brothel owner. I had to wait for more than six months, saved some money and ran for home....”*¹²⁰

The report included other similar stories of Vietnamese girls who fell into terrible situations in brothels in Cambodia where they were forced to receive guests and live and work under strict supervision of brothel owners. The IOM report mentioned above also described similar situations of Vietnamese girls in Cambodian brothels. However, it explained that living and working conditions of the girls and women varied from brothel to brothel.¹²¹ In fact, the average Cambodian person saw the Vietnamese sex workers in a better position than Cambodian women in prostitution. The former seemed to be more able to take care of themselves, especially health-wise. Vietnamese sex workers in Cambodia were also known to be able to save up money from

¹¹⁹ Tay Ninh Survey Report (2000)

¹²⁰ VWU, 1997: p54.

¹²¹ Derks, 1998: p33.

their work. On the contrary, Cambodian prostitutes were generally in poorer working conditions and they were unable to earn and save up as much as the Vietnamese women.

It was interesting to note the different perceptions of the situation of Vietnamese women and girls in prostitution between the Cambodian and Vietnamese sides not only in terms of the working conditions of the women but also the scale of the problem or what each side perceived to be a problem.

The 1997 VWU report - citing a study by UNICEF- claimed that over 80% of prostitutes in Cambodia during the early 1990s were Vietnamese women. By 1997, the number of prostitutes had gone up significantly with one third being girls under 18. The majority were still Vietnamese girls. In addition, provinces and cities with the highest rates of prostitutes infected with HIV were places with higher numbers of Vietnamese prostitutes.¹²² Moreover, the research report of the Women's Union indicated that many Vietnamese prostitutes who had been infected with HIV in Cambodia tended to return back to their homeland.¹²³

◆ **As wife of foreign men**

According to the report, some women from Southern Vietnam were deceived into going to China to be wives of Chinese men. The report also showed however, that there were women who wanted to go to China in hope of getting married. Nevertheless, in both situations women often found themselves having to work hard to serve the husband's family as well as helping on the farm. The women who shared their stories were not happy with the living conditions in China and managed to return back to Vietnam.

Situations of Vietnamese women married to Taiwanese men varied. According to the Vietnam Cultural Office in Taipei, the number of Vietnamese women married to Taiwanese men who asked to return to Vietnam was increasing. All women wanting to return to Vietnam said that they had been beaten and ill-treated.¹²⁴ However, the most common factors which led to a desire for the women to return home were language problems, problems with the family e.g., the women were not trusted by the husband and his family and unmatched expectations of the women of her husband.

A number of Vietnamese women married Taiwanese men who were much older. Some of the men also had physical disabilities. Irrespective of the condition of the husband, however, when the women realised that they were not happy staying with the husband, it seemed that many of them managed to return to Vietnam.

However, the report stated that there were also many women who, due to their miserable situation in the family abroad, wanted to return to Vietnam but could not. The women usually had neither passports nor personal identity card, as their husbands kept all these papers. The

¹²² VWU, 1997: p58.

¹²³ Ibid., p60.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p69.

Cultural Office in Taipei said that they could not help the women to return home because they must at least have passports.¹²⁵

The 2000 report stated that situation in recent years indicated that many Vietnamese women marrying Taiwanese men now had stable lives. Some women found a comfortable life and accept to live far from their home town. They worked hard and were loved by their husband's family.¹²⁶ According to the Tay Ninh Survey Report of 102 women married to Taiwanese men, about 58% of the women had better living conditions, both economically and spiritually. For 13% of cases nothing had changed, while 8.8% of cases lived in a worse situation after the marriage. It should be noted, however, that this information was given by family members of the women as the women themselves had gone away already.

5.4 Situation upon Return

Information on the current situation of women was based on that of women who have joined the activities of the Women's Union.

Former prostitutes

Life after prostitution

For those women who had been engaged in prostitution, most of them had gone through some period of staying at a "re-education centre" depending on the number of times they had been arrested. From the discussion and informal interviews with the women, it could be gathered that many of them had been in such a centre more than once. For the first timer, they had to stay for only 3 months. The VWU staff explained that if the women were caught for working in prostitution for the first time, they were not usually put in the re-education centre. Only after the offence had been repeated, did they have to serve a term. However, according to stories told by the women, some were arrested the first time they were caught engaging in prostitution.

A number of women said that after leaving the centre, they had to go back to prostitution again because there was usually no other better alternatives.

A woman who was now a group leader of one of the Women's Groups in District 4 was taken to the re-educational centre twice -- the first time for 3 months, and the second time for one year. She said she learned some skills at the centre but it was not enough to do anything to start a living.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Source: Thanh Ninh Newspaper, cited in 1997 report, p69.

¹²⁶ VWU, 2000: p11.

¹²⁷ The information obtained during the field visit by GAATW project staff in August, 2000.

In the view of VWU staff, going through the re-education centre was not seen as a punishment. Instead, the centre could help change the wrong ideas that women had regarding working in prostitution.

“Inferiority complex”

The VWU staff saw that women who had been in prostitution or had been trafficked had an “inferiority complex” that made them dare not contact and/or afraid of staff from mass organisations or authorities. Most of them wanted to hide their past and did not want to talk about their experiences. Thus, they could not get help and have to go back to prostitution again.¹²⁸

The perception of the VWU on the women who have engaged in prostitution was that of pity that the women engaged in prostitution out of an illusion, necessity, ignorance or greed. However, they believed that the wrong ideas that the women held could be changed through re-education because they were not bad people. Such a perception was different from most people and other authorities in society who consider the women as bad people all their lives.¹²⁹

It was difficult to get an honest answer from the women how they felt about working in prostitution or about their lives afterwards because of the legal framework and prevailing social attitude against prostitution in Vietnam. The women in Tay Ninh province (most of them entered prostitution “voluntarily”) whom the GAATW Project Coordinator talked to said that they thought it was right that they were arrested for prostitution because they dismayed the dignity of women. One woman told us a long story of how she became engaged in prostitution of her own decision but that in the end, she was always afraid of contracting diseases and of her personal safety, although she did not have much trouble from the police and did not have any major health problems.

Economic difficulties

According to the report, the majority of women returning from the "re-education centre" had no place to live and no funds to make a living. They had to rent a room in a poor area and borrow money at an interest rate of 20-30% per day.¹³⁰

It seemed that poverty and indebtedness constituted a vicious cycle for poor women. These women often had no one to turn to for help. To borrow money from the government’s fund (a scheme to help poor people) one needed to have collateral and housing registration which most of the women did not have.

Returnees from Cambodia

¹²⁸ VWU, 1999: p52.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p55.

¹³⁰ VWU, 1999: p52.

Very little information was available on the situation of women returning from Cambodia. Some of those with whom the researchers were able to make contact, had been trafficked into prostitution. When they returned, they were unable to find a means of making a living so they had to engage in prostitution again. Others still had debts to repay. Some of the women received assistance from the VWU.

Health problem

The 1997 VWU report gave cases of women who were trafficked into prostitution in Cambodia and returned to Vietnam with HIV/AIDS. One woman said that she found out about her infection after she had to be tested in order to apply for a job.¹³¹ The GAATW Project Coordinator also interviewed a young woman who was deceived into going to Cambodia for prostitution but ended up marrying a Vietnamese man who had helped her. She helped her husband work on a construction site in Cambodia. However, their living conditions were not always good and she suffered from mal-nourishment. As their living conditions and her health got worse, she decided to go back to Vietnam leaving behind her son with the husband. Her mother described her condition when she returned as “*she was so ill that she could not even wash her own clothes*”.¹³²

Returning from China

Losing legal rights

There are cases where some women had lost their legal rights as citizens after a period of absence from their residence which had not been reported to the relevant authorities.

Muoi was in China for nearly 2 years during which time she did not have contact with her family in Vietnam. While she was gone, her father passed away and her mother went to register his death. At that time, the police asked about Muoi and her mother could not give any information on her so the police took Muoi’s name off the house registration. Now Muoi lives in the house with her mother and brother. However, she has no ID (registration number), no right to travel to another province or abroad and no other rights as a citizen.¹³³

Returning from Taiwan

A number of Vietnamese women married to Taiwanese men have returned to Vietnam. These were women who had an unhappy marriage life or found that they were deceived or abused by

¹³¹ VWU, 1997: p54.

¹³² Information obtained through interview by GAATW Project Coordinator during the field visit to project sites.

¹³³ Information obtained through interview by GAATW Project Coordinator during the field visit on 15 August, 2000.

the husband and his family. Women who had registered their marriage officially in Vietnam could file for a divorce. There were also women wanting to file a divorce who had married Taiwanese men but had not follow the husband to his country and there had not been contact with him for a long time.

According to the VWU report, the majority of women who returned to Vietnam lived with their parents. Some of them had lost ownership of their home after a period of absence and thus had to rent a house. As many of the women did not have stable jobs, they found themselves in a difficult situation.

The VWU staff also perceived that women who had been engaged in an unhappy marriage with foreigners had an “inferiority complex” similar to those who had been in prostitution.

CHAPTER 6 ACTION

Phase II: Action - process and activities

The Action Phase of the project began in early 1998. The general objective set out at the beginning of the project for this phase was for the project team to assist in the formulation of appropriate actions in partnership with women and community in order to: (1) provide support to trafficked women; and (2) identify strategies at the local level to prevent trafficking of women. Based on this general objective, each implementing agencies developed their own specific focus reflecting the different contexts and their understanding of the problem. GAATW as the co-ordinating agency provided technical assistance and guidance. More attention was given to the implementing agencies in Vietnam as the concept and methodology of FPAR adopted in the project were new to them.

