

# BEYOND AWARENESS

LEARNING FROM LOCAL EXPERIENCES TO  
MOVE FORWARD IN FIGHTING HUMAN  
TRAFFICKING



A REGIONAL STUDY ON LOCAL PERCEPTIONS OF  
HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA



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**Andreas Henriksson**

Study process leader

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## **Executive summary**

Since the turn of the millennium, the problem of human trafficking has become a hot issue in international politics, and the number of measures and initiatives to combat it has increased exponentially. In South and South-East Asia, a region widely described as a trafficking “hotspot”, new national legislation have been adopted by almost all states, and the number of anti-trafficking efforts that are implemented by governments and NGOs have multiplied in the past fifteen years.

However, despite greatly intensified efforts at combating human trafficking in South and South-East Asia, very little is actually known about the scale and incidence of human trafficking. Quantifying the prevalence of trafficking through statistical data is notoriously difficult, and estimates do not provide any information about why and how trafficking takes place (Yea 2017, Gallagher 2017). Further, despite billions of dollars spent on various anti-trafficking efforts, it is rarely clear whether they work or not (Ford, Lyons and van Schendel 2012). In this context, this report emphasises the local context as the appropriate level of analysis to reach a more detailed understanding of the mechanisms of human trafficking, its causes and its possible solutions. Notably, research examining public perceptions and opinions about human trafficking in affected communities are largely lacking (Sharapov 2014). This failure to learn from the perceptions and experiences of individuals and communities affected by human trafficking prevents the formation of more accurate, context-specific knowledge about this issue.

Addressing this gap, this report presents findings from a multiple case study of how human trafficking is perceived and experienced in seven local communities in five countries in South and South-East Asia. The aim of the report is to explore and understand local experiences and perceptions on how human trafficking takes place in South and South-East Asia, and to analyze how these local experiences and perceptions can add value in designing better strategies to fight human trafficking. The report addresses the following specific research questions:

- 1) How is human trafficking experienced and perceived by local communities in Asia?
- 2) What are the local perspectives on the mechanisms leading to human trafficking or involuntary migration in these communities?
- 3) What are the major risks that children and teenagers are exposed to when it comes to trafficking, and how does it differ from adults?
- 4) Which strategies are used by local communities to prevent trafficking? What kind of protective factors or mechanisms are in place?
- 5) What are the local perspectives on how human trafficking could be reduced?

The material for the study consists of 94 semi-structured interviews conducted in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Thailand and Cambodia. Respondents include average residents of the local communities where data was collected; local government officials and other individuals in positions of authority; and NGO employees and other civil society representatives.

The findings reveal that a rather high proportion of the respondents have experiences and knowledge about actual cases of human trafficking, where people they knew or knew about were the victims. Consequently, many people do have first-hand knowledge about the issue of human trafficking. This points to the importance of learning from local perceptions and experiences in order to more effectively prevent human trafficking. Further, the analysis demonstrates that perceptions of what human trafficking means, and how it takes place, are remarkably similar across all the studied locations. In sum, human trafficking is most often described as a process where people are deceived to go somewhere to work, but end up in situations of exploitation that do not correspond to the jobs they were promised. Further, the results show that traffickers are generally represented as people close to the victims, sharing a similar background or social position. Interview narratives about human trafficking also demonstrate that respondents have a broad and multifaceted understanding of the issue, encompassing a diversity of forms and purposes of trafficking including trafficking for forced labour; sexual exploitation; forced begging; and harvesting of organs. Notably, women are not generally described as more vulnerable than men, although women are seen as more at risk of sexual exploitation while men are seen as more vulnerable to forced labour.

Respondents across the locations also broadly agree on what the causes of human trafficking are. Two main themes emerged from the analysis of respondents' accounts of the causes of trafficking: poverty and lack of risk awareness. Additionally, in some of the locations, but not in others, respondents often argued that victims could be deceived and trafficked because they are materialistic and have high aspirations to a wealthy lifestyle. A fourth, but less frequently mentioned theme, was a representation of corruption and weak law enforcement as factors enabling and facilitating trafficking.

Moreover, children and youth are frequently described by respondents as especially vulnerable to human trafficking. They are represented as easier for traffickers to deceive, and as especially vulnerable when poverty and marginalization compel children to work. In addition, interview data indicates that children are particularly affected by kidnapping, trafficking for forced begging, and organ trafficking.

Existing strategies for protection that are described by respondents primarily consist of various activities focusing on information and awareness raising to equip individuals and communities to avoid being trafficked. Further, strategies suggested by respondents for reducing human trafficking fall in three categories. First, actions to create awareness



so that people can protect themselves and not be deceived by traffickers is by far the most frequently mentioned approach to reduce trafficking. Second, stronger government action to implement policies and enforce laws is highlighted. Third, poverty reduction and job creation are brought up as key to reduce trafficking.

A main finding of the study is that ideas about individual awareness are central to how people understand the issue of human trafficking. Lack of awareness is repeatedly cited as the explanation for why people are trafficked, and activities to increase awareness is the clearly most prominent avenue for combating human trafficking that is suggested by respondents. Moreover, the vast majority of currently existing local anti-trafficking strategies and mechanism described by respondents focus on information and awareness raising. At the same time however, the results show that people do have a generally high degree of awareness about what human trafficking is, how it happens, and what they can do as individuals to protect themselves.

This study suggests that this “awareness paradox” can at least partly be explained by the dominance of awareness raising strategies in previous anti-trafficking efforts. As such, the findings demonstrate that what is needed for more effective prevention of human trafficking is not simply more information or more awareness raising campaigns. Further, the report highlights the significant limitations and problematic effects of an emphasis on awareness raising without corresponding efforts in pursuit of structural and institutional change. In particular, a focus on awareness places the emphasis of anti-trafficking efforts at the individual level; fails to engage with the root causes of human trafficking; and may inadvertently reinforce views where victims of trafficking are blamed for their victimization. In order to move the fight against human trafficking forward, this report suggests that increased efforts to address structural and institutional conditions that make people vulnerable to human trafficking are needed. Further, the emphasis of awareness and information activities could fruitfully be redirected towards a focus on root causes of human trafficking and on the roles and responsibilities of governing authorities in combating it. Awareness raising on these topics, rather than about what human trafficking is, can heighten people’s understanding of the broader socio-economic dynamics of human trafficking and empower them to demand political action and accountability in relation to governing authorities. Further, it is suggested that a rights-based approach constitutes a useful framework for moving in this direction.

Moreover, the broad and nuanced local perceptions of human trafficking and the diversity of trafficking experiences uncovered in this study contrasts sharply with the dominant themes and ways of working that have characterized previous anti-trafficking work as well as academic research. The findings in this study suggest that there are victim populations and types of trafficking that have been neglected and need more attention. Firstly, while both research and practice has disproportionately focused on female victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, findings from this study show that local people do not generally perceive women as more vulnerable than men, and share

numerous examples of trafficking of men. Secondly, trafficking for organ harvesting and for forced begging have not received significant attention in research on human trafficking (Russel 2018), and only very few NGOs have focused specifically on these forms of trafficking in their work (Limoncelli 2016). Against this background, it is noteworthy that respondents in this study frequently mention both trafficking for organ harvesting and for forced begging. Moreover, these forms of trafficking are described as specifically affecting children. Thus, there are good reasons to further explore how trafficking for these purposes manifests itself in specific local contexts, and seek to address them as relevant, particularly in projects with a focus on trafficking of children.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the present study, this report suggests the following recommendations. The recommendations are primarily directed to civil society and authorities that are involved in practical anti-trafficking work at the local level:

#### **Redirect emphasis beyond awareness**

Redirect awareness raising from general information about human trafficking towards root causes, solutions and empowering rights holders.

##### NGOs and other parts of civil society:

- Assess the level of awareness about human trafficking in the target population (as it is probably higher than expected) and adjust interventions accordingly.
- Raise awareness about legal frameworks on human trafficking and the responsibilities of various duty bearers to combat human trafficking and protect human rights.
- Educate rights holders about the structural causes of human trafficking that are not readily visible in the local context, and mobilize people to hold authorities accountable for changing these structural causes.
- Build networks and connect rights holders in local communities with existing strategies and programs that may benefit them, for example focusing on anti-trafficking, poverty reduction, local development, and safe labour migration.
- Ensure that awareness raising materials and interventions do not place the responsibility for protection against human trafficking on individuals, and do not reinforce victim blaming.

##### Local authorities and other duty bearers:

- Assess ongoing information campaigns about human trafficking and include information to rights holders about existing programmes and strategies, and how they can benefit from them.
- Make ongoing and future anti-trafficking efforts more visible in communities, to NGOs, and to other parts of civil society to increase impact.
- Enable and encourage NGOs and other relevant actors to network and collaborate with each other and with the government on anti-trafficking efforts.

### **Focus on structures**

Increase efforts to address structural and institutional conditions that make people vulnerable to human trafficking:

#### NGOs and other parts of civil society:

- Consult with local stakeholders, especially rights holders, to learn from local perspectives about human trafficking and create adequate and context specific interventions.
- Address the root causes to human trafficking and assess the need for contributing to poverty reduction and job creation, especially for marginalized or particularly vulnerable groups.
- Empower rights holders to hold duty bearers accountable for their obligations to reduce human trafficking.
- Develop strategies for advocacy targeting duty bearers, calling for policies and actions that address root causes of human trafficking beyond the local context.
- Design strategies to address child labour as a way of preventing human trafficking.

#### Local authorities and other duty bearers:

- Increase anti-trafficking efforts focusing on protecting human rights and addressing root causes such as poverty, inequality and unemployment especially for marginalized or particularly vulnerable groups.
- In particular, intensify efforts to address child labour through targeted improving livelihood opportunities and facilitating access to education.
- Create mechanisms to ensure transparency in local government and enable rights holders to hold government officials working on anti-trafficking measures accountable.

### **Identify neglected areas**

Assess the need for and design interventions to address neglected victim populations and forms of trafficking:

#### NGOs and other parts of civil society:

- Review whether current anti-trafficking efforts adequately target both women and men (e.g. are men included in interventions targeting sex trafficking victims?).
- Investigate if and how trafficking for organ harvesting and for forced begging takes place in the specific context of implementation, and design measures to address it, especially in projects focusing on trafficking of children.
- Recognize that traffickers, and potential traffickers, are part of the target community and include strategies to reach them and prevent further human trafficking.

Local authorities and other duty bearers:

- Review whether current anti-trafficking laws and efforts adequately include both women and men.
- Investigate if and how trafficking for organ harvesting and for forced begging takes place in the specific local context, and design measures to address it, especially in efforts focusing on trafficking of children.



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## Introduction

Since the turn of the millennium, the problem of human trafficking has become a hot issue in international politics, and the number of measures and initiatives to combat it has increased exponentially. Two key developments that propelled human trafficking into the international spotlight was the adoption of the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially women and Children (hereafter the Trafficking Protocol) in 2000, and the United States decision the same year to make monitoring of human trafficking a central aspect of its foreign policy. After the adoption of the Trafficking in Persons Victim Protection Act in 2000, the US has published a yearly Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report that ranks countries based on their performance in addressing human trafficking. Based on the TIP Report, the US imposes unilateral sanctions, such as the withdrawal of aid, on those whose performance is judged inadequate (Ford, Lyons and van Schendel 2012, Heiss and Kelley 2017).

