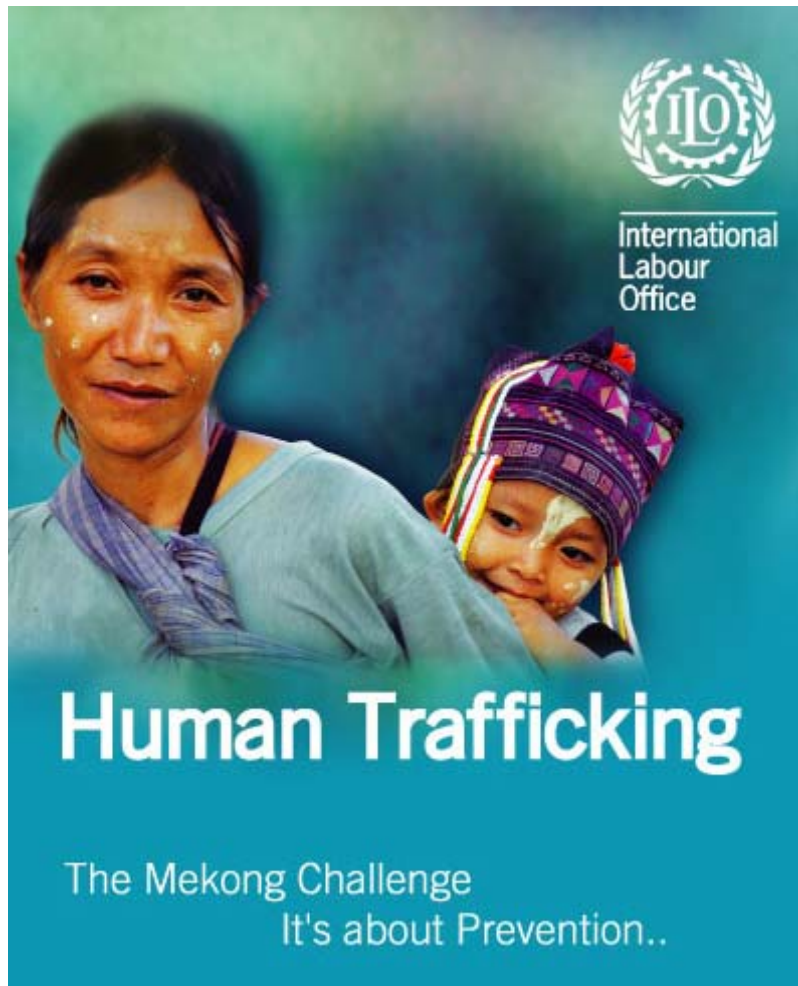


Models from northern Thailand on trafficking prevention through economic and social empowerment



DEPLOYING EMPLOYERS

How employers can help keep children safe

THE GOOD PRACTICE: Working with employers sympathetic to efforts against human trafficking and willing to participate in a protection network as a kind of “spy catcher” to report suspicious activity; using employers as advocates to help change attitudes and behaviours by making their employees and customers aware of the trafficking issue and its negative impacts.

The Chiang Mai Coordination Centre for the Protection of Children's and Women's Rights and its alliance-building project

THE INITIAL CHALLENGE: Governments in nine northern provinces, where many victims of human trafficking originate, adopted in 2003 a memorandum of understanding to work together to deal with the problem. In signing the MOU, each province agreed to set up a government agency for organizing trafficking-prevention activities.

When the Chiang Mai Coordination Centre for the Protection of Children's and Women's Rights opened in 2004, it included among its activities plans to go after business owners and entrepreneurs who violate labour laws through their involvement in human trafficking. But at the same time, the staff recognized that they could also nurture reputable employers and entrepreneurs as allies in efforts to combat the problem.

"We used to think of employers as the problem. But in talking with them, we find they have the same ideas as we do to fight human trafficking," says Manusaporn Bhamorbutr, Social Development Officer in Chiang Mai.

THE RESPONSE: With support from the International Labour Organization and its Mekong project to combat trafficking in children and women (ILO/TICW), the Coordination Centre first approached the Office of Welfare and Labour Protection to identify "good" business owners/employers. These would be people who were known to abide by the labour laws, were properly registered and regularly provided training to their employees on labour laws and labour welfare.

They then sought out business owners/employers to help develop appropriate media for campaigning and raise awareness among employers on human trafficking and its violations of human rights. In this way, they aimed to create materials that were more relevant and responsive, that "talked" the same language as the targeted business owners/employers and their customers.