This chapter is based on information in the project reports prepared by the implementing agencies as well as information and insight gained by the project coordinator during her field visits and communication with the women and member of the project teams. Although each of the implementing agency shared similar project framework, one can see the different process and approach taken as well as detail of the implementation reflecting/corresponding to the analysis of the situations and the specific context in each research area. In this chapter, the author maintains the terminology used by the implementing agencies in describing objectives, process and activities in the Action Phase.

6.1 Objectives set by Implementing Agencies

Cambodia¹³⁴

1. To formulate improved, more effective strategies at local and national level based on relevant and adequate data.

¹³⁴ From Project Proposal part III - Cambodia, p19.

2. To prevent traffic in women and to support women trafficked into prostitution in Cambodia.
3. To strengthen and act as a catalyst for local women's initiatives and participation in addressing problems related to trafficking in women.
4. To develop public awareness on issues of racial discrimination, gender inequalities, human rights and women's rights.
5. To facilitate attitude change which recognises trafficking in women and forced prostitution as criminal offences where the women are considered complainant not the criminal.

Vietnam

Northern Vietnam Team¹³⁵

1. To develop a pilot model with new and effective measures to prevent trafficking in women based on analysis of findings in Phase I.
2. To identify feasible solutions to help the victims to overcome spiritual and financial difficulties, be more independent and self-reliant as well as to be able to reintegrate into the society.
3. To provide recommendations to the State, social and mass organisations, families and the community on the prevention of trafficking in women.
4. To replicate the successful model of measures/strategies to fight against trafficking in women.

Southern Vietnam Team¹³⁶

1. To disseminate finding from Phase I to local and city authorities in order to identify measures to protect the rights of women and to prevent trafficking in women.
2. To assist women returnees (who were trafficked or deceived into prostitution) in ‘wiping out their complex’, to have stable economic life and be accepted by the community.
3. To continue with ‘peer educator’ programme by training some former prostitutes to provide information, campaign and assist ‘potential’ women not to fall into situation like them.
4. To expand the model developed during the project to other districts of Ho Chi Minh City.

6.2 Preparation for the Action Phase

Training workshop for Vietnam

GAATW organised a training workshop for the implementing agencies in Vietnam in preparation for Phase II. In Cambodia, preparation for Phase II was done internally. Reflecting on the

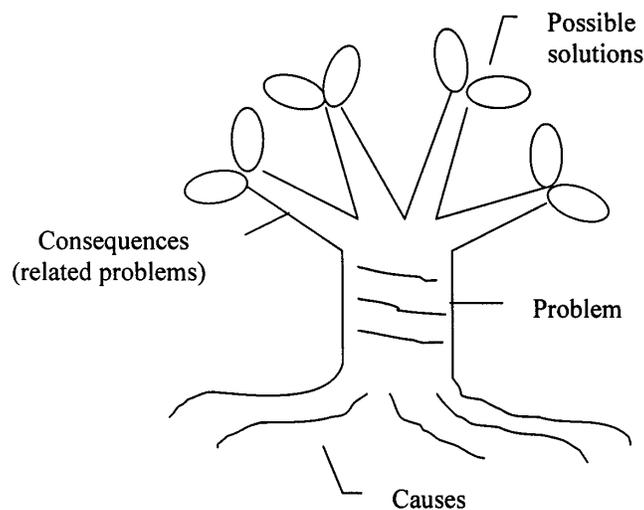
¹³⁵ From the YRI Report, 2000: p185-186.

¹³⁶ Vietnam Women’s Union of Ho Chi Minh City, 1999: p 1.

objective and methodology of the project, the training in Vietnam focussed on the understanding of partnership approach as a key working method in the action phase. Within this approach, the researchers work WITH the women and not FOR the women in bringing out the problems and bringing out solutions. In the context of the project, the problems and solution to the problem of trafficking were discussed and analysed by the women concerned. An exercise called “Problem Tree” (Figure 1) was introduced as a concrete tool to get the women to start talking about an issue or a situation in a more structured way. This exercise received much attention and interests from the Vietnamese project teams.¹³⁷ It was used by them to facilitate discussion among the women about causes, consequences of and solutions to the problem of trafficking.

The training also discussed ways for the women to prioritise different solutions that they identify and how to develop and implement activities accordingly. It should be noted that during the training, the project teams identified two solutions which would assist in preventing trafficking in women: (1) provision of information; and (2) the provision of credit schemes to the women for income generating activities. Steps to develop and implement activities that had been identified as potentially useful were then discussed. A weaving project was used as an example on how to develop an income generating activity. It was emphasised during the training that solutions to the problem as well as nature of activities should be identified by concerned women themselves rather than by the project staff.

Figure 1: Problem Tree



¹³⁷ Since the training time was limited and only one example could be shared and discussed in detail, the ‘Problem Tree’ became the “bible” (an important tool) for the project teams.

Exposure trip to Thailand

In addition to the training workshop in Vietnam, GAATW organised exposure trips to Thailand for the project teams from Vietnam and Cambodia. The project teams from both countries visited a number of women and community-based groups in Thailand to learn about different types of activities as well as approach and methods used by these groups to empower women and strengthen community involvement. These groups were working on various issues including community support for HIV/AIDS patients, education for hill-tribe children and education and life skills learning for sex workers. The project teams also visited a women's group formed during *the Research and Action Project on Trafficking in Women in Thailand* to learn about their experiences in establishing the group and developing group activities. Aside from learning about their activities, the emphasis of discussion during the visit was on the role of researchers or project staff as catalysts and facilitators for actions in Phase II.

6.3 Implementation of the Action Phase

Activities in Phase II were carried out at two levels: (1) in-country activities carried out in each project area by each implementing agency, (2) activities at the project level facilitated by GAATW.

6.3.1 Development of intervention activities

In the three project areas in Vietnam and Cambodia, similar activities have been developed. However, there are a number of differences concerning the aim of the intervention, participants involved and the approach and methods of the implementation. For the project in Vietnam, the main focus of the intervention activities was on reintegration and rebuilding new lives of affected women. Participants included trafficked women who have returned back to the community, former prostitutes, “at-risk” women as well as other women identified as in difficult situation. Some communication activities for prevention of trafficking have also been initiated in Vietnam.

For Cambodia, the project aimed at information dissemination and establishment of community surveillance groups for prevention of trafficking. The Cambodian project also initiated activities to advocate for human rights of sex workers while also assisting women who have been forced into prostitution.

Intervention activities can be broadly divided into the following four categories.

i) Reintegration and rebuilding new lives

For the project teams in Vietnam, providing support to returnees was one of the main objectives. Forming groups of affected women in order to help them overcome economic difficulties and their feeling of inferiority was the basis for the intervention model developed by the project teams in both Northern and Southern Vietnam. However, the actual process of the

implementation of activities has been somewhat different between the two teams. These different experiences have also brought about different outcomes.

Experiences from Northern Vietnam

In the project areas in the rural communes of Northern Vietnam, a number of women have migrated into and/or have been cheated or deceived to China since early the 1990s. Some of these women have returned back to Vietnam while many still remained in China. For Vietnamese persons to go to China legally they require official permission from both Vietnamese and Chinese governments. When the border between the two countries was still closed, migration across the border from the Vietnamese side was strictly controlled. However, among the ethnic communities living along the border areas, border crossing for visit and marriage was a common practice.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the border between China and Vietnam opened and border crossing for trading also became more widespread. During this period, a number of women from rural communes of border provinces started to look for ways to engage in small trading across the border and some were deceived into moving more deeply into China. A number of women who remain unmarried at an “older” age were also encouraged to go to China in order to find a husband.¹³⁸ And in addition the lure of a better life encouraged the migration of more women to China

Regardless of the reasons for women wanting to go or trafficked to China, the general opinion of these women and their families by the people in the community, especially that of local authorities is not positive. This is in spite of the fact that many were “deceived” into going to China. In the view of local authorities, going to China is often associated with illegal activities: illegal migration and trading of illegal goods. And in general, there is a stigma attached to women who marry Chinese men. All these factors contribute to such women and their families being isolated in their communities in Vietnam when they return from China. They do not and cannot talk about the problems with other people even though they may be in need of assistance. And after their absence some of them also face difficulties in making the livelihood since they do not have land for building a house or for cultivation.¹³⁹ Others who return with Chinese-fathered children could not register their children and thus the children are unable to go to school.

To provide support to the women returnees, the project team approached individual women within a commune and asked them to join a group that was named “group of women in special difficulties”. The project team also invited mothers whose daughters have been cheated to go to and still remain in China to join the group. Women identified as “high-risk” of being trafficked were also invited to join the group. According to the project team, the “high-risk” group includes poor women and unmarried older women.

¹³⁸ Being a single woman seems to be undesirable in the rural communes in Vietnam. Many women themselves said they felt lonely. Also many people in the society consider that woman should have a man to help and protect them.

¹³⁹ As explained in the Finding chapter, some state or local policies in Vietnam do not allow them to receive farmland after an unreported long absence.

Four women's groups have been established in four communes of the project areas with a total of 53 members.

