

# Providing Education for Livelihood and Resilience for Girls and Boys



Photo: Nick Rain

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**T**rafficking in people is a global problem that transcends many sectors in society. Education has been given so much importance in this area because it is considered a vehicle for cultures and values that create an environment for socialization to take place. Yet, in many environments, it has also become the primary cause of exclusion and disparity. Increases in primary school enrolments often cover up the growing disparity of access within the larger society.

The overall strategy recommended in this paper would be one of reforming education systems to accommodate all children and “produce” youngsters – girls and boys – with livelihood skills and resilience<sup>1</sup> to live and sustain a living, in their own communities, or in bigger towns and cities to which they have migrated on a safe and voluntary basis. This would entail major curricula reform and management changes in education systems, building on experience gathered in both the formal and non-formal sectors, and focusing on improving the quality and relevance of learning, aimed at reducing disparities and based on gender equality. This should be one key strategy, among several others aimed at combating trafficking, abuse and violence.

## I INTRODUCTION: REVIEWING CURRENT PRACTICE ON BOYS' AND GIRLS' EDUCATION FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

People trafficking<sup>2</sup> is a violation of basic human rights with causes embedded in economic, political, religious and cultural complexities. The constantly evolving nature of trafficking practices in the region makes it extremely difficult to prevent. It involves a combination of force, deception and exploitation, and it frequently affects the poorest, most disadvantaged groups in society. While the trafficking situation in Asia is well-portrayed in D'Cunha's paper in this publication and other theme papers, large gaps in our current information and knowledge bases regarding trafficking are evident.

The relationship between the supply and demand side of trafficking need to be better understood; the factors involved in determining why one community, or one individual, ends up in a trafficking situation and others not, need to be further explored and most importantly, interventions and strategies to prevent this from happening need to be designed, tested and scaled up immediately and effectively.

Like individuals and families, communities have strengths and vulnerabilities that influence life and

foster resilience. Neighbourhoods, schools, religious places, businesses, and government organizations are all part of this multi-faceted influence. The building of resilience in children to trafficking is a shared responsibility and no one sector in society can be held totally accountable for this dehumanizing practice.

The basic assumption of this paper is that while we cannot rely on education systems – be they formal or non-formal – to solve all social, cultural, economic and gender equality problems in society, they certainly have a very important role to play in equipping children to live better lives, and thus also equipping children to be more aware of, and alert to potential risk situations (as well as recovery, if and once they have ended up in a difficult situation). No education systems<sup>3</sup> in South and South-east Asia can today claim to be in a position to meet that goal fully.

Traditionally, education systems view children and parents, especially from poor communities, through a deficit lens – focusing on their shortcomings rather than noticing and taking advantage of their potential. This is especially the case for girls who

### The main problems with the current education systems are:

- They are *exclusive* and do not reach the poorest of the poor. Often children from minority groups and remote areas, especially those affected by HIV/AIDS, remain isolated from both inside and outside the education system.
- They are focused on rote and academic learning.
- They are authoritarian, top-down, taking little account of local socio-economic and cultural environments.
- They pay little or no attention to the need to provide livelihood and life skills to the students and do not equip them for the world of work.
- They place little value on teachers and do not recognize that without nurturing them – the system's "backbone" – they will never function effectively and efficiently.
- Girls are often marginalized in the teaching-learning process. Curricula and teachers are gender-biased and school environments are unsafe and places of (sexual) harassment from either teachers or fellow male students.<sup>4</sup>

are enrolled in education systems, which are in many ways designed to fit male, mainstream middle or upper class children. Children, parents and communities are blamed for the failure that, to a large extent, stems from the school system itself. As long as we have education systems where the harshness of teachers is not recognized as a major problem, both for enrolment and learning achievements, there is little hope of building resilience in children. A common finding in resilience research is the power of teachers, often unbeknownst, to tip the scale from risk to resilience.<sup>5</sup>

Teachers and schools are in an ideal position to actively work against negative gender stereotypes, discrimination and racism. A positive example of this was the life skills camps held by the Life Skills Development Foundation in Northern Thailand for at-risk orphaned children. Several interactive participatory forums were held with parents/guardians, children and teachers to enhance key components of life skills, particularly communication and relationship building.

A worrying fact that emerged during the discussions was that most guardians were adamant that their dependents should commence employment as soon as possible so they could provide more materialistic items to the surrogate family (a new house, car, etc.). Little concern was placed on education, even though this was the first priority of most children. Orphaned children were generally viewed as a burden on family resources and a “commodity” that could be exploited for personal

benefits. With the assistance of teachers, the sessions were successful, to a large extent, in challenging views and reshaping parents’ beliefs about their short-term financial gains.