These international developments have had a significant impact on national politics as well as aid priorities and practices in South and South-East Asia – a region widely described as a trafficking “hotspot” (Ford, Lyons and van Schendel 2012, Marks and Olsen 2015, Piper 2005). For example, in 1998 Cambodia and Thailand were the only states in the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to have national laws mentioning “trafficking” at all, and there existed but a handful of projects to address it. Ten years later, nine out of ten ASEAN member states had criminalized human trafficking through national legislation, and hundreds of anti-trafficking projects and efforts had sprung up (David 2009). The number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with human trafficking had multiplied, and NGOs are now the main actors in the anti-trafficking policy field (Foot, Toft et al. 2015). The global distribution of anti-trafficking NGOs demonstrate the centrality of Asia in the battle against human trafficking; a recent survey of almost 500 NGOs showed that the majority of them worked in Asia (Heiss and Kelley 2017). Another comprehensive study demonstrated that five out of the ten countries in the world with the highest presence of anti-trafficking NGOs are located in South and South-East Asia (Limoncelli 2016).<sup>1</sup>

However, despite greatly intensified efforts at combating human trafficking in Asia through new laws, government agencies, NGOs, and projects, very little is actually known about the scale and incidence of human trafficking. Quantifying the prevalence of trafficking through statistical data is notoriously difficult, and estimates do not provide any information about why and how trafficking takes place (Yea 2017, Gallagher 2017). Further, despite billions of dollars spent on various anti-trafficking efforts, it is not clear whether they work or not (Ford, Lyons and van Schendel 2012). In this context, several scholars have pointed to the local context as the appropriate level of analysis if a more detailed understanding of the mechanisms of human trafficking, its causes and its possible solutions, are to be reached (Ford, Lyons and van Schendel 2012, Clark

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1 These countries were India (2), Cambodia (3), Nepal (4), Bangladesh (6), and Thailand (7).

2003). In particular, research examining public perceptions and opinions about human trafficking in affected communities are largely lacking (Sharapov 2014). This failure to learn from the perceptions and experiences of individuals and communities affected by human trafficking prevents the formation of more accurate, context-specific knowledge about trafficking, but it is also an ethical problem. As noted by Kempadoo, people affected by or at risk of trafficking “are spoken for and represented but rarely are they positioned as authorities on human trafficking and slavery or as voices in their own right” (2015, 18).

Addressing this gap, this report presents findings from a multiple case study of how human trafficking is perceived and experienced in seven local communities in five countries in South and South-East Asia. The countries included in the study are Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Thailand, and Cambodia. These five countries are all widely seen as highly affected by human trafficking (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime 2016, Walk Free Foundation 2016), and are among the countries in the world where the highest number of anti-trafficking efforts are being implemented (Limoncelli 2016). Drawing on interviews with people in a variety of social positions and life situations, this study captures a wide range of local perspectives on human trafficking, seeking to learn from local knowledge and generate new insights about how human trafficking in communities such as these can be combated.

## **Aim and research questions**

Against this backdrop, the aim of this report is to explore and understand local experiences and perceptions on how human trafficking takes place in South and South-East Asia, and to analyze how these local experiences and perceptions can add value in designing better strategies to fight human trafficking. In considering how local perspectives and knowledge can inform the design of anti-trafficking strategies, the report focuses on prevention rather than criminal justice or aftercare to victims of trafficking. Research has suggested that a greater focus on prevention could be a fruitful path forward in reducing human trafficking, complementing existing criminal justice strategies (Yea 2017). Moreover, while services to victims are important, they do not by themselves contribute to reduce the incidence of human trafficking. The point of departure for this report is that a better understanding of local experiences and perceptions of human trafficking is essential to design more effective prevention programs.

In pursuit of the aim stated above, the report addresses the following specific research questions:

1. How is human trafficking experienced and perceived by local communities in Asia?
2. What are the local perspectives on the mechanisms leading to human trafficking or involuntary migration in these communities?

3. What are the major risks that children and teenagers are exposed to when it comes to trafficking, and how does it differ from adults?
4. Which strategies are used by local communities to prevent trafficking? What kind of protective factors or mechanisms are in place?
5. What are the local perspectives on how human trafficking could be reduced?

Addressing these questions, the report will generate new perspectives on how human trafficking is experienced locally and about how it can be prevented. Thereby it will challenge previous assumptions and practices and advance conversations in the field of anti-trafficking policy and practice. In particular, the report makes an important contribution in response to Limoncelli's call for ensuring the relevance and accountability of anti-trafficking work:

*Given that so much NGO funding has come from north to south, care must be taken to avoid top-down processes that could result in programs and projects that fail to respond to local conditions or to address relevant populations (2016, 326).*

Relatedly, learning from local perceptions and experiences is key to building strong local alliances against human trafficking, and central to a rights-based approach to anti-trafficking work.

Next, a review of previous research about human trafficking is provided, followed by an overview of existing knowledge and data regarding human trafficking in South and South-East Asia. The data and methods for this study is thereafter presented. The findings of the study comes next, where the main patterns identified throughout the analysis of the interviews are outlined and discussed. The implications of these findings for developing better preventative strategies are then discussed, the main conclusions are presented, and recommendations for action are outlined.

## **Understanding human trafficking**

Human trafficking has not only received increasing attention in policy and practice. Research on human trafficking has also grown substantially since the turn of the millennium. In a recent, comprehensive research review, Russel found that in 2000, only 22 academic articles about human trafficking were published, compared to 154 articles in 2014 (2018, 119). However, despite the growth of the field, Russel notes that there is still a lack of systematic, empirical research. Indeed, two-thirds of the research up until 2014 consisted of conceptual and legal work, overviews of the field of knowledge, or literature reviews. The lack of systematic research, despite the political salience of the issue, has also been pointed out by Blackburn, Taylor & Davis (2010). Attempts at estimating the global prevalence of human trafficking, like the Global Slavery Index developed by Walk Free Foundation, have been strongly criticized for

using dubious methodologies, flawed data, and extrapolating data from one country to others (Russel 2018, Gallagher 2017). Noting the notorious difficulties involved in measuring human trafficking, some scholars have suggested that empirical research should focus more on understanding local dynamics of trafficking than pursuing elusive global quantifications that, even if they were correct, do not provide much information about how and why trafficking takes place; who is affected; and how it could be reduced (Yea 2017, Gallagher 2017).

Further, the field of research on human trafficking has also been characterized by fundamental disagreements about what human trafficking is, and how it should be addressed. Three competing paradigms or conceptualizations of human trafficking have emerged.

Firstly, the dominant paradigm conceptualizes human trafficking as an issue of transnational organized crime that poses a threat to the integrity of state borders. Thereby it should be addressed through stricter border controls, measures to stop irregular migration, and law enforcement cooperation across borders to prosecute traffickers. Security concerns relating to irregular migration and organized crime as threats to the nation state were indeed the primary driving force behind the adoption of the United Nations (UN) *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* in 2000 (Gallagher 2001). It is indicative that the Protocol was adopted as a supplement to the *Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*. An overview of the academic literature on trafficking reveals that articles published in journals focusing on law enforcement account for a significant share of previous research (see for example Blackburn, Taylor & Davis 2010, Wilson & Dalton 2008). In Russel's systematic review, law was the top article-producing discipline (2018). However, critics of this conceptualization of trafficking have argued that it neglects the rights and security of trafficked persons themselves. In addition, repressive border and migration controls makes migration more difficult and thereby makes migrants even more dependent on and vulnerable to traffickers and smugglers (Kempadoo 2015, Ford, Lyons and van Schendel 2012, Lobasz 2009).

As a result of the dominance of this paradigm, most policy attempts to address trafficking have targeted the acts of trafficking but without adequate focus on the conditions of vulnerability that place individuals at risk of trafficking, such as poverty, gender inequality, civil war and political unrest (Yea 2017, Clark 2003). A focus on understanding how conditions of vulnerability manifest themselves and how they contribute to human trafficking in locally specific ways is thus essential to better preventing it and protecting the rights of individuals at risk of trafficking.

Secondly, trafficking has been conceptualized as an internationalized form of organized sexual exploitation. This type of analyses exclusively focus on trafficking for purposes



of sexual exploitation, linking the meaning of trafficking closely to prostitution. Drawing on radical feminist theory, trafficking is seen as an organized form of sexual exploitation resulting from a world order built on gender inequality, racism and capitalism. The solution to trafficking is seen as lying in resistance to these structural inequalities and the abolition of prostitution in general (Kempadoo 2015, Lobasz 2009, Jeffreys 1999). While this conceptualization of human trafficking aptly draws attention to some of the structural conditions that are enabling it, it also has significant limitations. Notably, by equating trafficking and prostitution, it renders trafficking for various other forms of forced labour and exploitation invisible. The influence of this paradigm can be seen in the lack of research on trafficking linked to forms of labour other than sex work, and the neglect of male victims of trafficking. In essence, a disproportionate amount of research on human trafficking have focused on sexual exploitation of women and girls, and therefore trafficking for non-sexual purposes, and trafficking of men and boys, is poorly understood (Russel 2018, Davis, Glotfelty and Miles 2017, Pocock et al 2016, Piper 2005). While research acknowledging men and boys as victims of trafficking is becoming more common, only a fraction (8 out of 1231) articles surveyed by Russel addressed trafficking of men and boys in its own right, and not only as part of a general discussion of trafficking. Research on forced labour trafficking and organ trafficking is also increasing, but is still under-researched in comparison to sex trafficking (Russel 2018).

Thirdly, scholars dissatisfied with both of the paradigms discussed above have argued for a conceptualization of human trafficking as an issue of human rights and human security (Jones, King and Edwards 2018, Pourmokhtari 2015, Clark 2003). Compared to an understanding of trafficking as a security threat to states, this strand of research shifts the attention to the security and rights of trafficked persons instead (Lobasz 2009). Rather than migration control, measures to create safe migration are advocated, as well as preventative strategies addressing the conditions that makes individuals vulnerable to exploitative forms of migration and work. Human trafficking constitutes a violation of a number of internationally recognized human rights, and responses should focus on fostering an environment where the rights of trafficked persons, or persons at risk of trafficking, can be better protected. This is equally valid regardless of whether trafficking for sexual exploitation or other forms of forced labour is discussed. Indeed, patterns and mechanisms of human trafficking have been demonstrated to be similar regardless of the type of labour that it is linked to (Kempadoo 2016).

Notably, research on human trafficking has not focused on exploring and analyzing local perceptions and experiences of trafficking to any significant extent. As argued by Sharapov, the role of the general public has been absent and overlooked in previous trafficking research: “little research has been undertaken to identify and critically examine public awareness and knowledge of trafficking, how opinions are formed, how they are influenced and conversely what influence they have on public policies in this area” (2014, 7). This study thus contributes to address this gap. Research departing

from a conceptualization of human trafficking as an issue of border security and criminal justice is not attentive to the voices and experiences of trafficked people or people vulnerable to trafficking: states, not people, are the security referent in this body of research. Research departing from a conceptualization of human trafficking as internationalized sexual exploitation largely focuses on analyzing the global structures of oppression that enable trafficking, not on analyzing its specific local manifestations or examining local experiences. Further, a preoccupation with sex trafficking is often argued to sensationalize the issue and infantilize victims (Jones, King and Edwards 2018, Kempadoo 2015).

In contrast, research departing from a conceptualization of human trafficking as an issue of human rights and human security does acknowledge the need for knowledge about locally specific conditions of vulnerability and patterns of human trafficking (see for example Clark 2003). Such knowledge is essential to the design of policies and interventions seeking to create an environment where the rights of trafficked persons, or persons at risk of trafficking, can be better protected. Thus, by analyzing local perceptions and experiences in a number of local contexts in South and South-East Asia, this report constitutes an important contribution to knowledge about human trafficking, and to the development of effective preventative efforts.