Table 6: Setup of Women's Groups in Northern Vietnam

Hop Thanh Women's Group (Lang Son province)

Category of women	Number
1. Returnees from China	4
2. Women from high-risk group	5
3. Mothers whose daughters have been trafficked China	2
Total	11

Mai Pha Women's Group (Lang Son province)

Category of women	Number
1. Returnees from China	7
2. Women from high-risk group	---
3. Mothers whose daughters have been trafficked China	5
Total	12

Trang An Women's Group (Quang Ninh province)

Category of women	Number
1. Returnees from China	9
2. Women from high-risk group	5
3. Mothers whose daughters have been trafficked China	---
Total	14

Kim Xuyen Women's Group (Hai Duong province)

Category of women	Number
1. Returnees from China	4
2. Women from high-risk group	10
3. Mothers whose daughters have been trafficked China	1
Total	15

Providing economic support to group members

To attract women to join the group, the project team offered the women with a small amount of loan. However, according to the project co-ordinator of the Northern Vietnam team, “lending money is not the most important thing... it's only the entry point”. Most of these women are poor and they need to be able to sustain or improve their lives.

The project team provided each group member with a loan between VND 800,000 to 1,000,000 at a monthly interest rate of 0.6%. The researchers reported that some of the group members refused to take loan from the project in the beginning because the women had some negative experiences borrowing from local money lenders who charge high interest rates making it impossible for them to repay.

According to the project team, there are two main state-run funding sources: The Poverty Reduction Fund; and Bank for Agricultural Development. However, to borrow from these sources, the person must have collateral or are considered to be able to repay the loan. Most of the poor women could not meet such requirements and therefore could not benefit from these schemes.

In this project each member had to make a proposal to the Project Management Board describing how they would use the loan. Since most of the women in the groups were farmers, many of them wanted to use their loan for cultivation and husbandry. The project team arranged for training on cultivation techniques and animal breeding for the women and many of the women invested their fund in planting fruit trees and buying pigs or chickens for breeding. Some women used their money for small trading while others spent their loan on medical treatment of their children or repairing their home. It was agreed among the women members that the loan could not be used to buy things or food nor used to pay off old debts. The groups used the interest payments from the member loans as group fund. Each group also set up group saving scheme in which group member could give monthly saving in a fixed amount.

The outcome of the effort to support the livelihood of affected women in the project in Northern Vietnam seemed to be quite positive. The women could make profits from their harvest, sales of animals or other products. The living conditions of their families have improved. Many of the group members said that they would be able to pay back the loan in instalments. However, the project staff noted that some women who are in really difficult economic situation may find it difficult to pay back the loan.

Group meetings & solidarity trips

When the groups were first established, the project staff helped to facilitate group meetings. Group members elected group leader and agreed on the rules of the groups including a monthly meeting. During the meeting, group members paid the monthly interest of their loan and make contribution to the group saving.

The women also shared their experiences in income generating activities with the group. They exchanged knowledge and helped each other, for example, to buy animals or seeds. They also

shared news and information on state policies concerning farmers and agricultural issues. The project staff provided magazines, newspapers and other reading materials for women to read together during their meeting.

The project staff also facilitated the sharing and discussion of the group members. The women shared their stories and experience of having been cheated into going to China. They also talked about their present personal and family problems. After several meetings, the women became more comfortable sharing about their situation. They encouraged and supported each other and tried to help those in difficult situation to solve their problems. They visited members who fell ill, attended different life events of other members and also helped some members to settle domestic dispute. The women themselves said that they felt happier after joining the group and meeting other women. They no longer felt isolated.

During group meetings, the women also sang and danced. Some women composed songs telling about the hard life in China.

To build confidence for women and to strengthen group spirit, the project team arranged for women's groups in different project areas in the three provinces to visit one another through "solidarity trips". The YRI project report describes the atmosphere of these trips as follows:

"It was the first time members of all the four women's groups met one another. They were very happy to talk to one another on the bus and in the guesthouse. They all looked pretty in their new clothes and make-up. But basically, it was the happiness inside them. The women were warmly received in all localities"¹⁴⁰.

During these solidarity trips, the project team asked the women to evaluate the project activities. They shared on what have been done regarding production activities, on the success and constraints as well as proposal for assistance from concerned agencies. The women also learnt that the problem of trafficking did not only happen to them or women in their communities but also in other areas of Vietnam.

For many women, these solidarity trips provided them with the opportunity to see the world outside their commune.

Building community support

In order to implement an effective and sustainable intervention model for reintegration and rebuilding new lives in rural Northern Vietnam, the project team needed to solicit support from local authorities including local Women's Union. As mentioned earlier, the view of local authorities on the women's returnees was not very positive during the beginning of the project. Their intervention in addressing trafficking problem was also limited to keeping the law-and-order. They did not see the vulnerable and difficult situation of the women. Through the discussion with the project team, local authorities began to change their perception and lend their support to the women's groups.

¹⁴⁰ YRI, 2000: p225.

Aside from providing moral support and encouragement to the women’s groups in general, local authorities have played important roles in giving practical assistance to the women. They have helped registering children born of Chinese father and Vietnamese mother, thus enabling them to go to school. Similarly, they helped with the case of a woman group member in Hop Thanh commune who was originally from another province. She had been trafficked to China and was sent back or came back to Hop Thanh commune. It had been seven years since her return and it was only with the assistance of this project and the support of the local authorities that this woman was able to get her name registered in her new community of Hop Thanh.

The project team reported that aside from local authorities, other local agencies such as Women’s Union and Youth Union have also extended their support to the women’s groups.

Experiences from Southern Vietnam

In Southern Vietnam, intervention model for reintegration and rebuilding new lives has been implemented in two areas: Ho Chi Minh City and Tay Ninh province. The project team identified three categories of affected women to participate in the groups. They include: (1) those who have been trafficked across borders to Cambodia; (2) women who married to Taiwanese men; and (3) women who were forced or are at risk of being deceived into prostitution. The groups set up are called “groups of women in difficult situation” - similar to the groups established in Northern Vietnam.

The tables below show number of women who participated in the groups in each project area.

Table 7: Setup of Women’s Group in Southern Vietnam

HCM City District 1

Category of women	Number
1. women trafficked to Cambodia	7
2. women married to Taiwanese men	21
3. women forced/ at risk of going into prostitution	14
Total	42*

(*This number is divided into subgroups. One with 12 members, and the other one with 23. It was not clear whether or not the remaining 7 women form a group.)

HCM City District 4

Category of women	Number
1. women trafficked to Cambodia	3
2. women married to Taiwanese men	13
3. women forced/at risk of going into prostitution	33
Total	49**

(This is the initial number. Now there are 44 members divided into 7 groups.)**

Tay Ninh

Category of women	Number
1. women trafficked to Cambodia	22
2. women married to Taiwanese men	3
3. women forced/ at risk of going into prostitution	34
Total	59***

(* this is the initial number. Now there are 47 members divided into 4 groups.)**

Providing economic support to group members

Like the project implemented in Northern Vietnam, providing economic support to the women was seen as an important element in the process of rebuilding new lives.

According to the project staff, most of the affected women still faced economic problem and they would like to borrow loan from the project to invest in small business or spend on emergencies. Initially, there were attempts to have the women work together in one common income generating activity rather than getting individual loan. The former arrangement would allow the women to meet and support one another through working together. However, due to a number of difficulties including the inconveniences of frequent meeting, the lack of management skills and suitable place for the operation, group income generating projects did not take off. Only the group in District 1 managed to start a book-binding project with the help of a Women's Union staff who arranged for skill training to the women and secured a space for operation. She also found a market for the initial production and finally acquired a machine for the group to operate in full scale with external financial support from the Netherlands Embassy. In District 4 and Tay

Ninh province, the women decided to borrow some fund from the project for individual activities after unsuccessful attempts to carry out any common activities.

In order to receive loan from the project, Women's Union staff asked the women to submit application indicating the need for the loan. Group members must agree on the loan to be given to each member because the group acts as the guarantor and they have shared responsibility over the loan, i.e., if some members fail to repay, the group will repay by deducting money from the group saving fund.

Project staff also provided training in basic management skills to the group leaders and secretaries so that they would be able to take responsibility over loan management by themselves. Such practices are considered innovative for the Women's Union. Women who are beneficiaries of the project have greater participation and responsibility in decision making on the activities. Initially, the Women's Union staff felt that this kind of 'self-management' system would not work because the women may not be reliable. However, the result has been positive. The Women's Union is now applying more participatory approach in their other activities with women.

Many women borrowed loan to invest in small trading, buying sewing machine, or paying school fee for their children. Most of the women received loan in the amount of 500,000 - 1,000,000 VND. A few women who could repay the initial loan quickly were able to borrow a large sum of about 3 million VND over a period of time. The project staff reported that living conditions of many women and their families have improved through these kinds of financial support of the project.

Women's Groups meetings

When the groups were set up the project staff asked the women members to agree on having regular meetings. These meetings serve several purposes. Firstly, women members could discuss their concerns and problems during these meetings. There were many problems raised by the women. For example, women who contracted STDs do not like to visit a state run medical unit for treatment because they often face problems.¹⁴¹ So they had to seek private doctors which is more costly. The project staff also encouraged the women to share about their past experience of why and how they have been involved in prostitution or about the marriage with Taiwanese men. According to the project staff, the women were initially reluctant to talk about their situation. However, through the staff's facilitation the women began to feel more comfortable and were less hesitant to share their stories and life experiences during the group meetings.