While the overall picture is in many ways grim, there is hope: the Asian region possesses many examples of successful, small or medium scale innovations in basic education. These are most often designed and implemented by NGOs, which have driven the point home that good quality and relevant basic education can be provided to even very poor and marginalized groups and plays a significant role in empowering communities and individuals to live better lives.<sup>6</sup>

The pilot small-scale experiences of these NGOs prove that education programmes can be designed to provide empowerment (and resilience) for girls through community-based interventions, involving parents and, in particular, mothers. One of the major challenges remains transferring such positive experience to larger-scale, mainstream systems. We still lack good examples and models to follow. The UNICEF Youth Career Development Programme is a step in the right direction. This dynamic co-operative initiative between private sector-leading hotels and UNICEF, Thailand, successfully facilitates access to skills training and employment opportunities for girls and young women from impoverished families in northern Thailand, at high risk to exploitation in the commercial sex and labour market.

## II SEVEN KEY PARAMETERS OF THE STRATEGY

The overall strategy would be one of reforming education systems to accommodate all children and “produce” youngsters - girls and boys - with livelihood skills and resilience to live and sustain a living, in their own communities or in bigger towns and cities to which they have migrated on a safe and voluntary basis.

This would entail major curricula reform and management changes in education systems, building on experience gathered in both the formal and non-formal sectors, and focusing on improving the quality and relevance of learning, aimed at reducing disparities (among the rural/urban areas and social groups) and based on gender equality. This should be one key strategy, among several others in combating trafficking, abuse and violence.

**1 Acknowledge the problem of sexual exploitation.**

**2 Make the “invisible” child “visible”.** Utilize a multi-sectoral approach to accessing and assisting children at risk of being trafficked. Children are protected not only by the self-righting nature of development, but also by their own actions and the actions of adults. Adult behaviour plays a central role in a child’s risks, resources, opportunities, and hence, his or her resilience.

**3 Acknowledge the contribution of an inclusive and relevant education in preventing trafficking of children and women, through eradicating the supply side.** This requires expansion of educational opportunities to be offered to all children (including those without citizenship), regardless of sex, ethnic background, mother tongue, physical abilities and to retain them also at secondary levels, as is also stipulated in the Dakar Framework for Action, Goal 5.<sup>7</sup>

**4 Build the resilience of teachers.** Enable teachers to initiate positive change among the students. Key elements are teacher support, development and training of school staff (teachers and school heads).

**5 Involve the community.** Involve the community in the management of the school and vice versa to improve the quality and relevance of the livelihood training. Recognize that communities are

multi-faceted entities and that special efforts need to be made to involve women actively in this process. More support to vulnerable, poor, marginalized families is needed to strengthen their survival strategies.

**6 Reform classroom approaches.** Orient classroom approaches to build on students’ strengths, help students recognize their own resilience and provide growth opportunities for individual learners – girls and boys – and children as a group. Enhance the gender sensitivity of teachers and their capacity to advocate and promote more gender-equal relations among children and parents. Recognize that all children come to school already socialized into certain stereotyped roles that the school system ought to have an active role in reshaping. Make a concerted effort to re-educate children from a gender perspective, and strengthen their resilience and survival strategies.

**7 Weaken the pull of the demand side.** The demand dimension of trafficking needs to be addressed through strengthened law enforcement. In the longer term, an education teaching children to pay due respect to the opposite sex, by providing them with appropriate and realistic health and sex education would help to reduce the demand – although probably not eradicate it. The education system can play a crucial role, not by reducing direct demand, but by changing societal attitudes that are complicit to the exploitation that surrounds trafficking.<sup>8</sup>

### III SUBSTRATEGIES AND POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

The following substrategies are a mixture of longer-term general reform measures and more immediate interventions, which can be carried out at the local level through local initiatives. While both are needed, and should interact in a dynamic and mutually reinforcing way, without overall in-depth national reforms of education systems, there can

be little or no sustainability in results in the long term. While areas currently identified as high risk should be targeted first, broader interventions will be needed, to build up resistance among communities currently not affected by trafficking, thus protecting them from becoming “sending communities”.