Moreover, this study responds to calls for cross-locale or cross-national comparative studies that does not only produce a “snapshot” view of one context at one point in time (Piper 2005). Further, methodologically studies of human trafficking in Asia has primarily relied on interviews with government officials, NGO workers and a small number of victims of trafficking. By taking a different approach and instead focusing on understanding trafficking from the perspective of the local communities where it occurs or risks occurring, this study will advance our understanding of the root causes, social conditions, vulnerabilities and patterns of human trafficking in Asia.

## **Human trafficking in South and South-East Asia**

South and South-East Asia, and specifically the five countries studied in this report, are widely described as trafficking hotspots, as noted above (Marks and Olsen 2015, Ford, Lyons and van Schendel 2012, Piper 2005). While it must be kept in mind that reliable statistics on the prevalence of human trafficking are not available, existing estimates combined with data on actual reported cases provide an approximate aggregated image of the scope and nature of human trafficking in the region. According to the *Global Slavery Index* (Walk Free Foundation 2016), 45.8 million people are in conditions of modern slavery globally. Alarming, two thirds of the total number of people in modern slavery are said to be located in Asia. Cambodia and India are the countries with the third and fourth highest estimated proportion of their population in modern slavery in the world, and Bangladesh, Nepal and Thailand all fall in the top 20 as well (Walk Free Foundation 2016, 26-27).

The *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery* report, produced by International Labour Organization (ILO) and Walk Free Foundation in partnership with International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2017, estimates 40,3 million people to be in modern slavery globally, with 62 per cent in Asia and the Pacific. Dividing the term modern slavery into the main categories of forced labour and forced marriage shows that forced marriage is most common in Africa, and forced labour is most common in Asia Pacific. Notably, when breaking down forced labour further the report estimates that forced sexual exploitation is far less common than other types of labour exploitation (International Labour Organization and Walk free Foundation 2017, 21-27). This is noteworthy given the dominance of sex trafficking in anti-trafficking policy and practice as well as research (Russel 2018, Limoncelli 2016).

Further, modern slavery is estimated to affect 71 per cent women and girls, compared to 29 per cent men and boys. However, the gender distribution is skewed particularly by the dominance of women and girls as victims of forced marriage and forced sexual exploitation. Victims of forced labour exploitation (excluding sexual exploitation) are an estimated 58 per cent women and 42 per cent men. Moreover, 25 per cent of those affected by modern slavery are estimated to be children (International Labour Organization and Walk free Foundation 2017, 23). However, emphasizing that estimates of this kind are rough approximations, just a few years ago the ILO estimated that 60 per cent of those trafficked for forced labour were men (International Labour Organization 2012).

The term modern slavery, used in the reports cited above, is a fairly new invention. It is important to note that it is not defined in international law, and does not mean the same thing as human trafficking. There is significant overlap and the terms are often used interchangeably. However, modern slavery is characterized by one person being under the control of another. Similarly, the related term forced labour requires an element of coercion, threat or force. In contrast, human trafficking can take place for other purposes than slavery or forced labour, for example organ trafficking, and can take place using other means than coercion or force, like deceit or abuse of power, or by taking advantage of a position of vulnerability (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime 2016, 15-16).

In the *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*, by the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the focus is human trafficking. Further, in contrast to the reports on modern slavery above, it is based on actual detected cases of trafficking rather than estimations of prevalence. In East Asia and the Pacific, 61 per cent of detected victims were trafficked for sexual exploitation and 32 per cent for forced labour. 77 per cent of victims were women and girls. 32 per cent of detected victims were children, both boys and girls (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime 2016, 103-105). In South Asia, 85 per cent of detected victims were trafficked for forced labour, and out of these as many as 40 per cent were children. No data on the gender distribution of the victims

were available (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime 2016, 109-110). Moreover, this report shows that the vast majority of detected trafficking victims from Asia had been trafficked within their region of origin (96 per cent for South Asia and 93 per cent for East Asia and the Pacific). Smaller numbers of victims from South East Asia were trafficked to the Middle East and East Asia and the Pacific, and victims from East Asia and the Pacific were trafficked to North America, Europe, and the Middle East (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime 2016, 43-44).

While data based on actual cases are less uncertain than estimation data, using these data to gain an overview of global or regional patterns of human trafficking is still tricky, as detected cases may reflect biases and assumptions about what trafficking is and whom it affects. For example, the disproportionate focus on sex trafficking in government and NGO efforts in South-East Asia in particular is likely to result in more victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation being detected, reported and included in UNODC data, while more cases of trafficking for other purposes, involving neglected victim populations such as men and boys, remain invisible. Further, due to the likely very small proportion of cases of trafficking that are ever detected, law enforcement interest in a particular sector at a particular time may have a heavy impact on the data. For example, out of the victims of trafficking in Asia-Pacific that were supported by IOM in 2015, 82,9 per cent were men. The absolute majority were victims of labour exploitation, and the fishing industry was the single largest industry (Walk Free Foundation 2016, 53). In this case, detected case data was shaped by the growing attention to exploitation in the fishing industry at this time. The very different gender distribution compared to the UNODC case data above illustrate the less than systematic coverage of case data.

However, while accurate statistical data or a generalized overview of the prevalence and patterns of human trafficking in South and South-East Asia is hard to come by, numerous case studies and reports provide examples and evidence of a variety of forms of trafficking taking place in the region. For example, in India, large-scale forced labour in brick kilns has been documented (International Justice Mission 2016), and practices of forced marriage and child marriage are widespread (Walk Free Foundation 2016, 52). In Nepal, trafficking takes place across the porous border with India, for forced labour as well as sexual exploitation, as well as from rural to urban areas within the country (United Mission to Nepal 2016, Hudlow 2015). Trafficking from Bangladesh to the Middle East for forced labour in sectors such as construction and domestic work has been recognized as an emerging trend (Azad 2018, United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime 2016, 109).

In South-East Asia, Cambodia was renowned as a sex tourism destination in the 1990s. A survey conducted in preparation for the Global Slavery Index 2016 uncovered evidence of forced labour when migrating for work in the fishing industry and as domestic workers, and in Cambodia in sectors such as manufacturing, construction, and farming (Walk Free Foundation 2016, 99-100). Like Cambodia, Thailand has also had a reputation as a

hub of sex trafficking. Recent research has challenged the perceptions that only women and girls are victims of sex trafficking, revealing that a significant number of men and boys are affected as well, for example in Chiang Mai (Davis, Glotfelty and Miles 2017). Further, recent attention to the scale of exploitation in the fishing industry has widened the discussion of human trafficking in Thailand beyond the sex industry, highlighting the extent of other forms of forced labour (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime 2016, 104). For example, a study of 446 men in the greater Mekong region demonstrated that the majority were trafficked for work in fishing (61.7%) and manufacturing (19.1%) (Pocock et al 2016).

As a result of increasing attention to human trafficking in South and South-East Asia, all governments in the region have taken at least some steps to address it. The most recent TIP Report (Department of State, United States of America 2017) ranks Cambodia, India and Nepal in Tier 2, which means that they are not considered to reach the US stipulated “minimum standards” in their response to the issue, but are seen as making significant efforts to meet the standards. Bangladesh and Thailand are placed on the Tier 2 watch list, meaning that they are not seen as making adequate efforts to curb human trafficking and are at risk of US sanctions. While the TIP report has received criticism for constituting a politicized tool for US interests and a unilateral sanctions regime (Chuang 2006), it is nonetheless the most recognized instrument for assessing state anti-trafficking performance and is widely perceived as having a positive impact by NGOs working in the field (Heiss and Kelley 2017).

Further, as noted above, Asia has been a focal region for the expanding NGO anti-trafficking industry. Numerous NGOs, and UN agencies, are implementing anti-trafficking programs in the region. The countries included in this study are all among the countries in the world where the highest number of anti-trafficking NGOs are working (Limoncelli 2016). Studies of what these NGOs do has revealed that they work with a diversity of types of trafficking and victim groups, but there is a disproportionate focus on sex trafficking and on women and girls as victims. This reflects the dominance of sex trafficking in the field thus far, and shows that many NGOs working with human trafficking see it as an issue that primarily affects women and girls (Heiss and Kelley 2017, Limoncelli 2016, Foot, Toft and Cesare 2015). This may reflect engrained ways of working and stereotypical assumptions about human trafficking rather than actual needs. For example, in Thailand, a country primarily associated with sex trafficking and sex tourism, evidence shows that both men and women are at risk primarily if they are irregular migrants or stateless people (Jones, King and Edwards 2018). Assumptions that human trafficking mainly affect women and girls may cause male victims of trafficking, and forms of trafficking other than the sex trade, to be neglected and insufficiently understood and addressed by anti-trafficking efforts.

Moreover, the most common type of anti-trafficking activities that NGOs engage in are different forms of education and public awareness raising. These types of activities far outnumber those that provide direct services to victims or that seek to address root causes of trafficking (Heiss and Kelley 2017, Limoncelli 2016). However, the diversity and comprehensiveness of NGO programming has increased in recent years (Foot, Toft and Cesare 2015).

Against this background, it is clear that reliable data on human trafficking in Asia is rarely available. Thus, as argued by Yea (2017), the most fruitful way forward is to strive for a better understanding of how human trafficking takes place locally rather than trying to measure its prevalence at an aggregate level. An adequate understanding of how trafficking is perceived and experienced locally is key to designing appropriate anti-trafficking efforts that correspond to actual needs and target affected populations. This study thus contributes to generate locally grounded knowledge about how human trafficking is manifested and experienced in South and South-East Asia, which can inform the development of effective and appropriate preventative strategies.

## Conceptual framework

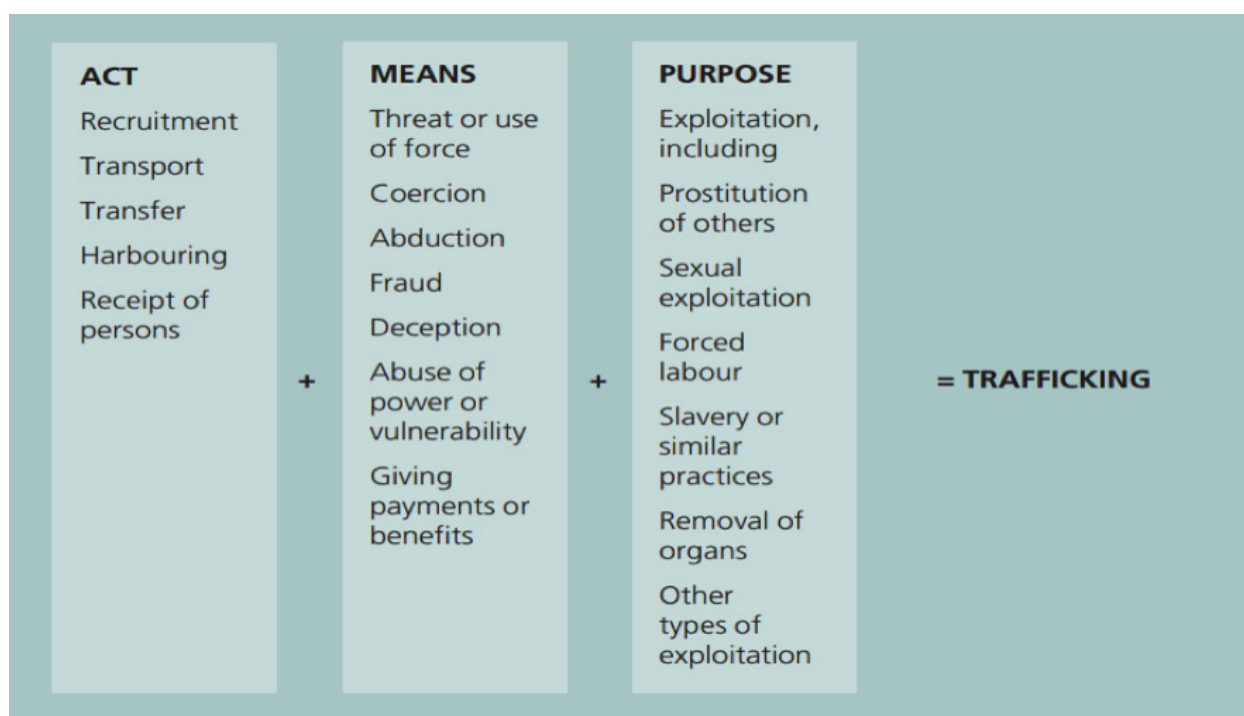
In relation to the overview of academic and policy perspectives on human trafficking presented above, this report departs from a conceptualization of human trafficking as an issue of human security and human rights. Such a perspective is concerned with understanding the root causes of trafficking in terms of the insecurities that make people vulnerable to trafficking. Thereby it rejects perspectives on trafficking as primarily an issue of transnational crime and border security, and related policy recommendations that seeks to criminalize mobility and prevent people from migrating through increased border controls. Notably, *prevention* of human trafficking is in this report understood as prevention of deceit, exploitation, coercion and force in relation to migration, not prevention of migration in itself. Limiting people's freedom of movement is not the solution to human trafficking. Criminal justice measures such as criminalization of trafficking and prosecution of traffickers are important but, in themselves, such measures have not been proven to reduce trafficking (Yea 2017). In addition, perspectives on human trafficking that equate it with sexual exploitation are inadequate, as they obscure that the phenomenon of human trafficking in South and South-East Asia encompasses exploitation in many other sectors of work as well, and that men and boys, not only women and girls, can be victims of trafficking.