Secondly, during the monthly group meeting, members could settle the loan repayment and collect money for group saving as agreed among themselves.

¹⁴¹ This information was obtained during a visit to the women's groups meeting by GAATW project co-ordinator. The women did not specify the problems but it could be understood that as most of them used to work in prostitution they might be discriminated against by the medical personnel.

Thirdly, from time to time during the monthly group meeting, the project staff held an information sessions to provide the women's group members with the knowledge on different issues. These include:

- Updated information on tricks of traffickers
- Sexual Transmitted Diseases and Prevention of HIV/ AIDS. This included lectures on the harm of drugs towards young men and tradition of Vietnamese women.

It was also reported that members of the groups volunteered to raise funds to help other members when they were ill or in need of support.

According to the project staff, women participating in the groups became more confident to speak out about their problems. Many women who did not have registration in the city or birth certificate for their children felt more confident to make applications to local offices.

ii) Community surveillance for prevention

Community surveillance for prevention of trafficking model has been initiated in the project in Cambodia through formation of village women groups. According to the Cambodian project team, the idea of forming village groups was decided by the villagers themselves when the project staff came to share findings of the research with local people at the end of Phase I. In order to involve as many people as possible in the process of developing intervention activities, a total of 72 sessions of group meetings in 7 villages were organised involving nearly 2,600 participants. After learning about situation of migration and trafficking from the project staff, villagers felt that information was an important tool to prevent deceitful migration and trafficking. People need to be alert and be aware of the trafficking situation in order not to become victims. There need to be ways/ channels for effective information sharing and keeping watch on possible deceitful migration and trafficking at the community level.

It was decided that women in the same neighbourhood should form small groups of 5-15 members each. Each group selected a leader on the basis of maturity, literacy levels, communication skills and community respect. Then among the group leaders, one representative was selected per village to be women volunteers.

Women volunteers received training from CWDA on community development, project planning and management, sustainability of the project as well as on topics of gender equality. In addition, the volunteers, as well as group leaders, received training on human rights, laws related to trafficking, AIDS education, teacher training for adult literacy and group saving. These topics had been identified by the villagers as their priority needs and concerns.

The overall function of the groups was to perform a surveillance role. The role of the group leader was to inform her group on new information and keep active check on developments related to migration, etc. Group members kept track of unknown faces in the village and reported to the authorities. They also discussed with people who plan to migrate and warn them of possible risks.

The groups have reportedly helped to prevent possible trafficking cases by bringing back three cases who had gone to other places and raised the suspicion of their families.

Table 8: Project areas and participants in Cambodia

Province	Number of villages	Number of groups
Ko Kong	2	9
Kompong Som	2	10
Battambang	2	41
Phnom Penh	1	10
<i>Total</i>	7	70

The women’s groups can be considered an information sharing and learning channel in the community. Project staff, village volunteers as well as group leaders have conducted a number of information/education sessions with the women’s group members on domestic violence and lack of equal opportunity for women; factors contributing to migration and trafficking of women.

iii) Information, Education and Communication (IEC) interventions

In Northern Vietnam, group members, particularly returned women and mothers of women who have been trafficked were willing to become communicators to prevent trafficking. They believed that, with their real stories, they could persuade others to help checking for cases of trafficking. They talked to people when they go to market or during other occasions. The project staff also provided training to members of women's groups to enable them to become effective communicators.

In both Northern and Southern Vietnam, the project teams reported that they organised talks and seminars in public and with local authorities in order to raise awareness of the situation and to seek recommendations for measures to prevent trafficking in women.

In all the villages in the project in Cambodia, information centers or “reading rooms” have been established. The sets up of reading rooms vary from a corner in someone's house to a separate construction in someone's backyard. The project team acquired different kinds of written material relating to trafficking for these rooms. Over the last few years, reading rooms in some villages (e.g., in Battambang) have been developed further and currently contain materials on various issues as well as trafficking. The additional materials include storybooks for children, newspaper, information on agricultural products, environment, health, children's rights, domestic violence, etc. This reading material has been provided by both CWDA and other agencies/NGOs in response to requests from villagers/women. Members of the women's groups take turn to be in charge of the reading room. The reading rooms have been used by various groups of people - children, people from nearby villages and NGO workers.

In Both Vietnam and Cambodia, a number of awareness raising and information materials have been produced. Project teams in northern and southern Vietnam both produced leaflets on trafficking as well as storybooks about lives of victims of trafficking. These materials have been distributed to people in the community and local authorities concerned.

In Cambodia, a number of IEC materials have been produced. Six video spots have been produced including three songs talking about the risk of migrating to city to work: one talking on trafficking, one case of trafficked women and one on trafficking law. A flip chart showing “Tricks of Traffickers” and a hanging calendar outlining main points of Cambodian trafficking laws were developed.

In addition, three types of T-shirts have been produced with different printings including “We know how to prevent AIDS”, “Trafficking in women is a human rights abuse” and “Sex work is work”. The first two kinds of T-shirts have been distributed in the communities and to general public with particular focus on women. The third type of T-shirt was designed by the Cambodian Prostitute Union (CPU) to be used in their campaign for the rights of sex workers.

According to the project team, all IEC materials were developed following numerous discussions with the villagers in all of the project areas. These materials have been used extensively within the project. The flip chart showing tricks of traffickers for example, aside from being used as an information material, was produced as a tool for literacy class and for discussion during women's group meetings. In addition, the IEC materials have been distributed to and used by other local NGOs as well as governmental and international organisations.

iv) Human rights advocacy for sex workers -- Cambodian Prostitute Union (CPU)

The project staff have maintained contact with sex workers in the Toul Kork area in Phnom Penh during the Phase I. In the Phase II, the project team facilitated a sharing and discussion among some sex workers. They also provided training to a group of sex workers on health and human rights issues. After the discussion and training, the women said that they became aware of trafficking and the human rights perspective of the sex workers. As a result, the Cambodian Prostitute Union (CPU) was established with the assistance of CWDA. The main objective of CPU is to advocate for human rights of sex workers so that they can defend themselves from various forms of violence and discrimination. In this way, the work of CPU is also geared toward prevention of trafficking of women into prostitution.

Main activities of CPU include:

- a survey on human rights violations of sex workers;
- awareness raising among sex workers about their rights and how to take actions;
- literacy for children of sex workers;
- group saving/credit scheme;

CPU members also make visits to brothels to see if there are any problems. They talk to brothel owners about human rights of sex workers and laws on trafficking. They inform the brothel

owners that legal action can be taken by human rights organisations in case of violations. They also help to mediate in conflicts between sex workers and customers, to introduce “new” sex workers to the CPU and by taking women to health services.

Since its establishment in 1998, CPU members have been advocating for the human rights of sex workers and how to fight against trafficking in women and children. They have been invited to speak at different meetings and conferences both at the national and international levels. In Cambodia for example, members of CPU spoke at the first National Conference on Gender organised by Ministry of Women’s Affairs and also at the meeting on HIV/AIDS prevention organised by Ministry of Public Health. They pointed out that policies to suppress prostitution do not help to combat trafficking in women. They also pointed out that in order to help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, women in prostitution must be in the position to negotiate condom use with clients. This meant that their rights must be protected and respected by brothel owners and clients.

At the international level, members of CPU have participated in a number of meetings organised in Asia and Europe.

According to the CWDA project report in 1999, CPU had over 100 members with 22 active ones. The latest information from the visit in November 2001 indicated that there are about 200 members (there are about 400 women working in the area). The active members play important role in running education and information sessions for their peers while other members have pledged their support to the cause of the Union. It should be noted that women who are members of CPU belong to the category of more “free” sex workers - i.e., they do not work in brothels under control of brothel owners but rent rooms and operate independently. This enables them to speak more freely and to advocate for their rights. CPU currently has a plan to expand its activities to different provinces. Their new strategy is to get collaboration and understanding from women in the community to help prevent trafficking as well as discrimination against sex workers.

CPU could not register itself as an independent organisation as prostitution is not recognised as legitimate activity in Cambodia. Until it can be officially registered, CPU operates as a project of CWDA.

v) Other intervention activities

Literacy classes

Lack of or low level of education is seen as one main factor contributing to trafficking in women. Thus, the project team in Cambodia introduced literacy classes in the villages of the project areas allowing young and adult women to learn to read and write in their own community.

Literacy classes were also offered to women working in brothels in the project areas in the provinces. These classes were provided outside the brothel in nearby locations. However, since most brothel owners were not cooperative this activity achieved less success.

Poverty alleviation activities

In order to encourage self-reliance among the women in communities for their own economic support, the project team in Cambodia facilitated the formation of saving groups. A number of saving groups have been formed in all the seven villages since September 1998. In addition, volunteers in Kor Haal village in Battambang worked with 42 families in the village to start vegetable gardens and home-based mat weaving project as an income generating activity. The project provided a small amount of fund for buying vegetable seeds for the first season. Village children are encouraged to collect straws and sell them to the mat weaving project.

Providing practical support to women returnees

In Cambodia, the project team provided a number of practical ways of support to women who have returned to their villages after escaping from or leaving brothels. Some of the returnees were referred to a specialised agency providing services for victims of abuse and trauma. The project team also has provided options for income generation that include literacy and vocational training through existing programmes of CWDA. In addition, the project team worked out strategies to reduce discrimination against women returnees in the villages. This has been attempted during a number of education/information sharing sessions organised by the project staff in the village.