## IIIa INTERVENTIONS AT THE NATIONAL POLICY LEVEL

**1 In-depth curricula analysis and reform,** removing gender and racial bias, aimed at strengthening life skills dimensions and building resilient students, who are responsible, take initiative and assess risks carefully: When it is found that girls who have been to school are more likely to end up in a trafficking situation, it is partly because the education systems have not provided those girls with the awareness and capacity to assess risks, combined with the lack of other opportunities in the local environment. The lack of attractive income-generating opportunities available after completion of basic education is another important contributing factor. Employment may be abundant but the type of work is unsatisfactory.

**2 Mobilized parties to expand earning opportunities:** To address the problem of local communities not offering work opportunities, local development bodies/ministries and the private sector need to be mobilized in favour of expanding earning opportunities in those areas that serve as suppliers of girls and women for trafficking purposes. A much closer link between the education systems and the world of work or income-generation needs to be built, paying specific attention to increasing young girls' and boys' opportunities. This would require major reforms and rethinking of the vocational training systems, which currently have few opportunities to offer to girls and adolescents in rural areas.<sup>9</sup>

**3 Raised income from self-employment and entrepreneurship:** While many sending communities have little to offer in terms of salaried jobs, emphasis needs to be put on increasing the income from self-employment and small-scale entrepreneurial activities. This requires systematic co-operation and co-ordination among education departments, local development bodies and the private sector.

**4 Action-research to support policy development:** More research with concrete findings and realistic recommendations needs to be carried out in various communities across the Asian region, especially source sites, on:

- gender socialization from early childhood and the role that the education system can play in counteracting negative stereotypes and promoting more positive gender-fair models of interacting;
- how parental and community sensitization on the long-term value of educating their children can impact on the vulnerability of many children being exposed to a trafficking situation;
- how education can best be designed to address social attitudes that accept and encourage trafficking of children and, in particular, girls in certain communities;
- how best to strengthen community-family-school collaboration and ensure genuine participation from all parts of the community, especially the potentially excluded – often women.

## IIIa INTERVENTIONS AT THE SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY LEVELS

**1 Involve young people and girls themselves as a resource.** (An interesting example is provided in Annex 1.) Recognize the importance of peer pressure and promote peer teaching and child-to-child interaction.

**2 Promote closer co-operation between school and home.** All schools should have early warning systems that enable teachers to detect behaviour and performance change, for instance due to family problems – death, divorce,

abuse, inter-generational problems, etc. – among the children, which could eventually lead to drop-out and trafficking. Thailand's School Management Information System (SMIS), tested and used in Child-Friendly Schools, is an instrument which can be applied more widely. In this regard, specific efforts need to be made by teachers and community workers to maintain the link between girls and school.<sup>10</sup>

**3 Undertake systematic awareness-raising among all community organizations and bodies, including NGOs especially in the “sending” areas on the risk of trafficking and mobilize them for the cause of prevention. The use of district and village level multi-sectoral teams, including law**

enforcement, health, education, religious and non-governmental organizations (as the UNICEF district-based project in Chiang Mai demonstrates) is highly successful in targeting and protecting vulnerable children. Target parents with information through Parent-Teacher Associations and adult literacy and skills training programmes.

**4 Ensure that individuals participating in any form of training have the ability to influence their community peers, and incorporate change and technology.**

**5 Target communities highly affected by migration, and thus likely to be also highly affected by trafficking and HIV/AIDS.<sup>11</sup>**

## ANNEX 1 CASE STUDY: SPACE FOR GIRLS?<sup>12</sup>

Many parents in Nepal refuse to send their daughters to school, fearing girls are at risk of being abused, which will affect theirs and their families' reputations. How can children, especially girls, change their environment and make it a safer place to be and study in? How would this impact on their educational lives?

Save the Children supports projects in Nepal that facilitate research by children, exploring ways to reclaim safe spaces for themselves. By sharing findings and interacting with local government, schoolteachers, and parents, the children can begin to mobilize support and change. As an advocacy tool, the process can help girls and boys to influence schoolteachers, students, parents, government, and NGOs: children clearly have enormous potential to improve their environment and take control of their own lives.

Girls in the Surkhet district of Nepal, for example, expressed strong feelings of vulnerability in their community. Save the Children – UK developed a project in which the girls carried out the research themselves, exploring and analyzing the types of space they occupied. Using Participatory Rural Appraisal tools, the girls were able to determine the characteristics of a safe environment and developed an action plan to take back their “space”.

The girls used PRA tools to map unsafe spaces within their village, Venn diagrams to illustrate their mobility, and team-building tools. Boys were involved in the process only when the girls felt it was necessary.