In the Trafficking Protocol, the UN defines trafficking as:

*[T]he 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 purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at*

*a minimum, the exploitation of 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” (United Nations 2000).*

The acts, means and purposes of trafficking included in this definition are illustrated in figure 1. On the basis of this definition, in this study we do not distinguish between human trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation, which has dominated much of anti-trafficking policy and research (Russel 2018, Limoncelli 2016), and trafficking for purposes of exploitation in other sectors of work or in other ways. The advantage of this approach is that the patterns, types and purposes of human trafficking in a particular local context can be treated as an empirical question: something to be explored rather than assumed. Further, the UN definition of the means of trafficking makes the question of consent, frequently and problematically discussed in relation to sex work, irrelevant. Thus, an individual who is subjected to conditions such as fraud, deceit, exploitation, coercion and force during the process of recruitment, migration or at the destination point is a victim of trafficking regardless of whether the individual was aware of the nature of the work offered at the point of destination when deciding to migrate.



**Figure 1:** UN definition of human trafficking. Source: UN Office of Drugs and Crime 2006.

With regards to trafficking of children however, the element of means of trafficking in the general UN definition does not have to be present. Thus, in order to legally prove trafficking of children, only acts of trafficking and a purpose of exploitation is necessary. Thereby, in international law the definition of human trafficking is substantially wider

when it comes to children (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2014).

Moreover, departing from a conceptualization of human trafficking as an issue of human security and human rights underlines the importance of foregrounding local experiences and perceptions of trafficking. As noted above, research and policy in this field has often paid little attention to the voices and agency of victims of trafficking and their communities, predominantly located in the Global South. In spatial terms, the local is taken to mean sub-national contexts such as a village, town, or particular region or area in the studied countries. Broadly defined, people understood as being local are thereby anyone who is living or working in such a local context, including but not necessarily limited to local residents of different genders and ages; local leaders; local government officials; members of local civic associations; and representatives of NGOs active and based in the local context (thus excluding international NGOs, UN agencies etc. although these may implement programs in local contexts).

Local perceptions and experiences are those that are expressed by respondents belonging to these categories. Notably, perceptions and experiences are subjective and socially constructed; they are grounded in particular social and cultural positions (Lowe 1982, Friedman 2010). Thus, a focus on understanding local experiences and perceptions does not rest on an assumption that these represent objective truth. Rather, understanding local experiences and perceptions provides insights into the social and cultural contexts where trafficking takes place, enabling a more nuanced understanding of how it could be effectively addressed in context-specific ways. Listening to local voices may sometimes provide better information about patterns and mechanisms of trafficking, information that can be used to target prevention efforts better. However, local people may not necessarily know how, when and why trafficking takes place, as human trafficking is by nature a covert business. Nevertheless, understanding how local communities think about trafficking and what they believe is happening, whether actually correct or not, is still imperative in order to better understand how trafficking can be prevented. For example, what types of information campaigns or awareness raising efforts may be needed given existing perceptions?

These theoretical points of departure and definitions of key concepts lays the analytical groundwork for this study. The next section outlines how this framework is translated into concrete methods for collection and analysis of data.

## **Data and methods**

The overarching design of this study is a multiple case study (Stake 2006), aiming to examine local experiences and perceptions of human trafficking in multiple locations in South and South-East Asia. A multiple case study includes several cases in order to gain insight into a phenomenon or issue through examining its manifestations in a variety



of contexts. Thus, including multiple cases will enable the study to contrast the results from different cases, drawing out broader comparative insights as well as learning from the similarities and differences between the cases.

This section presents the data and methods for the study, discussing the selection of locations for data collection; selection of respondents; the conducting of interviews; and analysis of interview data.

## Selection of locations for data collection

This study is based on semi-structured, qualitative interviews with a total of 94 respondents. Interviews were conducted in seven locations in five countries in South and South-East Asia, as shown below in table 1. The locations for data collection were selected based on three criteria. Firstly, they are all areas affected by human trafficking, as areas of origin, destination or transit. Thus, understanding how human trafficking is experienced and understood in these communities is key to devising strategies to address and prevent it. Secondly, selected locations represent a variety of urban and rural locations. This allows the study to capture a diversity of experiences of human trafficking and learn about how this phenomenon manifests itself in different types of contexts. Thirdly, selected locations are areas where the organizations involved in this study have previously established programs and relationships. Following Stake's suggestion to choose cases that allows the researchers to learn as much as possible (2006), this selection criteria recognizes that access to and familiarity with the locations for data collection is important. Indeed, in some cases a prior relationship may even be a precondition to gain trust and make data collection possible.

Country	Locations for data collection
Bangladesh	City of Dhaka
Cambodia	Rural community, Svay Rieng Province
India	Town of Bhadohi, Varanasi District
Nepal	Kanchan Rural Municipality, Rupendehi District
Nepal	Raptisonari Rural Municipality, Banke District
Thailand	City of Chiang Mai
Thailand	Sannimit village, Chiang Mai District

Table 1. Locations for data collection.

The selected locations for data collection include two large cities, one smaller town, and four rural areas. The cities of Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Chiang Mai, Thailand, are areas of origin, transit points and destinations of human trafficking. Further, the town of Bhadohi, outside Varanasi in India, is a center for the country's carpet industry and as such a destination for human trafficking. However, it is also an area of origin. Svay Rieng Province, Cambodia, and Raptisonari Municipality, Nepal, are both rural communities with a high incidence of human trafficking, not least due to their location in proximity to international borders. Svay Rieng Province is a rice-farming area

that borders Vietnam, and Raptisonari Rural Municipality borders India and has been characterized as a primary source and transit point for human trafficking across the border. Like Raptisonari, Kanchan Rural Municipality is located in a trafficking-prone area of Nepal that has a high rate of female migration for foreign employment. Sannimit village is located in Chiang Mai District, Thailand. It comprises merely 90 households, and its inhabitants belong to the Lahu ethnic minority, also known as a hill tribe. In Thailand, hill tribe populations are particularly at risk of human trafficking due to their marginalized social and economic position (Jones, King and Edwards 2018, Davis, Glotfelty and Miles 2017).

Together, local perceptions and experiences from these selected locations can capture different aspects of how human trafficking operates in South and South-East Asia, including urban as well as rural locations and source, transit and destination areas. This design thereby enables the analysis to generate new knowledge based on the commonalities as well as the differences between countries and locations for data collection.

## **Selection of respondents**

Like the selection of locations for data collection, individual respondents were purposively selected based on pre-determined criteria. Thus, purposive sampling means that members of the sample are chosen with a purpose to represent particular social groups, experiences, or roles. These particular features are sought out because they will enable exploration and understanding of the phenomena or issue that the study seeks to analyze (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam 2003). In the context of this study, including respondents from the three categories rights holders, duty bearers and civil society was judged to be the best strategy for capturing a variety of local perceptions and experiences of human trafficking.

As shown in table 2, *rights holders* are people from the local community of varying age and gender. There was no requirement that these respondents have any particular experience of or relationship to issues of human trafficking. While survivors of human trafficking can be found in this category, they were not selected for this reason. A methodological advantage of the focus of this study – understanding human trafficking through analysis of local community perceptions and experiences – is that it avoids the problem of accessing “hidden populations” (Brennan 2005, Tyldum & Brunovskis 2005, Tyldum 2010). Thus, we are not specifically seeking out individuals who have themselves been trafficked. Rather, we are seeking to understand the contexts from where people are trafficked or may be at risk of being trafficked, in order to understand how this can be better prevented. As the label rights holders indicates, these respondents are included in the capacity of being people who should benefit from any interventions aiming to prevent or address human trafficking, and it is therefore vital to understand their perspectives and experiences of the issue. Rights holders comprise half of the total

sample of respondents, and half of the sample from each location.

Further, *duty bearers* are respondents who represent authorities who have responsibilities towards rights holders. In this category, there are primarily local government and law enforcement officials but also some cases of leaders with a more informal mandate but great local significance, like village leaders and factory owners. Respondents representing *civil society* include members of local citizenship associations, representatives from local NGOs, and religious leaders. Respondents in these two categories were included to capture potential existing strategies for combating human trafficking at the local level, as well as the understandings of the issue that guide them and shape their effectiveness.

Category of respondents	Examples of respondents in each category	Total number of respondents in each category
Rights holders	Average people in the local community of various ages, both men and women	46
Duty bearers	Local government officials Village leaders	24
Civil society	Members of local associations (parents, teachers, others) Representatives from local NGOs Religious leaders	24
		Total: 94

Table 2. Composition of total sample of respondents.

Below, table 3 shows the number of respondents per category that were interviewed in each location. The target distribution was 8 rights holders, 4 duty bearers and 4 civil society representatives in each location. However, for Nepal this sample was split between the two locations. While the study also includes two locations in Thailand, these include one large city and one small, minority-populated village, and it was therefore judged to be valuable to include a full sample from each of these. The sample from Bhadohi, India, fell slightly short of the target number of interviews due to time and practical constraints.

Country	Locations for data collection	Number of respondents by category RH/DB/CS	Total number of respondents
Bangladesh	City of Dhaka	8/4/4	16
Cambodia	Svay Rieng Province	8/4/4	16
India	Town of Bhadohi	7/4/3	14
Nepal	Kanchan Rural Municipality	3/2/3	8
Nepal	Raptisonari Rural Municipality	4/2/2	8
Thailand	City of Chiang Mai	8/4/4	16
Thailand	Sannimit village	8/4/4	16
		Total: 46/24/24	Total: 94

Table 3. Number of respondents from each location.

Gender balance in the sample from each location was actively pursued. However, the total sample came to consist of about 60 per cent men and 40 per cent women. A significant explanation for this is the dominance of men in positions of authority in local government and law enforcement (duty bearers) in many of the study locations.

While individual samples from each location are fairly small, together the full sample constitute a unique material that enables the study to capture a diversity of local perspectives and experiences of human trafficking in South and South-East Asia, identify broader patterns across countries and data collection sites, and consider their implications for policy and practice.