6.3.2 Activities facilitated by GAATW

Throughout Phase II, GAATW facilitated a number of activities involving two or more partner agencies in the learning and sharing of experiences. Participants of these activities included researchers and project staff as well as members of women's groups formed during the project. Two main activities will be discussed in this report.

i) Study trip of researchers and project staff from the VWU to Cambodia

Towards the end of Phase II, GAATW facilitated a study trip of the Vietnamese project team from Southern Vietnam (Women's Union) to Cambodia with the aims to explore the possibility for cooperation between the Women's Union and NGOs in Cambodia as well as for the two implementing agencies to share experience on activities carried out in the Action Phase.

For the first objective, the Vietnamese project team visited a number of NGOs to learn about their work to assist trafficked women and children. Many NGOs shared about the problem of repatriating Vietnamese women and children who have been trafficked to Cambodia back to Vietnam. The Cambodian NGOs would like to get cooperation and assistance from organisations in Vietnam in order to speed up the process of repatriation because the current process can take a very long time. They also would like to have contacts with Vietnamese organisations that could do some follow up work on the repatriated cases. The Women's Union team explained that repatriation should be best carried out through official diplomatic channel. The organisation can only assist in the process when they receive information or requests from relevant ministries. In

this regard, direct co-operation between the Women's Union and NGOs in Cambodia on repatriation and case follow up did not seem to be very possible.

To learn about intervention activities initiated in the Cambodian project, the Vietnamese project team visited women's groups in a project village outside Phnom Penh. Members of the Vietnamese team commented positively on the liveliness and active participation for the group members in the village. They observed that members of the women's groups in Cambodia are more confident to express their opinions. However, the former felt that CWDA should provide more direction on activities and structure of the women's groups rather than letting the women manage and oversee the groups by themselves. This is an interesting observation which reflects the different approaches between project partners in Cambodia and South Vietnam.

ii) Meeting of women core group members

After the women's groups have been formed in all the project areas both in Vietnam and Cambodia, GAATW facilitated a meeting between active members of each group. The aim of this meeting was to provide an opportunity for the women to share their experience with each other regarding the situation of trafficking in their areas and about their group activities. From the point of view of the project, we hoped that such sharing would highlight the commonalities and differences. We were also optimistic about the broader possibilities of this dialogue among women who do not share a common language, but to a large extent have experienced similar historical, political and personal realities. We also wanted to find out whether their projected solutions to the problem of trafficking could result in a common strategy.

In addition to the women's group members from Vietnam and Cambodia, two active members of the "Dok Aoo" women's group from Thailand were invited.¹⁴² Some of the researchers and project staff from all the three countries also joined the meeting.

The dynamic of the meeting was positive. Despite the language barrier, the women managed to share their stories and pose questions to one another. Each of the women's stories shared some common elements. Most of them were cheated, deceived or forced by someone at one point of being "trafficked". An interesting discussion emerged around the issue of prostitution when it is clear that some women were pushed by circumstances to accept working in prostitution. While many women agreed that such a situation should not be considered a trafficking case, some women from Vietnam remarked that prostitution is an illegal activity that must, in any case, be forbidden and prevented the same way as trafficking.

Sharing on experience of forming women's groups brought out lively discussion. Not only were the women eager to find out what the others were doing concerning project activities, they were also trying to visualise the lives of other women in other countries. For instance, women from northern Vietnam were puzzled in hearing that the women's group in Thailand was formed because members wanting to spend their free time more efficiently: "*How come you have so*

¹⁴² The 'Dok Aoo' group was formed during the RA project in Thailand in 1993.

much free time? Here in Vietnam we have to work hard all the time.” Or the Cambodian group had talked about women going fishing and some women from Vietnam were very surprised about this because in Vietnam fishing is done only by men.

Although communication among the women from the three countries was limited by the lack of a common language, the women felt they shared something in common and they could learn from each other's experiences. Some sense of friendship has also been developed. On the last day of the meeting, the Vietnamese woman from Lang Son passed on a letter to a Thai woman from *Dok Aoo* group and through the translator she said, *"please tell her that I hope we meet again... I would like to invite her to come visit me"*.

After the official completion of the project, many of the women's groups in Cambodia and Vietnam continue to meet and carry out their group activities. In some areas, old members have left while new members join in. The context/situations of migration and trafficking in the many of project villages have also changed. Among the project communes in Northern Vietnam, out-migration and the problem of trafficking seems to have disappeared.¹⁴³ A number of factors may have contributed to this change. But members of the women' groups felt that their communication and awareness raising activities have played a role. In Southern Vietnam, the continuity of the group is less apparent although the model of ‘self-management’ in the loan scheme seems to have been adopted by the Women's Union as their new approach. Migration and trafficking of Vietnamese women from the southern provinces to Cambodia has apparently been declining, while arrangement for marriage of the women to Taiwanese men has been on the rise. One reason for this change may be that marrying Taiwanese men has become a better option for women and their families and also more profitable for agents who make the arrangements. However, it should be noted that there is no clear relationship identified between the phenomenon of this decline and rise. In Cambodia, labour migration from the project villages continues. Although people have become more aware of the risk of being trafficked, lack of economic alternatives in their home pushes people to take this risk.

Activities of the Cambodian Prostitute Union (CPU) have gained support from a number of human rights organisations. Their struggle will see many challenges ahead but the process and results will also be empowering for those involved.

¹⁴³ This information was provided by local authorities in the project communes. However, during our discussion with a Women's Union leader of Lang Son province in November 2001, we were told that the problem of trafficking was still prevalent in many other communes of the province.

CHAPTER 7 ANALYSIS

7.1 Conceptual understanding of trafficking: an evolving discussion

The conceptual understanding of the issue of trafficking is perhaps one of the most important factors that influenced the RA Project. However, as mentioned earlier, when the project was conceived in 1995 -1996, there was no internationally agreed definition of trafficking in persons. For the project partner in Cambodia, the concept of trafficking was understood in the context of a human rights violation, connected to the growth in prostitution. For the project partners in Vietnam, trafficking was perceived as related to women being forced or deceived into prostitution or into becoming wives of foreign men.

While the perception of the issue by the project partners may reflect the actual trend of trafficking phenomenon at that time, it must be recognised that the understanding of the trafficking issue by project partners - particularly those in Vietnam - also followed the legal concept of trafficking in each country. This understanding was largely based on the historical understanding of trafficking in international law that focused on the recruitment and movement of women across borders for the purpose of prostitution, as in the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and the Exploitation of Prostitution of Others.¹⁴⁴ Thus, despite the absence of an internationally agreed definition, trafficking has often been associated with the crime of harbouring or facilitating prostitution. In Vietnam, trafficking was also linked to kidnapping, false adoption, illegal migration or immigration as well as illegally staying abroad. All of these acts are considered a crime under the Vietnamese Criminal Code.¹⁴⁵

Gaining conceptual depth and clarity on the trafficking issue has been an evolving process, both for GAATW and for the project partners. In the last few years, discussion on the definition of trafficking, and measures to combat it, has been progressing at the international level. The Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women commented in her report to the UN Commission on Human Rights during its 56th session in April 2000, that definition of trafficking should focus on forced-labour and slavery-like practices rather than narrowly focusing on prostitution or sexual exploitation. She also noted that "...the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and the Exploitation of Prostitution of Others...(which) seeks to criminalised acts associated with prostitution...has proven ineffective in protecting the rights of trafficked women and combating trafficking."¹⁴⁶

The first internationally agreed definition of trafficking came into place in December 2000 under the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and

¹⁴⁴ The 1949 Convention did not give a definition of trafficking but described punishable acts related to prostitution.

¹⁴⁵ YRI, 2000: p166-67.

¹⁴⁶ The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Radhika Coomaraswamy, Report on Trafficking (2000).

Children attached to the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime. Broadly, it defines trafficking as:

*“...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat, use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud...for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation includes sexual exploitation, forced labour or services or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”*¹⁴⁷

Prior to the new development at the international level, discussion on the conceptual clarity of the trafficking issue had already taken place during the course of the RA Project.

Recognising that the scope trafficking in women included more than just forced prostitution or sexual exploitation, GAATW encouraged the project partners in Vietnam and Cambodia to look beyond the original research scope. This was done during a monitoring visit in Phase I. In Cambodia the local partner already had a good grasp on the elements of trafficking although the actual level of understanding may have varied among the project staff. The director of CWDA was instrumental in giving direction and training to the project staff regarding the broader areas of trafficking. During the first phase, researchers in Cambodia found many cases of trafficking of women for forced labour or for begging in Thailand.¹⁴⁸ In Vietnam, the discussion and understanding of the issue was more complex because the implementing agencies had to operate within the existing legal framework and the official perception of the trafficking issue in the country. In this regard, it was also more difficult to expand the scope of the research here.

It was particularly clear in Vietnam during the course of the project that the official perception of the trafficking issue influenced the research process and the nature of the research findings as presented in the earlier chapter of this report. In turn this official understanding also influenced the resulting kinds of activities proposed or implemented in the action phase. Some important implications of this are outlined below.