**In order to reclaim their “space”,** the girls identified the need:

- for parents to recognize the importance of girls' education;
- to avoid conservative traditions such as gender discrimination within castes, between sons and daughters, and early marriage;
- for girls to be able to demonstrate their abilities within the community;
- for people to speak out against the injustices and oppression of girls; and
- to raise awareness of girls' rights and enable their access to equal opportunities.

**As a result of the process,** the following changes have been identified within the community:

- The girls' group was consulted by community members on various cases of abuse or mistreatment of girls. In one case, a local policeman kidnapped a local 11-year-old girl. In collaboration with other children's groups, the girls

wrote a letter to the local police commissioner, copying it to the village chairperson, local NGOs, the Chief District Police Officer and the Chairperson of the District Child Welfare Board, asking them to take immediate action. The 11-year-old girl was freed and the Chief District Police Officer is conducting an investigation.

- Teachers and boys within schools and the community respect girls more than was hitherto the case. Boys who initially resorted to

teasing, now support girls' efforts to manage change. Boys are beginning to advocate respect for girls through drama. Support groups for girls who have faced abuse have been established by local communities.

- Local government bodies believe the community groups provide a strong support system for girls, often citing the groups as success stories, inviting them to events related to girls' rights and safety, and in one case providing financial support for future work.

## ANNEX 2 CASE STUDY: THE CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOL, THAILAND

Every society hopes and expects that its children will grow up to be capable and responsible citizens who contribute to the well-being of their communities. Yet in many developing countries, children are denied the rights that would enable them to survive, develop fully and participate actively.

In Northern Thailand, several severe social problems such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, and familial violence are affecting the lives of thousands of children making it increasingly hard for them to develop to their full potential. All of these factors increase the susceptibility of children being targeted by trafficking syndicates to be exploited in hazardous working environments and prostitution.

Outside the home, the school is the second most important social and learning environment for children. The aim of the Child-Friendly School project was to develop replicable processes using a rights-based approach to make schools "child-friendly" and responsive to the special needs of children in distress, develop their psycho-social competencies and life planning skills, and promote healthy lifestyles and resilience in children and youth affected by AIDS in two provinces in upper Northern Thailand.

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### Special Objectives

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- To increase school-community awareness and understanding of the rights, psycho-social needs, and problems of children in emotional distress, orphans, and specific needs of children affected by AIDS.
- To improve the child-friendliness of schools by providing a caring and nurturing environment, emotional and psycho-social support for children in distress and children affected by AIDS, and opportunities for participation in self-directed creative learning and recreation experiences.
- To enhance the capability of teachers, parents/guardians, social service agencies to interact with children, including those affected by AIDS, in supportive and nurturing ways that promote psycho-social development and increase resilience.
- To develop and demonstrate a lifespan approach (pre-school to Grade 9) for active participatory learning to develop psycho-social competencies (life skills), including specific coping skills for children affected by AIDS, life/livelihood planning skills, health-promoting behaviour, and resilience.

- To contribute, at the national level, to the development of adequate national guidelines and practices to support children affected by AIDS, through the sharing of lessons learned from the experience of the schools involved in the project.
- To provide livelihood skills training for children to enable them to be “employment-wise” when they leave school.

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### Key Strategies

- Implement participatory processes for child rights sensitization, promotion and protection involving children, parents, teachers, community leaders, local government, and social service agency personnel.
- Involve children, community leaders, and teachers in generating criteria/indicators to ascertain child-friendliness of schools, and use this in combination with external children’s rights criteria/indicators.
- Establish participatory assessment, analysis, planning, and action systems for continuous improvement of the child-friendliness of schools, including providing emotional and psycho-social support for children in distress and children affected by AIDS.
- Create a learning exchange network of core trainers, teachers, and supervisors to promote and model supportive behaviour and nurturing ways to interact with children in distress, including those affected by AIDS.
- Develop and implement processes for school-based participatory situational analysis by children, with involvement of parents, caregivers,

community leaders and teachers, to identify local social environmental risk factors, protective factors, psycho-social needs and problems of children in distress, including children affected by AIDS.

- Determine local priorities for specific positive developmental and preventive life skills education for school children affected by AIDS.
- Develop locally relevant applications of life skills curricula to respond to the social environmental risk factors, risk behaviour, problems of students in their everyday lives including the special needs of children affected by AIDS, and life/livelihood planning skills.
- Conduct evaluation research on behavioural, educational and social outcomes.