### Semi-structured interviews

As noted, the primary type of data for the study are semi-structured, qualitative interviews conducted in the locations discussed above. Semi-structured interviews are interviews where the data collector or researcher departs from an interview guide with a number of questions or topics for conversation that will be brought up in every interview. However, depending on the responses given, the interviewer will probe for information or ask follow-up questions in different ways, allowing the interview to be shaped by the respondent (Arthur & Nazroo 2003). This type of interviews are an appropriate method when the aim is to grasp people's points of view, experiences and perspectives. Notably, the interview is not only used as a way of uncovering information, but should rather be seen as a way for the interviewer to figuratively walk alongside the respondent, encouraging them to tell their stories and seeking to understand their lifeworld (Legard, Keegan & Ward 2003).

Data collection was prepared in November 2017 during a training workshop in Chiang Mai, Thailand, where an interview guide was drafted and methods for conducting interviews discussed and practiced. This joint preparatory session was essential for ensuring a common understanding of and vision for the study among the interviewers collecting data in the different locations, and ensure that data from different locations is comparable. The interview guide<sup>2</sup> was then translated to the local language of each of the locations for data collection and, when needed, the phrasing of questions was adjusted to be locally appropriate and intelligible.<sup>3</sup> The team of interviewers included individuals originating from each of the studied countries, and were familiar with the specific locations where interviews were conducted. Interviews were conducted in December 2017 and January 2018.

Prior to each interview, the data collector informed the respondent of the focus and purpose of the study, the conditions of participation in the interview, and the ways in which the information from the interview will be used. In particular, care was taken to explain that the interview is voluntary and can be stopped at any time at the request of the respondent, and that the identity and personal information of the respondent will be kept confidential. The data collector ensured that the respondent had understood this information before asking for his or her verbal consent to proceed with the interview. A consent form template summarizing the information that the data collectors related to the respondent was drafted and discussed at the Chiang Mai workshop, and then translated to all relevant local languages.<sup>4</sup>

The majority of interviews were individual, but in a handful of instances, two respondents belonging to the same category were interviewed together.<sup>5</sup> Interviews were conducted in sites such as offices, coffee shops, or in the home of respondents. For duty bearer and civil society respondents, meeting at their offices or in coffee shops or restaurants was more common, while rights holders were most commonly interviewed in their homes, at the premises of the organization responsible for data collection, or in locations such as the local church or football field. The main principle was to allow the respondent to choose a setting for the interview that he or she would be comfortable with.

The interviews focused on respondents' perceptions and experiences of human trafficking. It was explained to the respondents that experiences does not necessarily mean personal experiences, but may include instances of human trafficking that the respondent has personal knowledge about or has heard about from sources such as the news. The aim was to grasp how the respondent thinks about trafficking in his or her community, and if the respondent does know of any examples or patterns of trafficking. However, it is important to note that we were interested in the perceptions of the respondent

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2 The English language version of the interview guide is included in Appendix A.

3 The local languages were Bengali, Khmer, Hindi, Nepali, Thai, and Lahu.

4 The English language version of the participant information template is included in appendix B.

5 This applies to the data from Cambodia.

even though these perceptions may not always reflect facts about the occurrence of trafficking that are objectively verifiable. The length of interviews varied between 10 and 45 minutes, with the majority around 30 minutes.

Further, interviews were recorded and thereafter transcribed, to ensure that the material for the study would be as rich and detailed as possible. Interviews were either transcribed in the local language and thereafter translated to English, or translated and transcribed into English simultaneously. The latter method was employed where a translator with good proficiency in both relevant languages was available to transcribe interviews, and where time constraints prevented a more time-consuming two-step procedure.

### **Analyzing the interview data**

When the interviews had been conducted, transcribed and translated into English, all the data was analyzed with the purpose of answering the research questions of the study. The analysis was done using qualitative thematic analysis. In thematic analysis, the data is processed in order to identify main themes, indexed and sorted in accordance with these themes. It is a way of identifying recurring patterns in the data and achieve a systematic overview of the material (Ritchie, Spencer & O'Connor 2003).

The initial step of the analysis was to become familiar with the material, reading through all of it in order to identify themes and patterns. However, this initial reading was linked to the research questions, ensuring that the focus of the study shapes the analysis of the data. Secondly, an index with main themes and sub-themes identified in the first step is constructed. Thereafter the material was read again, sorting or coding it in accordance with the index, adding new categories and themes when they emerged, and further fine-tuning the index. In these first analytical steps the data from each location was analyzed separately.

Thirdly, when the material from each location had been thoroughly processed, the main themes and sub-themes that had been identified and summarized were compared across the locations in order to identify commonalities and differences. Finally, the meaning and implications of main themes and findings from the comparative analysis was further analyzed and linked back to responding to the research questions and formulating the conclusions of the study.

## Findings

What are the local perspectives on human trafficking, its causes and its solutions? This section describes the results of the analysis, addressing the first part of the aim of this study: “to explore and understand local experiences and perspectives on how human trafficking takes place in South and South-East Asia”. The findings reveal that a rather high proportion of the respondents have experiences and knowledge about actual cases of human trafficking, where people they knew or knew about were the victims. Consequently, many people do have first-hand knowledge about the issue of human trafficking. This points to the importance of learning from local perceptions and experiences in order to more effectively prevent human trafficking. Departing from each of the five research questions, the main patterns identified throughout the analysis of the interviews are outlined and discussed, and quotations from the interview narratives are used to illustrate the findings.

### What is human trafficking?

Perceptions of what human trafficking means, and how it takes place, are remarkably similar across all the studied locations. In sum, human trafficking is most often described as a process where people are deceived to go somewhere to work, but end up in situations of exploitation that do not correspond to the jobs they were promised. Further, the results show that traffickers are generally represented as people close to the victims, sharing a similar background or social position. Interview narratives about human trafficking also demonstrate that respondents’ have a broad and multifaceted understanding of the issue, encompassing a diversity of forms and purposes of trafficking.

### Recruitment through false job offers

In interviews from all seven study locations, human trafficking is described as a process where people accept an offer to go somewhere to work, but end up in situations of exploitation that do not correspond to the jobs they were promised. As a civil society respondent in Thailand explains, human trafficking

*is a scam. For example, people are deceived to go to work abroad for better salaries. They believe in those words because they want their family and themselves to have well-being. When they arrive, there may be no pay, there may be abuse in any form, and they are forced to work beyond the agreed tasks.<sup>6</sup>*

In a similar account, a village leader from Cambodia explain how trafficking takes place there:

*Traffickers go from one village to another, and cheat people to make them go along with them to other provinces or other countries. Traffickers trick people, for example they promise people a high salary and a safe place to stay, but it is not true.<sup>7</sup>*

<sup>6</sup> Civil society respondent 1, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

<sup>7</sup> Duty bearer respondents 1 and 2, Svay Rieng District, Cambodia.

This scenario is typical in interviews from all the locations. As recently demonstrated by a study in Nepal, and by IOM assisted victim data, trafficking victims are in the vast majority of cases recruited through accepting a job offer (United Mission to Nepal 2017, 22, Walk Free Foundation 2016, 53). This indicates that respondents' views on the recruitment process are consistent with reality.

## **Traffickers are people close to the victims**

Further, traffickers and brokers are often represented as someone known to the victim. As related by a Cambodian respondent, “traffickers are mostly people whom the victims know, and think that they can trust, like relatives and neighbors whom they know well”.<sup>8</sup> Alternatively, traffickers are described as people coming to the community and gaining the trust of victims through personal relationships:

*Offering false employment opportunity through personal contact is the key method the traffickers use to convince the family. Through this method the traffickers gain the trust of the family and the victims. All the people irrespective of men and women are at risk for trafficking because of their poverty and ignorance. The people agree to be recruited in the hope of leading a better life through earning abroad.*<sup>9</sup>

These accounts are supported by the latest Global Trafficking in Persons Report, which argues that victims and traffickers often share the same background, such as geographic origin, language, culture, and even family ties, and that “traffickers rarely travel abroad to recruit victims” (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime 2016, 7). However, while recruitment by traffickers is described by respondents as relying on personal relationships and local familiarity, recruiters are sometimes linked up to national or transnational networks. In Bangladesh, a respondent shares that “a criminal gang who has a strong network in and outside of this country is involved in human trafficking”.<sup>10</sup> In Cambodia, foreigners involved in trafficking are reported to “use Khmer people as middlemen”.<sup>11</sup>

In a unique interview from India, a man working as a recruiter for factory owners in Bhadohi corroborates the above accounts and provides insights from within the trafficking business. Describing his methods for recruitment, this man relates that

*I usually roam around in the village and watch that they need money [...] I take the money [from factory owners] and help poor people and children from villages and towns and drop them off in factories. Thereafter I am not responsible for them.*<sup>12</sup>

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8 Civil society respondent 4, Svay Rieng District, Cambodia.

9 Civil Society respondent 1, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

10 Duty bearer respondent 2, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

11 Duty bearer respondent 1 and 2, Svay Rieng District, Cambodia.

12 Respondent 2, recruiter, Bhadohi, India



Thus, after identifying people in need of money, this recruiter convinces them to go with him and work in factories, where they frequently end up in abusive conditions or bonded labour. For this the recruiter is paid commission by factory owners, allowing him to earn a living.

The sometimes indistinct boundaries between victims and traffickers are even more clearly illustrated by a former male sex worker interviewed in Chiang Mai, Thailand. He shares that he has been offered to help recruit others into the sex trade, but declined. In contrast, he relates that one of his friends “has a foreign sugar daddy taking care of him. He has to help the foreigner to recruit more boys”.<sup>13</sup> Thus, this young man, himself a victim of sexual exploitation, also takes part in the trafficking of other boys as a way of ensuring his own survival. This phenomenon has been described as “second wave trafficking” (Lutya and Lanier, 2012) or as use of “proxy recruiters” (Aronowitz, 2009). Research has also demonstrated that small-scale, local recruiters are vital to the trafficking business, and that the actions of these local traffickers may be shaped by the same vulnerabilities and social structures as are victims’ decisions to migrate (Yea 2017).

## **Diverse types and purposes of human trafficking**

Interview narratives and examples of what has happened to trafficked people reflect a broad and multifaceted understanding of the purposes of trafficking. Nearly all respondents relate that people can be trafficked into several different types of exploitative situations, including forced labour in various industries, forced domestic work, and forced sex work. In addition, trafficking for forced marriage, and trafficking where a promise of marriage is used as the means of deceit, is frequently mentioned. For example, a promise of marrying off one of her daughters convinced this Indian mother to send her child away with her uncle:

A mother had daughters that were young, and one day that woman’s real brother came up with the proposal of marriage of those girls. The woman was not financially stable, so she trusted her brother enough to let him take one of her daughters to get her married. But the brother picked the girl and sold her in the market for 60,000 cash and then they took that girl to Gorakhpur and re-sold her for 80,000 cash.<sup>14</sup> The real uncle of the poor girl sold him for his evil and selfish reasons.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, forced begging and trafficking for purposes of harvesting and selling organs are types of trafficking that are commonly mentioned as specifically affecting children. Kidnapping by force, rather than recruitment through deceit, is a means of trafficking that is also linked to trafficking of children in particular. The risks and vulnerabilities faced by children and youth specifically are discussed in more depth below.