- The initial research process for the project in Northern Vietnam was difficult because at the higher policy level, trafficking was perceived as a sensitive, cross-border issue with China. In Vietnam, it took almost one year after the project was actually launched, to get official approval for the project from the government. The lack of official status of the project created some negative impact on project activities, particularly those involving the support of GAATW (which implied the presence of foreigners). Training for researchers and monitoring of fieldwork during the initial research stage by GAATW, for example, did not happen as planned. Much of the preparation and the actual research process had to be undertaken by the implementing agencies themselves without added support from the GAATW.
- The conceptual conflation between trafficking in women and prostitution had some impact on the quality and nature of data collected. This was particularly the case with the initial research

¹⁴⁷ The new international definition and interpretative notes are available at;
http://www.uncjin.org/Documents/Conventions/dcatoc/final_documents/index.htm

¹⁴⁸ However information regarding other forms of trafficking was not discussed in detail in the CWDA report.

in Southern Vietnam in which much of the findings only described the situation of women who had to resort to prostitution because of their difficult circumstances or that of their family. Although the project partners in Southern Vietnam generally agreed on the basic elements of trafficking such as deception, coercion, the use of violence, abuse by authorities, debt bondage, forced labour and slavery like practices, these elements were not always highlighted in the research report. This was perhaps because of the focus on prostitution rather than on elements of trafficking. The project reports from Northern Vietnam also presented living and working conditions of prostitutes as those of trafficked women without making any distinction between the two groups.

- The conflation between trafficking and illegal migration, which is consistent with the official line in Vietnam, also had an impact upon the quality of the research findings and analysis presented in the reports. For example, the statistics on “trafficked” women cited in the YRI report largely referred to the number of women who had illegally migrated. They included those women sent back by the Chinese authority, those who had gone away and lost contact with their families and those who did not give official notification to and nor receive permission from local authorities before migrating. No distinction was made between these different groups. Researchers obtained these figures mostly from local authorities, the border police or the local Women's Union and cited them in the report without further explanation.
- At the beginning of the project, it was difficult for the researchers to gain support for women returnees, from the local authority. The women returning from China, especially those in rural Northern Vietnam, were seen as law-breakers by local authorities. This was because local authorities viewed trafficking and illegal migration only as a matter of law-and-order, in line with the country’s legal framework. Most of the women and their families did not approach local authorities for help because they were afraid of punishment.
- In rural Northern Vietnam, the general community attitude toward migration, especially to China, did not seem to be a positive one. Thus, researchers encountered some resistance from community people when they tried to set up women's groups to support returnees from China. Some people asked the researchers why the project was helping those who had left their homeland to seek a better life in China while many people were trying to make ends meet at home.

In spite of these implications and the fact that conflation between trafficking, prostitution, and illegal migration was and is going to be an ongoing issue, some changes in the perception have been noted both an individual and organisational levels. In the context of Northern Vietnam, the researchers were instrumental in engaging in discussion with local authorities concerning the latter’s view on the status of returnees. Instead of seeing them as criminals, the local authorities gradually developed an understanding on the situation of women who had been cheated and had to leave the country illegally. In the later stage of the project, this shift in perception resulted in the involvement of local authorities in the provision of support to the women returnees and their families, as well as to the women’s support groups that had been formed.

Similarly, more openness and a change in perception about trafficking were seen to be developing during the project in Southern Vietnam. For example, both the researchers and the

local authorities initially saw the phenomenon of Vietnamese women in the southern provinces marrying Taiwanese men through arrangement of agents, only as a disguise for trafficking cases. However, through further survey and discussion, the later project report from the Southern Vietnam team remarked that there were also cases of happy marriages. In both Ho Chi Minh City and Tay Ninh province, local authorities and researchers also acknowledged the fact that there were many women who voluntarily worked as prostitutes to earn a living. However, the general attitude toward these women remained that they had chosen the wrong path and needed to be re-educated. Developing conceptual clarity of trafficking with the local partners in Vietnam has been a challenging and interesting process.

7.2 Factors contributing to trafficking

One important issue which a number of research projects on trafficking, including the RA Project, seek to identify is the cause and contributing factors to trafficking. In reviewing the available literature on trafficking in Vietnam, Kelly and Le (1999) commented that description of root causes of trafficking becomes rhetoric with the focus on “poverty”, “lack of education” and “*doi moi*”.¹⁴⁹ In the findings and discussion in the project reports from both Northern and Southern Vietnam poverty and lack of education are also pointed to as contributing factors. While this may be rhetorical description, the examination and analysis of these factors by implementing agencies contributes to further understanding of the complexity and contextuality of the root causes of trafficking.

Poverty, migration and women's choice

The YRI report stated that “poverty and hunger constitute a socio-economic basis for the formation and development of social evils including trafficking in women.”¹⁵⁰ Poverty was measured here in terms of rice production capacity and annual income per person per year. A “very poor person” had below 50 kg of rice per year or an equivalent of VND 100,000 (approximately US\$10).¹⁵¹ It should be noted, however, that the perception of poverty in the Vietnamese context was not confined only to “absolute” poverty. The importance of the widening income gap between the rich and the poor as a result of changes in the economic structure was also discussed in both reports from the Northern and Southern teams.

The YRI report gave some indications of a number or a certain percentage of “trafficked” women who were considered “very poor”. For example, the report cited statistics provided by Quang Ninh Police, which indicated that 40% of women trafficked during 1991-1997, came from very poor families.¹⁵² Or 13 out of 54 women trafficked in Kim Xuyen commune were very poor with annual income equivalent to VND 100,000.¹⁵³ The problem with linking poverty and trafficking

¹⁴⁹ Kelly and Le, 1999: p15.

¹⁵⁰ YRI, 2000: p55.

¹⁵¹ However, the indicator varies by geographical areas.

¹⁵² Ibid., p67.

¹⁵³ YRI, 2000: p66.

is that the actual context of trafficking is being simplified. Besides, it should be remembered that statistics of trafficked women as given by the authorities are questionable. Trafficked women are largely identified as those who have left home without official reporting or those who have been pushed back from China because of their illegal status.

An important pattern observed in Northern Vietnam (although not always clearly illustrated in the report) was that women were moving in order to look for ways to earn a living. However, because they lacked information about travel and contacts at the proposed destinations, or because of a general lack of experience, many of the women relied on friends or strangers to facilitate their movement and many times they were cheated. In this regard, poverty may well be just one of the causes of female migration while other factors make them vulnerable to deceit and exploitation during the travel process and at the destination. The situation was similar in the context of Southern Vietnam and Cambodia.

For Southern Vietnam, it is important to point out that the report only indicated that a percentage of the women interviewed during the Phase I entered prostitution due to poverty and indebtedness. In this regard, poverty was one reason for women to resort to prostitution as a mean of living or in order to get out of a difficult economic situation. Nevertheless, it is important to note that poor women are placed in especially difficult circumstances because they have very limited access to assistance from the state. According to the researchers, poor women were unable to attain a loan from the official sources with low interest rates. This was because they could not guarantee their ability to pay back the money. On the other hand if they used moneylenders, the interest rate could be as high as 50% per month.¹⁵⁴ In this context, increased access for the women to a suitable credit scheme could help them in such difficult situations and reduce their need to migrate elsewhere.

In the CWDA report, poverty was referred to as one of the main factors pushing women and girls into leaving home. The majority of the interviewees stated that they left home because of the promise of a job or because they were looking for work or additional income in order to improve the family's plight or social status. In this regard, there seems to be a clear indication of the desire of women and girls to improve their life and their family's situation through migration.

Personal and family problems

The research findings from both Vietnam and Cambodia indicated that many women chose migration as a means of escaping domestic violence, boring or abusive marriages or relationship problems. Women told stories of having had to endure drunken and irresponsible husbands, they were finally compelled to look for what they perceived as a "better" alternative. While these underlying causes need further research and analysis, they have often been explained under headings such as failed love affairs or broken marriages. Such terminology appears again to have negative connotations for women reflecting the attitude of society at large toward them. There is a social stigma associated with such breakdowns in relationships, especially for women.

¹⁵⁴ VWU, 1997.

However, it should be noted that not all women were compelled to migrate by difficult circumstances. Findings by the implementing agencies showed that there were also a number of women coming from well-to-do families who still made the decision to migrate for some adventure.

Education

A low level of education has often been cited as a contributing factor to women being trafficked. The report from Northern Vietnam said, “Our research findings show that women with low educational level are more likely to fall into the trap of traffickers”.¹⁵⁵ The report from Southern Vietnam also indicated that “...girls who fell victims to women-trading rings and who were forced to work as prostitutes were often very poor, with low education level.”¹⁵⁶ It is important to note here that the low level of education referred to in the Vietnamese context was a primary school level of education. Among the women interviewed, very few were illiterate. However, the majority of them only had primary school level of education.¹⁵⁷ In contrast, the majority of girls and women interviewed in Cambodia were illiterate, as they had no school education at all.

Lack of or minimal formal education alone may not be the most important factor contributing to the vulnerability of women to deception, or to lack of choices in life. The YRI report discussed a lack of information and services, for example TV, radio and newspaper, in poor rural areas as preventing many women from being aware about trafficking. Hence they were easily deceived. Indeed, in most of the cases interviewed, the women had never left the village before they were cheated. Lack of experience made them dependent on friends/neighbours who may want to take advantage of them. It should be noted, however, that even when informed about the risk of being trafficked, many women still take the risk, since staying in their villages is not a good alternative due to the poor economic opportunities available there.