Having established a working relationship, the Coordination Centre staff then asked these employers to help collect data on the demands for labour, conditions of work and living conditions (where they existed) within the work place as well as information on ethnicity and the social/economic and health situation of employees. This information was then fed into the human trafficking database.

To further groom employers (both those considered "good" and "shady"), the Coordination Centre staff initiated a one-day seminar for business owners/employers to learn about trafficking and exploitation issues, labour laws, human rights, children's rights and even HIV and AIDS.

The seminar participants were provided with publications and other materials about trafficking problems and society's responsibility to help find solutions. The materials included posters, stickers and VCDs that they can hang up in their establishments and

make available to employees and customers. The ultimate objective was to encourage business owners/employers to work with the centre in preventing and watching out for cases of human trafficking. This includes changing customers' (and employees') attitudes and behaviours regarding the sexual exploitation of children or forced labour.

The seminar attracted some 63 participants, with most of them committing to participate in a "protection network". This network serves as a kind of "spy catcher", with employers essentially becoming members of the multidisciplinary team (police, social workers, medical professionals, NGOs, etc.) that handles reported cases of abuse. Due to corruption among some law enforcement authorities and because local employers are typically quite aware of what goes on in their neighbourhood, an employers' network serves as a street-wise partner. Upon hearing or observing suspicious behaviour, employers contact the multidisciplinary team that then meets to discuss how to handle a certain situation.

The seminar ended with the participants asked to sign a commitment that reads, "We will cooperate in human trafficking prevention and surveillance in our business and will participate in the network and that we will release and reveal all the media and publications related to anti-trafficking issue to our personnel and customers."

OUTCOMES:

- ◆ 47 business owners and employers who participated in the seminar signed the commitment.
- ◆ The commitment from the business owners and employers thus established a protection network within Chiang Mai city (the centre intends to eventually expand beyond the city limits) that continues to work effectively to monitor the human trafficking situation and to encourage participation from other business owners and employers (mostly factories and hotels for now).
- ◆ The Coordination Centre has received more tips on suspected trafficking cases from business owners and employers than prior to the project.
- ◆ Employees and customers have more knowledge and awareness of the trafficking issue.

The Coordination Centre awards (with accompanying media attention) business owners who have taken the anti-trafficking issue seriously. Three have been spotlighted so far: Novotel Hotel, Central Daungtawan Hotel and Princess Food Company, Ltd.

In response to the appeal to employers, the management of the Novotel Hotel asked the Coordination Centre to lead a one-day seminar with 30 of its employees – at the hotel's expense. They specifically wanted information/discussion on sexual violations, children's rights, human trafficking, how to assist victims of trafficking, how to alert authorities with suspicions or tips, resources and contact details of agencies and organizations working on these issues. The Novotel corporate policy requires that each hotel management develop employees' awareness of social problems, including human trafficking. The hotel policy also requires employees to report any suspicions of girls or young women brought to the hotel for commercial sex activities.

In general, employers/entrepreneurs in the tourism business better recognize that the incidence of human trafficking in some establishments harms all of them by creating problems with authorities and a stigma with tourists and the local public.

The government's alliance with employers, particularly entrepreneurs, as advocates has prompted them to have a more positive relationship with the government; both sides recognize they should work together toward building a better understanding and awareness of laws, public health and the environment.

ONGOING CHALLENGE: Reaching customers remains difficult because many employers are reluctant to speak to them or make information available, fearing negative impact on their business.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- ◆ There must be a continuous process for explaining and raising awareness among employers and entrepreneurs on various problems related to human trafficking, child labour and children's rights.
- ◆ Some business owners could not participate in the project because of the timing; many more want to get involved in anti-trafficking efforts. There needs to be an ongoing process to seek them out and work with them.
- ◆ There also is need to continue developing and strengthening the employers' network.
- ◆ Publicly acknowledging and praising employers/entrepreneurs who have contributed to or shown interest in dealing with human rights violations and the trafficking problems goes a long way in building alliances. Rewarding business owners and employers will inspire further commitment to and development of their anti-trafficking work.

For further information, please contact:

Ms. Kusumal Rachawong
ILO Mekong Sub-regional Project
to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women
C/O The Center of Protection and Suppression of Human Trafficking
Old City Hall
Muang District, Chiang Rai 57000

Telephone/Fax: 053 600 053
E-Mail: ticwcr@csloxinfo.com