13 Rights holder respondent 4, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

14 Indian rupees (INR). 60 000 INR is about 940 USD, and 80 000 INR is about 1270 USD.

15 Civil Society respondent 1, Bhadohi, India.

Notably, general understandings of what trafficking is and how it takes place did not differ significantly between urban and rural locations, or between source, transit and destination contexts. However, experiences of and stories about local cases of human trafficking do reflect these contextual differences. For example, male labour migration from Bangladesh to the Middle East is common (Azad 2018), and this is reflected in the data from Bangladesh. In the following, a Bangladeshi respondent uses the story of his brother to illustrate his understanding of human trafficking:

After being trafficked, the victims are forced to work in hard conditions and are compelled to be involved in odd jobs. With the help of a broker, my brother went to Saudi Arabia on payment of taka five lacs and fifty thousand to that broker.<sup>16</sup> But at the airport he was taken by another trafficker to an unknown location where he was traceless for three months. We could not contact my brother during that period. He managed to flee away from that place and then communicated with us. Forced labour is the most common type of trafficking in our community.<sup>17</sup>

Likewise, in Nepal there is a high level of labour migration abroad, and therefore respondents primarily view human trafficking as an international phenomenon. When labour migration is undertaken under illegal and unsafe conditions, migrants easily become vulnerable to forced labour and abuse:

*There was a woman here in Narayapur and she went to a foreign country as a foreign worker. She stayed there for a few years, and when she was there she was tortured as a domestic worker and she was forced to do sex work.<sup>18</sup>*



In contrast, in Thailand and India a major share of victims are trafficked from rural to urban areas within the country, which is reflected in the perceptions of respondents. Further, in the data from Thailand, there is a more pronounced emphasis on trafficking for sex work, which is explained by the prominent role of Chiang Mai as a regional

<sup>16</sup> 550 000 Bangladesh Taka (BDT). This is about 6600 USD.

<sup>17</sup> Rights holder respondent 8, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

<sup>18</sup> Rights holder respondent 5, Raptisonari Rural Municipality, Nepal.

centre for sex tourism and the sex industry more broadly (Jones, King and Edwards 2018, Davis, Glotfelty and Miles 2017). Similarly, in the data from India, a stronger emphasis on forced labour in factories is explained by the contextual characteristics of Bhadohi as a hub for the country's carpet industry.

### **A broad and nuanced understanding of human trafficking**

In summary, respondents in all the locations included in the study demonstrate a high level of awareness of what human trafficking is and how it takes place, and generally have a broad understanding of its purposes including various forms of exploitation. In fact, local perceptions of human trafficking uncovered in this study correspond closely to the UN definition established in the 2000 Trafficking Protocol cited above. Acts of trafficking recurrently mentioned by respondents include recruitment, transportation, harbouring and receipt of persons; means of trafficking include force, coercion and abduction as well as deception, fraud and persuasion through promises of material benefits. Finally, the purposes of trafficking that are discussed by our respondents include all of the forms of exploitation mentioned in the UN definition: forced labour, slavery, prostitution of others, sexual exploitation and removal of organs. As will be discussed below, given this high level of awareness and nuanced understanding of the problem, it is remarkable that current local strategies as well as aid interventions in this area have a strong emphasis on awareness raising. While a high level of local awareness could be interpreted as testament to the success of previous awareness raising efforts, it simultaneously calls into question whether more awareness raising will effectively reduce human trafficking in these contexts.

Moreover, in relation to previous research and aid practice, it is noteworthy that respondents in this study generally do not perceive women as significantly more vulnerable to human trafficking compared to men. Relatedly, human trafficking is not more strongly associated with sex work and sexual exploitation than with other forms of forced labour. As discussed above, previous research and practice have tended to over-emphasize trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation, and assume victims to be primarily women and girls (Russel 2018, Heiss and Kelley 2017, Limoncelli 2016). It could thus be argued that local perceptions in the studied locations align more closely with the broad UN definition of trafficking, and with recent estimations of the prevalence of trafficking for different purposes (International Labour Office and Walk Free Foundation 2017), than does academic research and aid policies and practices. However, although both women and men are seen as vulnerable, vulnerabilities to different forms of human trafficking are nonetheless perceived as gendered. Women and girls are seen as more likely to fall victim to sex trafficking, and men and boys to other forms of forced labour. While this perception is broadly correct, it still obscures significant aspects of the phenomenon of human trafficking, like the large numbers of boys trafficked into the sex industry in Thailand (International Labour Office and Walk Free Foundation 2017, Davis, Glotfelty and Miles 2017).

## What are the causes of human trafficking?

Like the narratives about what trafficking is and how it takes place, respondents across the locations broadly agree on what the causes of human trafficking are. Two main themes emerged from the analysis of respondents' accounts of the causes of trafficking: poverty and lack of risk awareness. In some of the locations but not in others, respondents often argued that victims could be deceived and trafficked because they are too materialistic and have high aspirations to a wealthy lifestyle. A fourth, but less frequently mentioned theme, was a representation of corruption and weak law enforcement as factors enabling and facilitating trafficking.

### Poverty as a cause of trafficking

Poverty is the factor which is clearly most frequently mentioned as a cause of, or explanation for, human trafficking. In fact, all 93 respondents mention poverty in some way. Thus, the perception that poor people take the risk to be recruited by traffickers or to migrate in unregulated ways because they need to find a way to ensure the survival of themselves and their families are widespread in all of the studied locations. This explanation for why trafficking happens is well summarized by a Nepali respondent:

*There are many reasons [for human trafficking] and according to me one of the reasons is poverty. There are many families that are poor and it is very hard for them to provide for the basic needs of their family. Some families cannot give good education and they cannot provide basic health facilities to their families as. I think to fulfil those financial needs of their family they fall into the traps. They become the victims of this.<sup>19</sup>*

A civil society respondent from India relate a similar account, emphasizing that “most of them are terribly poor, and their poverty is the reason that force them to pick this wrong action”.<sup>20</sup> In desperate circumstances, people may accept any offer that promises an income “because they do not have other employment”<sup>21</sup>, or because “they do not have land or oxen for rice-farming”.<sup>22</sup> As summarized by a Bangladeshi respondent, “poverty makes people vulnerable to be victims of human trafficking”.<sup>23</sup> A young man from Thailand relates a personal story about how a desperate economic situation compelled his friend to accept recruitment into prostitution:

*I'm thinking about what happened to my friend. If I had money to give to him, he would not have to do that. The situation was quite tough. We went to borrow money from many people. None of them had money to give to him. Then, he had no choice.<sup>24</sup>*

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19 Civil society respondent 1, Raptisonari Rural Municipality, Nepal

20 Civil society respondent 3, Bhadohi, India.

21 Rights holder respondent 6, Bhadohi, India.

22 Duty bearer respondent 3, Svay Rieng District, Cambodia.

23 Rights holder respondent 2, Bhadohi, India.

24 Rights holder respondent 3, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Moreover, poverty can also prompt people to act as traffickers themselves, ensuring their own livelihood and survival by recruiting others. This is emphasized by a villager from Thailand: “nowadays the economic situation is not good, it is difficult to get a job and pay, so people are trying to lie to each other by offering jobs and make easy money”.<sup>25</sup> Again, this highlights the blurred boundary between victims and traffickers, and shows that driving forces behind becoming a victim and becoming a trafficker may be very similar.

This prominent emphasis on poverty as a cause of trafficking is well in line with existing knowledge in research and practice. For example, a systematic review of 61 sources, including academic articles as well as NGO reports, found that poverty was cited as a determinant of human trafficking in 77 per cent of the sources (Perry and McEwing 2013). While this review only included sources focusing on trafficking of women and children in South-East Asia, it is reasonable to assume that poverty contributes to trafficking of men as well.

Further, many respondents give examples showing how the vulnerability caused by poverty is unevenly distributed and compounded by social inequalities. For example, individuals belonging to a low caste group are described as particularly vulnerable in Nepal and India; hill tribe people and migrant workers in Thailand; and in Cambodia growing economic inequalities are cited as compounding the marginalization and vulnerability of poor people. In relation to this, Huda’s (2006) analysis demonstrates that economic and social inequalities is strongly related to the movement of persons within each country and across borders in South Asia, contributing to the problem of trafficking in the region.

### **Lack of awareness as a cause of trafficking**

The second main theme in interview narratives about causes of trafficking is lack of awareness. Sometimes lack of awareness of the risks in relation to trafficking is more explicitly emphasized, and sometimes lack of awareness is linked to lack of education and literacy in a wider sense. The latter is exemplified by this Bangladeshi respondent: “ignorance and illiteracy of the victims also contribute to trafficking. Public awareness can protect the people from being trafficked”.<sup>26</sup> Here, ignorance is emphasized as a factor facilitating trafficking, allowing victims to be convinced by traffickers. Consequently, public awareness is suggested as key to protect people from trafficking.

Notably, when lack of awareness is represented as the cause of trafficking, becoming a victim of trafficking is easily seen as a result of the individual’s failure to be aware and to protect him or herself. This is clear in the following story from Nepal, where a young girl was trafficked to India and sold into forced sex work:

<sup>25</sup> Duty bearer respondent 4, Sannimit village, Thailand.

<sup>26</sup> Rights holder respondent 1, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

*There was a young girl who feel in love with a guy when she was studying in grade nine. That boy put her on taxi from Ruphediya and took her to Baharich and she was sold there and after being sold many times in a prostitution house, she reached Mumbai and she was 8 months old pregnant when she was rescued by [name of rescue organization], she gave birth to a baby there. They also need to be aware of what could happen to them, people must not trust a stranger easily: we need to always be aware.<sup>27</sup>*



Here, the respondent, a local government official, put forth this story as a warning example, illustrating the potential consequences of trusting a stranger and failing to “be aware”. The girl’s lack of awareness is highlighted as the problem of the story, and as the cause of her victimization. The moral of the story is that risk awareness and vigilance against deceit is an individual responsibility, and the main way to prevent trafficking.

### **Materialism and high aspirations as a cause of trafficking**

A significant number of the respondents argue that people become victims of trafficking because of their materialism and their aspirations for a wealthy life. As explained by a Thai respondent,

*The society is one of the push factors of human trafficking. Mass media usually portrays the idea of materialism including brand name bags, cell phone, luxurious goods and cars. They often talk about a luxurious and convenient lifestyle. This can stimulate people to be materialistic. Our current social context has played such a big role in pushing victims to this path.<sup>28</sup>*

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27 Duty bearer respondent 8, Raptisonari Rural Municipality, Nepal.

28 Duty bearer respondent 3, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Thus, people are susceptible to traffickers' promises of good jobs and income because of these expectations and aspirations communicated by media and culture. A Nepali respondent explain that this is compounded by economic inequalities, where the poor can readily see what a wealthy life could be like. The sense of deprivation this creates is then exploited by traffickers:

*When they see the economic high class people with better clothes, jewelleries, they dream for it. The trafficker persuade them that they can also be like that and live a luxurious life: "listen to me, look at others, they are living good lives, lifestyle, their children studying in boarding schools, wearing jewelleries".<sup>29</sup>*

However, many respondents argue that too high aspirations and ambitions are not just an aspect of poor people's frustration over inequality: rich and poor alike are described as vulnerable to trafficking because their judgement is clouded by greed. As this Cambodian respondent explain, rich people are therefore also tricked by traffickers:

*People want to have more and more properties. Rich people also want more and more properties, and they are tricked too. Rich people who have daughters seek to get them married with foreigners, so that she can go to abroad. But the family is tricked.<sup>30</sup>*

Relatedly, many respondents argue that the wish to be wealthy and have money and status is motivating both victims and traffickers. Answering a question about the causes of trafficking, a Thai villager immediately claim that "people are too lazy to work and do not want to listen to other people, so it is quite easy for them to be deceived by traffickers offering such an amount of money or a good job".<sup>31</sup> Modern society, its materialism and the greed and aspirations it gives rise to is thereby described as a key driving force of human trafficking: "the society has changed: we worship money more than anything".<sup>32</sup> This perception of modernity and materialism as a source of immorality and social problems are clearly articulated in the following anecdote. Here, a Thai social worker relates a story of a visit to a remote and isolated hill tribe village:

*They do not have electricity in the villages. Some of them [the children] did not even have shoes to wear. They did not have any source of media in their communities. If we look at it from a different angle, it might actually be great for them. The children are not convinced by mass media. The villagers seem to be satisfied with their way of life. They might even be less at risk than kids in the city [...] Their way of life was so simple. They can peacefully live together in their community.<sup>33</sup>*

29 Duty bearer respondent 1, Kanchan Rural Municipality, Nepal.

30 Duty bearer respondent 1 and 2, Svay Rieng District, Cambodia.

31 Rights holder respondent 6, Sannimit village, Thailand.

32 Civil society respondent 1, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

33 Duty bearer respondent 3, Chiang Mai, Thailand

In this account a traditional, simple lifestyle is elevated as a positive alternative to modern, urban life, and the respondent argues that hill tribe village children may even be protected from trafficking by their isolation in remote mountain villages. While this interpretation is revealing the ideas underlying the perception that trafficking is caused by modernity's aspirations for material wealth, it is hardly consistent with reality. It is well documented that marginalized hill tribe communities in Thailand are at a higher risk of human trafficking than the majority population (Jones, King and Edwards 2018, Davis, Glotfelty and Miles 2017).