Education may provide access to a better opportunity. However, one needs to question the kind of education and skills that really give that option. Having literacy skills is certainly an advantage which helps the women in many situations. For example, a sex worker in Cambodia was under debt bondage because she had signed a false contract with brothel owners without being able to read it. Where as, literacy skills saved a Vietnamese woman who had been forced to marry a man in China, since she was able to write to her friend to ask for help. Nevertheless, simply being able to read and write does not seem to be adequate in giving access to better life conditions, especially in Vietnam where the standard of education is relatively high. However, in a country like Cambodia where the education level is low among the general population, literacy may be a very important factor in assisting women gain access to better opportunities. In any case, what is necessary is education to empower women. It is probable that providing access to a combination of formal education and appropriate vocational and life skills training could assist in reducing the vulnerability of women and girls from being trafficked. The impact of the level of education in preventing trafficking requires further study.

¹⁵⁵ YRI, 2000: p57.

¹⁵⁶ Women’s Union, 1997: p40.

¹⁵⁷ 50.9% in Southern Vietnam and 30 out of 57 interviewees in Northern Vietnam had less than 6 years education.

7.3 The Application of Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) Methodology

The development and application of FPAR in research projects on trafficking and migration is still at a stage of infancy. Prior to the RA Project, FPAR was applied and tested out in *the Research and Action Project on Trafficking in Women in Thailand (RATW)* which was implemented by the Foundation For Women between 1992-1994. Experience in the RATW had shown that FPAR was a useful methodology for research on trafficking issue. Through its “bottom-up” approach the views of women were heard and their rights promoted. Nevertheless it was thought that application of FPAR in the RA Project in Vietnam and Cambodia, could further validate the concept and methodology.

In order to assess the application of FPAR in the RA Project, the key concepts and techniques (methods) of FPAR (as discussed in Chapter 1) as well as factors that influence its application need to be considered.

Factors influencing the application of FPAR in the RA Project

- First and foremost, the understanding of FPAR itself by the implementing agencies was a crucial factor. To really understand the principles and practice of FPAR, extensive training, discussion and hands-on experience in practical exercises were required, especially for those who were not familiar with such a concept. Given the limitation of the training as discussed in the Chapter 1, it could be expected that the understanding and the use of FPAR by the implementing agencies might not have been optimal.
- The application of FPAR was challenging in the particular socio-political contexts of Cambodia and Vietnam. Specifically, these contexts determine the structure of the society and the degree of openness and control within that society. Such factors influence the freedom to which a research methodology can be applied in that situation and the success of its’ outcome.
- In the RA Project the sensitive nature of the issue of trafficking in these countries and confusion over the understanding of what it involved further complicated the application of FPAR. (see earlier discussion in 7.1)
- The role of researchers, local project co-ordinators and implementing agencies was also critical in the application of FPAR. This included the dynamics and relationships between the researchers and research participants, and between the project co-ordinators and the researchers. In addition the mandate and experience of the particular organisation as the implementing agency of the project also influenced the way in which the FPAR methodology was applied.

The Application of FPAR in the context of the Cambodian Project

In Cambodia, data collection was done in Phase I of the project in order for researchers to have an understanding of the situation and problems of trafficking. This period was also an important time for the researchers to establish contact with research participants and community people.

All of the researchers were either local social or development workers. Some of them were involved in HIV/AIDS education programme at the community level or in brothel areas. With the use of checklist developed in the beginning of Phase I, the researchers were able to make contact and interview people in the villages and women in brothels. The researchers reported some difficulties in talking to local people in the villages due to the situation of political unrest during the time of the research (1997). The local leaders and the village women perceived them as working for a political group and thus did not trust talking to them. Furthermore, security of the researchers and of the women they talked to, was of concern since the trafficking network were connected to some powerful people including some in the armed forces. As for interviews with sex workers, some researchers also found it difficult to talk in detail to the women in brothels because of the close watch kept by the brothel owners.

After the process of data collection, the researchers arranged for meetings to share and discuss research findings with the women concerned, i.e., those in the villages and brothels. Sharing back information with research participants is considered one of the most important processes in FPAR.

In the villages, sharing of research findings, namely the situation of migration of trafficked women from the villages, led to discussion on causes of the problems and actions that needed to be taken to address them. Consequently, women's groups were formed to function as surveillance of what was happening to women locally and local information sharing groups, as discussed in Chapter 6. Subsequent activities that have been developed in the communities, including literacy classes, the development of a reading room and the development of income generating activities, can be seen as responses to some of problems identified i.e., low literacy rate and high poverty. Although the focus on and participation of women was central in all activities initiated, the impact of this approach could also be seen at the family and community level in terms of increased gender awareness. In most of the project villages, the number of domestic violence cases has reportedly declined.

Researchers also tried to arrange such sharing sessions with sex workers in the brothel areas. However, this process proved to be more difficult especially in the area where the majority of the sex workers were under strict supervision of brothel owners. Nevertheless, researchers were able to negotiate with brothel owners to allow some of the sex workers to gather for one or two hours during the days when they were not working. In the red light district of the Toul Kork area in Phnom Penh, there were more women who operated as "room-rented girls" rather than sex workers in brothels under control of owners, although previously many of them had worked in brothels. These women had more freedom of movement and they were able to meet when researchers invited them to the meeting. Through the facilitation of the researcher, these women shared and discussed their problems and problems of sex workers in brothels. Such problems included trafficking women from one brothel to another, violence and abuse of women by brothel owners, police harassment and crackdown. All sex workers also faced problems of discrimination

from the community. This sharing and discussion among sex workers in the Toul Kork area led to the formation of the Cambodian Prostitute Union as discussed in Chapter 6.

In this way, the application of FPAR in the project in Cambodia had contributed to the conscientization of women sex workers to demand their rights. In the villages, the use of FPAR also contributed to the empowerment of women to address some common problems. The women felt that they were involved in identifying of problems and in the planning and initiating of activities which addressed some the problems. For both women in the villages and sex workers, impacts and changes could be seen at different levels in different project sites. In general, the use of FPAR in the Cambodian project was seen as a positive experience by the project partners and the women who participated in it.

The Application of FPAR in the Context of the Vietnam Project

As in the project in Cambodia, data collection took place during Phase I of the project in Vietnam. Unlike the Cambodian researchers however, in Northern Vietnam, the researchers from YRI were not locals of the project communities. The researchers were based in Hanoi and they travelled to the research areas in the provinces. Initially, the researchers relied on assistance from local authorities in providing information on situation in the villages and in identifying research participants. In order to get to know the research participants in the communities, researchers stayed in or nearby the villages for 10-14 days at a time. They engaged in daily activities with the research participants in order to become familiar with their life situation and to talk to them.

The researchers felt that despite some difficulties, the process was successful in helping them to gain the trust of the women and that information obtained was accurate and useful in understanding the situation of trafficking and the conditions that the women faced.

For Southern Vietnam, the VWU research team contacted women who had engaged in sex work (those returned from “re-education” centres), or families with daughters working in prostitution. This identification of research participants was done largely through VWU staff at district level (in the case of the two research areas in Ho Chi Minh City), and through local VWU offices (in the case of the villages in Tay Ninh province). Because of their background as social workers of the VWU, some of the researchers already had contact with some of the research participants.

When making a visit to the women and interviewing them, the researchers offered a small amount of money to the women or their family as a token of appreciation for their time. According to the researchers, this gesture was necessary because most of the women were in difficult economic situations.

In the project in Vietnam, the process after the completion of the research phase was somewhat different than that in Cambodia. Sharing of research findings with the research participants did not happen in the first step as in the Cambodian project. In Vietnam, the focus at the beginning of the second phase was on formation of women’s groups. Researchers and project staff invited potential participants (returnees, mothers of trafficked women, high- risk women) to a meeting and to join the group. They informed the women of the objectives of the group including the aim of helping one another both financially and personally. Researchers also told the women that they

would be entitled to take a loan from the project. It seemed that formation of women's groups in Vietnam required active facilitation by the researchers in comparison with the more spontaneous coming together of women in the Cambodian project.

For the project in Northern Vietnam, the observation regarding the formation of women's groups was made based on the fact that many women refused or were hesitant to join the groups at the invitation of the researchers. In the researchers' view, this was because the women were busy making a living and also that they had inferiority complexes and therefore were not open to and avoided the researchers. However, looking at it from the women's perspective, some of them were afraid that the researchers were making investigations in order to arrest them.¹⁵⁸ There was also a negative perception about the women's groups that would be formed. Some parents remarked that if they let their unmarried daughter join the group of "social evil" women, then the daughter would "lose her honour". Another woman said that *"If I need a fund I can borrow anywhere, it is not necessary to join your meetings."*¹⁵⁹ According to the YRI report, the researchers however were very patient in trying to explain the purpose of the group to the women. Based on this description, it seemed that some women did not see the need to come together with other women and the researchers had to convince them to join the group by offering benefits for the women themselves.

For the project in Southern Vietnam, the process of bringing women together to form groups was similar to that in North Vietnam. However, the VWU was already running a number of programmes including some credit schemes, skills training, and HIV/AIDS and health education. The researchers and project staff already had contact with many women including former prostitutes, those still working in prostitution, and women in difficult circumstances who were identified as high-risk women. Many of those women were invited to come together and form a group of "women in especially difficult circumstances" and that they would be eligible to take out a loan from the project and participate in other activities. In this regard, the establishment of women's groups was nothing new for the VWU. It was only that in the context of the RA Project, groups of women with different specific needs became the focus.