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### As a Result of the Study

- Children, teachers, families and communities are sensitized to child rights.
- School/community relationships and co-operation have been enhanced. Communities now play an active role in school planning and activities.
- Students report greater satisfaction and involvement in the school.
- Reduced depression and an elevation in the self-esteem of students, particularly girls.
- Multi-sectoral teams play an ongoing sustainable role in assisting schools and communities to help children in difficult circumstances.
- The overall resilience of communities has been enhanced – they are able to effectively network and work co-operatively to deal with social problems.

## ANNEX 3 CASE STUDY: WOMEN AGAINST AIDS (WAA)

The Women Against AIDS group has been highly active in developing small-scale income-generation schemes to assist people affected by AIDS and trafficking in Sanpatong District, Chiang Mai.

The programme was initiated in response to severe prostitution problems in the area highlighted by

the well-publicized deaths in 1984 of several girls from the district in a fire in a Phuket brothel “prison”. The girls had been chained together and unable to escape. In 1991 the programme started the Women’s Group Paper Production and Leadership Development project (Canada).

This project aimed to assist rural women by providing them with village-based income-generation, through the production of Sa handmade paper, and by strengthening their self-respect, group cohesiveness and community values, to prevent them from being lured into lives of bondage, prostitution and disease.

Small income-generation schemes were developed, and girls working in brothels, in their spare

time when they were not entertaining customers, were engaged in skills-training to produce handicrafts for sale. This was intended to help pay off their debts.

The group was also highly active in source communities in trying to change the well-accepted practice of selling a girl child into prostitution as a result of consumeristic pressures.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Definition of resilience: An innate self-righting mechanism (Bernard, B; Turning it Around for All Youth: From Risk to Resiliency; Clearing House on Urban Education; No. 126; August 1997.) ... go back to original shape after pressure is released... regain good health and good spirit after having gone through a period of difficulties (Longman Dictionary).  
  
Definition of education for livelihood: develop competencies for sustainable livelihoods aimed at meeting basic needs such as living conditions, health promotion, personal services and care, social interaction.
- 2 The United Nations definition of trafficking is "...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purposes of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs."
- 3 Education systems are understood as both formal and non-formal subsystems.
- 4 Very little research is available in Southeast Asia on these issues. But the little we do have, indicates strong gender biases. See for instance: Gender and Development in Cambodia: An Overview; Cambodia Development Resource Institute; Phnom Penh, 1999.
- 5 Bernard, B; Op. cit.
- 6 See a few examples in: Bernard, B; Op. cit. Ptanawanit, S, Boribanbanpotkate, S and Piemyat, S; Development of Educational Model for Creating Socio-economic Opportunities for Girls in Difficult Circumstances; ILO/IPEC; 1999. Vocational Training Interventions to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women; ILO/IPEC; Mekong Subregional Project, TIA-2. Mathur, R; Taking Flights, Adolescent Girls' Camp, Education for All: Making it Work; UNESCO; 2000. Barker, G; Adolescents, Social Support and Help-seeking Behaviour: An International Literature Review and Program Consultation with Recommendations for Action; 2002.
- 7 Goal 5: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access, and achievement, in basic education.
- 8 The South Asian Masculinities Film Project by Save the Children and UNICEF, has produced a set of four films aimed at raising awareness on HIV/AIDS among adolescents and violence against girls in the region. The films aim to initiate discussions among boys and girls, help

them to reflect on the ways in which femininity and masculinity are built, help them to challenge traditional images of men and women and develop new alternative models of femininity and masculinity that are free of violence and discrimination against women and nurture a culture of accepting and valuing the opposite sex. For further information, contact: shekhar @nimhans.kar.nic.in or <http://www.id21.org>.

9 Vocational Training Interventions to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women; Op. cit.

10 Such interventions have been conducted with some success in Northern Thailand. Please refer to: Ptanawanit, S et al.; Op. cit.

11 The Jintang County Service Center for Migrant Working Girls and the Zhugao Township Women's Federation (China) and others, have opened hotlines for migrating working girls as well as conducted classroom discussions on how to prepare students for the future. These experiences provide interesting lessons in preventing and rescuing trafficked girls. See: Feasibility Study, Sichuan Sub-report for the Urban Poverty Reduction among Young Migrants in East Asia, UNESCO-Beijing.

12 Gautam, I, Pokharel, S, Rajbhandary, J; Safe Space for Girls? 2002 [[www.id21.org/education/EgveRajbhandary.html](http://www.id21.org/education/EgveRajbhandary.html)].

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