Notably, this theme is prominent in the data from Thailand and Cambodia, and also present in the data from Nepal. In India and Bangladesh, the idea that victims are motivated by greed or high material aspirations are not articulated. One explanation for this difference may be related to the level of economic development of these locations. Respondents from Bangladesh and India are generally very poor, and may be more prone to relate victims' actions to survival than to ambitions for material wealth or status. On the other hand, the same could be said about the rural locations in Cambodia and Nepal, so other factors certainly also play a role.

The view that victims are trafficked because they are lazy, greedy, or overly ambitious can easily lead to victim blaming, as victims are seen as essentially being immoral and irresponsible and therefore to blame for their situation. Focusing on circumstances around the victims' decisions to accept traffickers' offers may also draw attention away from deeper, structural causes of trafficking. This will be further discussed in the concluding section of the report.

### **Weak policy and law enforcement as a cause of trafficking**

A fourth cause of trafficking that is frequently brought up by respondents across the study locations is weak policies and law enforcement, compounded by corruption. A prominent example comes from Nepal. The Nepal-India border is weakly monitored and regulated: citizens of Nepal and India can cross without identity documents at any of 22 checkpoints along the 1,850 kilometer long border (United Mission to Nepal 2016, Hudlow 2015). This facilitates trafficking across this border, as many Nepali respondents relate. The open border create conducive conditions for traffickers to operate: "they target people from Nepal because of the open border and easy rules, and also corrupted authorities".<sup>34</sup> Lack of regulation and law enforcement is reportedly intertwined with corruption, where people in positions of influence gain from human trafficking: "even the political leaders can also be engaged in this process, bureaucrats from higher positions".<sup>35</sup>

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34 Duty bearer respondent 8, Raptisonari Rural Municipality, Nepal.

35 Civil society respondent 3, Kanchan Rural Municipality, Nepal.



However, while Nepal's open border is a rather specific example, the combined effect of weak governance and law enforcement and corruption is described by respondents from other locations as well. For example, a civil society respondent from Cambodia shares the following view:

*I like to see law enforcement. When traffickers are caught, they should be sentenced. But now the police don't see human trafficking as a bad crime, and instead the police ignore the cases. The government says, "please report when you have a case". But people don't trust them because of corruption.<sup>36</sup>*

Thus, respondents frequently argue that trafficking is enabled and facilitated by corruption and involvement of people at influential positions. A local official from Thailand illustrates this point with a recent example:

*There was news that influential people were arrested while receiving service at a massage parlour. They bought sex from little girls. It was a big human trafficking case. Then there was a great numbers of news like this. It is normal but the problem will not end. The implementation and legal consequence isn't strong enough to handle the issue especially when the perpetrators are senior officers.<sup>37</sup>*

The link between corruption and human trafficking has been well documented by international organizations (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime 2011, Transparency International 2011). The fact that local respondents are well aware of this link, and can support their perceptions with local examples, further strengthens the finding that people in local communities have a generally high level of awareness of what human trafficking is, and how it takes place in their local contexts.

## **What are the specific vulnerabilities and risks for children and youth?**

In interviews from all studied locations, children and youth are frequently singled out as especially vulnerable to human trafficking. They are described as easier for traffickers to deceive, and as especially vulnerable when poverty and marginalization compel children to work. In addition, interview data indicates that children are particularly affected by kidnapping, trafficking for forced begging, and organ trafficking.

### **Children and youth are easier to deceive**

Generally, children and youth are seen as easier to deceive and less able to protect themselves because of their limited life experience and risk awareness. As noted by a civil society representative from Thailand: "children are very easy to lie to; if someone tells them they will give candy, cookies and money, they suddenly believe and follow

<sup>36</sup> Civil society respondent 3, Svay Rieng Province, Cambodia.

<sup>37</sup> Duty bearer respondent 4, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

them and they are put in a van and taken somewhere”.<sup>38</sup> Further, many respondents argue that youth are particularly at risk because they are naturally curious, risk-taking and want to see the world: “they are at a certain age, they cannot manage their curiosity and their expectations, and this can lead to vulnerability. They are the ones who will fall victim to trafficking”.<sup>39</sup> In Thailand in particular, but also Cambodia and Nepal, respondents also argue that desires for material wealth and status in combination with peer pressure is a key factor making youth vulnerable to trafficking:

Teenagers are risky. They are normally from poor family but they are extravagant. They want to have things like others do. They see that they friends are making a lot of money. They all want to have phone and luxurious things.<sup>40</sup>

## Poverty and child labour

In addition, children are described as especially vulnerable when they are orphaned or when families cannot care for them because of poverty or marginalization:

*The children can be street-living kids. They are probably from hill tribe villages in the mountains. Their parents might be separated. Some of them ran away from home. Some of them are drug users. They might not be in school but being with friends instead. These children can be at risk.*<sup>41</sup>

In India, a recurrent narrative is that because of family poverty, children cannot go to school but are compelled to work. Thereby they become vulnerable to smugglers and recruited into forced labour in factories in Bhadohi. As a civil society representative explains,

*Children are being smuggled from and to Bhadohi and sold at some place through brokers. And they are being exploited there and they are separated from their families and the situation is inhuman for those who are there [...] In another incident there was a kid in the [carpet] factory of Bhadohi for about 11 years. We got his information that he used to run the trolley in the factory. He told us that there are many children here in the factory.*<sup>42</sup>

One common method of recruitment, the respondent continues, is to promise poor parents to take their children to be educated, thus relieving the parents of the financial burden to care for them and giving the children the opportunity to be educated. Instead, traffickers sell them into factory work. After a group of children were rescued from a factory, “they told us that a relative brought them to teach

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38 Civil society respondent 3, Sannimit village, Thailand.

39 Civil society respondent 1, Kanchan Rural Municipality, Nepal.

40 Civil society respondent 2, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

41 Rights holder respondent 7, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

42 Civil society respondent 2, Bhadohi, India.

them at a Madrasa [Muslim school] but left them at the factory in Bhadohi”.<sup>43</sup>

Due to poverty, families may feel that they have no choice but to let children work, for example as domestic help in more wealthy households. However, child domestic workers are at a high risk of abuse, and may fall prey to traffickers. One example from Nepal illustrates this:

*It was a poor household, they also had a daughter. Due to poverty, they made their daughter do household work in another’s home. After years of household work at that home when the child was also grown up, then that child vanished from there.*<sup>44</sup>

This story resonates with the results of a recent study on perceptions on human trafficking in Cambodia (International Cooperation Cambodia 2016, 34). This study found that people did not associate practices such as allowing a child to live and work in the home of a wealthy relative or acquaintance and receive money in return with human trafficking, but considered it a culturally acceptable form of exchange. Clearly, such cultural norms may cause parents to underestimate the risks for exploitation that they are exposing their children to in such cases.

A law enforcement officer from Thailand relates another example, which demonstrates how child labour motivated by poverty can make children vulnerable to further abuse:

*We were invited to search for any illegal objects and evidence in the Juvenile Detention Center. A girl shared with me about her exploitation and abuse. She was recruited to be a waitress in a restaurant. Then she was forced to provide sexual services to customers. Then she was arrested.*<sup>45</sup>

Thus, when working as a waitress this young girl was forcibly recruited into prostitution. These examples show that child labour frequently places children at risk of being trafficked and abused.

## **Kidnapping, forced begging, and organ trafficking**

Data from all locations indicate that children are exploited in specific ways that do not affect adults to the same extent. Firstly, it is primarily children that are mentioned as victims in trafficking cases where kidnapping, rather than deceit or persuasion, is used as method of recruitment. A respondent originating from a town along the Thailand-Myanmar border describes child kidnappings as a major problem in the area: “there is always a child missing in my community. Even on my latest visit, there was

43 Civil society respondent 2, Bhadohi, India.

44 Civil society respondent 3, Kanchan Rural Municipality, Nepal.

45 Duty bearer respondent 1, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

a child missing”.<sup>46</sup> Further, this respondent tells of a case where the police managed to stop a child kidnapping:

*When there was a child kidnapping, the police set up a checkpoint. They were able to stop two suspected vehicles. The first one was a minivan with dark sun screen film while another one was a red car with evidence. They were only six or seven years old, a boy and a girl. They might have been siblings. They were very sad and crying. If you were there and saw what I saw, you would be very upset. I wanted to help them too. The children were tied and gaged. If they weren't forced, why they would they be gaged, right?<sup>47</sup>*



A respondent from Bangladesh also testifies to the frequent occurrence of child kidnappings, describing it as one of the major forms of trafficking affecting his community:

*Kidnapping of children is the type of trafficking that happened in our society. For harvesting different organs of children below about eight years of age, the traffickers traffic the children and acquire organ of the children accordingly. In case of children over 8-10 years old, traffickers bring them to towns and cities to work.<sup>48</sup>*

Here, trafficking for purposes of organ harvesting is highlighted as one form of trafficking affecting children. In fact, trafficking related to organ trade is in all locations mentioned almost exclusively in relation to children. Thus, this appears to be a form of trafficking that children are especially vulnerable to in comparison with adults.

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46 Rights holder respondent 5, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

47 Rights holder respondent 5, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

48 Rights holder respondent 1, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Another form of exploitation that seems to be specific for children is forced begging. For example, many respondents from Cambodia give examples of children that have been taken to Vietnam or Thailand to beg. Two local government officials relate that disabled children are particularly at risk in this regard, “because people will feel pity on them if they are beggars. Traffickers convince parents to take their children along, but instead send them to Thailand to beg.”<sup>49</sup> Sometimes, as this example illustrates, traffickers convince parents to let them take their children with them with false promises. However, as a village leader emphasizes, sometimes the parents themselves take their children abroad to beg out of poverty and desperation: “Parents are traffickers too, because they use their children as beggars. Parents do that because they are poor and need a job and an income.”<sup>50</sup> The perception that children in particular are targeted by trafficking for forced begging is confirmed in a study of 446 males trafficked in the greater Mekong region. Out of these, only those below the age of 18 were trafficked for forced begging (Pocock et al 2016).