Nevertheless, there was a new element in the work of both research teams i.e., the use of participatory techniques which were introduced during this project. Sharing and discussion took place after the group formation. Women who joined in the group were encouraged to share and discuss their situation and problems. Together, they also tried to identify some possible ways to address the problems.

Whilst the major activities of the women's groups that have been formed during this RA Project were similar among the groups in Northern and Southern Vietnam, the impact and the outcomes seen, at least in the eyes of GAATW however, have been somewhat different. Most evidently, there seemed to be more cohesion and the sense of bonding among members of the women's groups in Northern Vietnam. This was an interesting outcome considering the difficulties and ambiguity in the initial process of group formation. After the women agreed to join the groups,

¹⁵⁸ YRI, 2000: p211.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p237.

the process of sharing of experiences among the group members helped created a positive impact on the empowerment of the women. Up until now, when the project has officially ended, the group members still meet and support one another. The cohesion that developed within the groups in Northern Vietnam was less apparent in the groups in Southern Vietnam especially in Tay Ninh province. A number of factors may have contributed to the different dynamics found between the women's groups in Northern Vietnam and Southern Vietnam.

The first factor was perhaps the different geographical context of the project sites and the basic livelihood of the women in project areas. Most of the women in the project area in rural Northern Vietnam had land for housing and basic cultivation. In comparison, the women in Southern Vietnam lived in the city in squatter areas and were trying to make a living from petty trading. They were more interested in the prospect of having regular employment and income. Moreover, life in the countryside moved at a slower pace while poor women in the city must struggle to make daily living. These situations have some impact on the ability to participate of women in the women's groups.

Secondly, the backgrounds of the members of the women's groups in Northern Vietnam and Southern Vietnam were different. Amongst the general public, there seemed to be less stigma attached to women who had been trafficked to China than those who had worked in prostitution. It was also the case that discrimination against trafficked women (for purposes other than prostitution) may be removed more easily than against former prostitutes. While trafficked women were seen as being cheated or deceived, many people saw those who engaged in prostitution as being “greedy”, “lazy” or “wanting easy money”. It was generally believed too that former prostitutes needed to be “rehabilitated”. In Vietnam, this meant that the women must go through a period at a “re-education” centre where aside from learning some vocational skills, they were taught moral standards and dignity of being “good” women and citizens. The latter kind of teaching also took place during women's group meetings in the Southern Vietnam facilitated by VWU staff including groups that had been formed during the RA Project. In such groups the women may have felt further stigmatised and were not comfortable to discuss and share their real problems with the group. This factor, together with the fact that for most women group members joining the group served their economic purpose (i.e., they could borrow some loan from the project) may have meant that the women's groups in Southern Vietnam did not develop the same degree of cohesion.

Thirdly, the researchers and project staff in the Northern Vietnam and Southern Vietnam teams had different experience. Prior to the implementation of the RA Project, project staff and researchers from VWU had their own “top-down” approach in working with the women. The old style of interaction with women was still observed especially during the initial period of the RA Project. It was not very easy for the VWU staff to understand and practice the “bottom-up” approach as was introduced in the RA Project. To do this, they had to learn to trust and respect the women and to listen to their views. The women themselves were also perhaps used to interacting with the VWU staff in a more reserved manner i.e.; they were not encouraged to speak out or share their views but only to accept what was told. These factors may have some impact on initial trust building between project staff and the women and the process of sharing and discussion during group meetings. On the contrary, the researchers from the YRI did not have experience working with community at the grassroots level. In this respect, it was perhaps

easier for them to embrace the participatory and “bottom-up” approach and apply it in the work with the women’s groups once they have been formed. Participation and the open sharing of the women certainly have positive impact on group dynamics.

Final thoughts on FPAR concept and methodology

To a large extent, the application of FPAR in the RA Project was influenced by the socio-political context of the countries in which it was run, especially in Vietnam. In this regard, preparation for the project that took into account the country's socio-political context was essential. Similarly providing orientation and training for researchers and project staff on FPAR and the conceptual understanding of trafficking was crucial for the effective implementation of the project. However, as mentioned earlier, the use of FPAR in a project on trafficking especially in countries like Vietnam and Cambodia is rather new. It was therefore not easy to anticipate the difficulties that would arise from the socio-political context of the countries. From the experience in this RA Project, some observations can be made.

The use of economic incentive to attract women to join the group, as in Vietnam, may be thought to be inappropriate or in conflict with the concepts of real participation and empowerment. However, once the groups formed, women became involved and participated in sharing and discussion as well as in other activities. The changes that were seen amongst women in the groups, particularly in Northern Vietnam, included an increased confidence to take action to improve their situation and an increased ability to support one another. This can be considered as an empowerment. Even among the women in the groups in Southern Vietnam, one could observe changes during the course of the project. One criticism of the project in Southern Vietnam could be that it focused mostly on providing economic support to the women. However it should be mentioned that for many women, the ability to generate income could be an empowering process. Some women said that they felt more confident and that the family saw them as more capable when they had a loan to start a small business. For other women, more earning capacity meant more decision making power for them. Nevertheless, the limitation of focusing in the project on economic activities alone must be realised.

The use of FPAR in a project like this can have different impacts on different people involved in the project. For the women, FPAR allowed their voices to be heard and their needs and problems addressed. For the researchers, FPAR has meant learning to listen to and to respect and trust the women as participants of the project. They learned to work *with* rather than working *for* the women and the process became *bottom up* instead of *top down*. These changes have been more significant for some researchers and project staff than for others. However, all project teams felt that experience gained from the use of this methodology in this project could be transferred or adapted to apply in other areas of work of the organisations.

The Project also began a process of community participation which is self-sustaining. The most important achievement has been that in spite of different socio-political context, it is the women who have begun to take charge of their own lives and others are also moving towards an enhanced self-esteem and self-realisation. Such positive developments bring about change in their lives and situation.

As for GAATW, coordinating this project was a rewarding and challenging experience. We feel that our role in facilitating the learning and understanding of the issue of trafficking and the sharing of ideas and experiences on participatory approach was positive. Nevertheless, we also realise that while the key premises and the methodology of feminist research in combination with participatory action research can offer an excellent base for the research on trafficking in women, the actual implementation of the methodology is not always easy or that the results may not be the most desirable. Experience from the project shows that there is a need to be flexible in developing responses to the problems identified particularly at the policy level. Such flexibility depends greatly on the country's political system and the existence of local non-governmental organisation/ civil groups that are able to challenge state policies. An important lesson learned from the project is that while policy responses may be more rigid and slow to change (especially in country like Vietnam); some changes can be seen at the individual and local levels. In such a case, action at the grassroots level can bring about tangible positive outcomes.

Finally, the experience in working with FPAR in countries with different socio-political contexts like in Vietnam and Cambodia has taught us that we need to be able to use this approach innovatively without compromising on its principles and aims.

CONCLUSION

The Research and Action Project on Trafficking in Women in the Mekong Region (Cambodia and Vietnam) that was implemented during 1997-2000 was probably the first of its kind. The Project set out to achieve many objectives including the generation of reliable information on the situation of trafficking in women in Cambodia and Vietnam. As well it aimed to develop

strategies, both at a local and policy level to address the problem of trafficking. The process to achieve these aims was certainly a challenging one due to the complexity of the issue as well as the particular socio-political contexts of Cambodia and Vietnam. Despite many difficulties and limitations, the RA project has generated interesting and useful information that can contribute to further understanding and discussion on the phenomena of trafficking in women, female migration and prostitution in Cambodia and Vietnam. This contribution is important considering the development of trafficking issues at the international and regional levels that would also have implications on national and local level responses.

An important lesson learned from the project is that while changes at policy level may be more difficult and slow to take effect, actions can happen more quickly at the individual and the local level. In such cases, initiatives at the grassroots level can bring about tangible, positive outcomes. The RA Project has contributed positively in strengthening individual and community support of women returnees as well as in empowering women. This was particularly evident in the project outcomes seen in Northern Vietnam and Cambodia. Furthermore, the formation of Cambodian Prostitute Union (CPU) can be seen as action by an “affected” grassroots group to challenge policies and practices that violate and discriminate against women in prostitution.

The RA Project provided an important learning ground for the implementing agencies in the understanding and application of feminist research and participatory methodology. While the use of the FPAR concept and methodology in a project like this was considered innovative particularly in Vietnam, the implementing agencies felt that this new approach brought about many positive results. Nevertheless, experience from the RA Project has also pointed at the need for further validation and consolidation of the use of FRAR in the context of trafficking in women.

There were many difficulties and limitations in the RA Project that would be useful as lesson learned for future implementation of research projects on trafficking in this region. A separate review/evaluation of the project was conducted and a sharing of this review with external audience was organised in December 2001. During this external sharing, the three implementing agencies also made their presentations on process and outcome of the project as seen in their own context. These presentations can be found in the appendix. An extensive report of this review is also available from GAATW for those who are interested.

Finally, the project was essentially about the lives of women in particular contexts and circumstances. These are women who have lived and are still living. Their lives are real and their voices need to be listened to. This report tries to capture the process of the project in the Mekong sub-region and convey the important findings and outcomes of this research.