Thus, the analysis of local perceptions and experiences of human trafficking clearly demonstrates that children and youth are seen as particularly at risk, and are exploited and abused in specific ways compared to adults. The indications that children are particularly targeted by trafficking for forced begging and for harvesting of organs should be further investigated. Exploring how these forms of trafficking operate in specific national and local contexts is essential to effective protection of children and prevention of human trafficking. This is especially important as it has been demonstrated that very few anti-trafficking NGOs work with these types of trafficking (Heiss and Kelley 2017, 238). To conclude this section, it is clear that in line with available data and estimates that indicate that children constitute a significant share of trafficking victims in Asia (International Labour Organization 2017, United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime 2016), these findings indicate that a particular focus on children in anti-trafficking work is warranted.

## **What are the existing local strategies for protection?**

As demonstrated above, respondents from all studied locations generally have a high level of awareness of the existence and character of human trafficking. Thus, many people have been exposed to information about the issue through various channels including personal experience, discussions about the topic, reports in the news, or anti-trafficking interventions. This is reflected in the existing strategies for protection that are described by respondents, where the single most prominent theme is a reliance on information and awareness raising to equip individuals and communities to avoid being trafficked.

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49 Duty bearer respondent 1 and 2, Svay Rieng District, Cambodia.

50 Duty bearer respondent 3, Svay Rieng District, Cambodia.

## Self-protection in families and communities

In discussions about the current local strategies for protection that exists, respondents in all locations describe examples of practices or actions aimed at preventing human trafficking. For example, a mother in Nepal explains how she advises her daughters in order to protect them from trafficking:

*I have daughters. When they are playing with their mobiles, I teach them to be cautious, not to go to unknown places. Be cautious when boys call you. Don't communicate with unknown people. We discuss in the family.<sup>51</sup>*

Social media is frequently reported to provide channels for traffickers to contact and recruit victims. In this context, this mother's concern about her daughters' online habits are key to her strategies for protecting them.

Further, respondents from Thailand also exemplify how conversations within the family and community are important for making people aware of the risk of human trafficking and thereby be able to protect themselves. One respondent reports that "in my hometown, there was a conversation about child protection and how to take good care of them. Adults should always take responsibility for their children, otherwise it can lead to children going missing".<sup>52</sup> Another respondent emphasizes the role of local leaders and NGOs in sharing information and creating awareness: "local leaders and the Thai-Lahu Foundation [a local NGO] give us warnings to be careful about this issue. We are also talking sometimes when we watch TV and hear from other people".<sup>53</sup>

## Interventions by local authorities and NGOs

Respondents from India and Bangladesh further relate examples of civil society interventions to raise public awareness about human trafficking, such as public rallies and training sessions. Generally, NGOs are most often mentioned as the agents of anti-trafficking efforts, which is consistent with research findings on the centrality of NGOs in anti-trafficking work (Heiss and Kelley 2017, Limoncelli 2016). This is reflected in the account of a Nepali respondent below. However, this respondent also emphasizes the limited reach of NGOs and the need for more to be done to comprehensively address human trafficking:

*There are some NGOs that are trying to address this issue. There has been a couple of awareness trainings and maybe some awareness campaigns. They do not have enough manpower to reach everywhere so they also need to have manpower to address this problem. I hope everyone will take this more seriously to address this big problem.<sup>54</sup>*

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51 Rights holder respondent 1, Kanchan Rural Municipality, Nepal.

52 Rights holder respondent 5, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

53 Civil society respondent 1, Sannimit village, Thailand.

54 Rights holder respondent 6, Raptisonari Rural Municipality, Nepal.

With regards to respondents' views on current efforts to address human trafficking, the case of Cambodia stands out. While about half of the respondents in other locations give examples of existing strategies, all respondents in Cambodia provide detailed and unanimous accounts of a number of protective strategies and mechanisms. A local government official provides a summary:

*Every month the Commune Council goes to each village, to promote the 9 principles of safety<sup>55</sup> in the village. Some promotion is also done at pagodas during holidays, which is useful because many people attend these religious events. We have made a list of useful phone numbers. We have a village committee in each village, which can help to report human trafficking cases. Members of these committees are the village leader, parents, Commune Committee for Women and Children administrator, and Buddhist leaders.<sup>56</sup>*

The strategies mentioned here recur in the narratives of respondents from all categories, and thus appears to be well established and widely known. This contrasts with all other locations, where respondents in the rights holder category frequently report that they do not know what various authorities are doing about human trafficking, or that they do not believe that government, police or civil society are doing anything to address the issue. Thus, the seemingly more sustained and consistent efforts to spread information, raise public awareness and coordinate between various stakeholders that are in place in Svay Rieng province in Cambodia may provide important lessons that can be useful in other contexts. In addition, respondents in Cambodia believe that these strategies have indeed contributed to reduce human trafficking in the area: “human trafficking was high in the early years of the 2000s. But now there is less trafficking because of law enforcement and awareness raising”.<sup>57</sup>

## **A strong focus on information and awareness**

Notably, existing strategies that are mentioned in all locations, including in Cambodia, overwhelmingly focus on raising awareness about human trafficking. While information and risk awareness is key to enabling people to protect themselves and avoid being deceived by traffickers, these strategies have no ambition or potential to change the root causes of trafficking that are discussed above, such as poverty, inequality and inadequate social safety nets. As such strategies focusing on awareness target the symptom of human trafficking while leaving its deeper, structural causes untouched. In this context, the frequently expressed sentiment that the issue of human trafficking is not given enough attention and that not enough is being done to address it can be

55 The 9 principles of safety refers to the Village – Commune Safe Policy of Cambodia. It is an executive edict by the Ministry of Interior, issued in 2010, with the purpose of reducing crime at the local level in Cambodia. See Cambodian Center for Human Rights (2018) for more information.

56 Duty bearer respondent 1 and 2, Svay Rieng District, Cambodia.

57 Duty bearer respondent 1 and 2, Svay Rieng District, Cambodia. Several reports suggest that trafficking in Cambodia may have decreased. Sexual exploitation of children (International Justice Mission 2013) and trafficking from Cambodia to Thailand (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime 2017) have reportedly gone down in recent years.

interpreted as a critique of failures to achieve structural change that undermines the root causes of trafficking. While this critique is implied rather than clearly articulated, rights holders do frequently state that government authorities and law enforcement agencies should more comprehensively work to address trafficking. Moreover, the fact that people are unaware of the policies and strategies of local authorities may also indicate that enhanced visibility and coordination is needed. Thus, the fact that many respondents feel that not enough is being done, despite demonstrating a high level of awareness and citing examples of existing awareness raising strategies, can be seen as a call for political leadership and accountability on this issue. This will be further discussed below.

## **What should be done to reduce human trafficking?**

Strategies for reducing human trafficking suggested by respondents fall in three categories. First, actions to create awareness so that people can protect themselves and not be deceived by traffickers is by far the most frequently mentioned approach to reduce trafficking. Second, stronger government action to implement policies and enforce laws is highlighted. Third, poverty reduction and job creation are brought up as key to reduce trafficking.

### **Awareness raising**

In interviews from all seven study locations, various actions to increase awareness of human trafficking is the suggested solution that is clearly most often mentioned. As discussed above, lack of awareness is one of the two most prominent explanations of why trafficking occurs. From this, it follows that increasing awareness is seen as a key strategy to address to human trafficking. Interestingly however, the theme of awareness is far more dominant in accounts about solutions to trafficking than in comments about the causes of trafficking. When asked about their views on how human trafficking can be reduced, strategies for raising awareness seems to be what comes to mind for the absolute majority of respondents. The following account from Thailand is illustrative:

*We as parents or leaders have to gather our villagers and teach all children, young and adults not to believe whatever the strangers tell and offer anything they could and give warning for that. Each one of our villagers, leaders are all responsible to be aware of this case to prevent from this problem.<sup>58</sup>*

As this quotation exemplifies, preventing trafficking is often described as an individual responsibility: people need to be aware and make sure traffickers cannot deceive them. This view is also clearly articulated by a Cambodian civil society respondent: “individuals should build their own knowledge about human trafficking by learning from others, and then bring this knowledge to their family [...] when individuals and

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58 Rights holder respondent 6, Sannimit village, Thailand.



families understand well, it will reduce trafficking in the community.”<sup>59</sup> Along the same lines, a Nepali villager emphasizes that awareness campaigns should be held by government and civil society, but that it is the responsibility of people themselves to take up this knowledge: “the community people should internalize it. They should also show interest.”<sup>60</sup>



Thus, although NGOs are often mentioned as key agents implementing awareness raising activities, the responsibility to prevent human trafficking by being aware is to a high extent placed on individuals and families. Individuals should make sure they are aware and can avoid being trafficked, and parents should educate their children. As emphasized by a respondent from Thailand, adequate parental guidance is not only important to make children aware of the risk of trafficking, but to instil morality: “I think a family is a foundation. Parents need to educate children. They need to teach children the moral and create a good mind set for children.”<sup>61</sup> The sentiment that appropriate moral education of children will prevent trafficking is closely linked to the idea that people become victims because they are too materialistic and ambitious. Moral education is, in this context, emphasized as a way of teaching children modesty and humility: “we have to stay humble: sufficiency like in the old society”.<sup>62</sup> As discussed above, this interpretation of the causes and solutions to trafficking is most prevalent in Thailand, Cambodia and Nepal, but rarely visible in the data from India and Bangladesh. Instead, in India and Bangladesh, the need for increased awareness is more often framed as one aspect of a comprehensive package of anti-trafficking strategies:

*The local government and other community leaders can play an important role to create awareness among the people by organizing rallies, advertisement in the*

59 Civil society respondent 3, Svay Rieng District, Cambodia.

60 Rights holder respondent 1, Kanchan Rural Municipality, Nepal.

61 Civil society respondent 4, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

62 Civil society respondent 1, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

*television channels, disseminate information through billboards, posters, and leaflets. Besides this, the government should strengthen the capacity of the judiciary and law enforcement officials to manage trafficking cases through organizing training, court ward meetings, and dialogue with the community leaders. Further, poverty eradication programs should be started among the poor community people to reduce the frequency of trafficking cases.*<sup>63</sup>

Here, a Bangladeshi local government official mentions awareness raising activities alongside efforts to strengthen legal responses, and to reduce poverty. These strategies are further discussed below.

### **Stronger policy and law enforcement**

The second most prominent theme among suggested strategies to reduce trafficking are efforts to improve government responses through implementation of policies, rules and regulations, and law enforcement. Respondents frequently express that policies and rules are not effective in deterring traffickers, who knows that prosecution and punishment is not likely. As explained by a Thai villager, this impedes any efforts at reducing the problem: “as we are living in Thailand it cannot be reduced with only our present policies and rules, because people [traffickers] realize that the policy is not so strict and not strong enough. So they are not afraid of them”.<sup>64</sup> A Nepali respondent agrees, stating that the “government should take more initiative to stop it [human trafficking] with more strict rules and regulations”.<sup>65</sup> In Nepal, calls for stricter rules and government regulation particularly applies to the administration of Nepal’s border with India: as long as the open border in Nepal exists, this problem will not be completely reduced or minimized. At least [the government should] control though compulsory checking of identity card when crossing the border”.<sup>66</sup>

Calls for stronger government action against human trafficking is by many respondents related to the issue of corruption discussed above. Thus, corruption must be curbed if governments are to act more decisively to reduce trafficking. As noted, people commonly report that they believe public officials to be involved in and benefit from human trafficking. As argued by a Cambodian respondent, corruption and poor government performance makes people doubt whether authorities can be trusted, being unsure of whether they will be helped or further victimized them if they give information about human trafficking to local authorities:

*When a case happens, people should know where they should go for help. Also, the government should organize so that any people can get help when human trafficking happens. Furthermore, cases should be kept confidential when reported, and not*

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63 Duty bearer respondent 1, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

64 Rights holder respondent 6, Sannimit village, Thailand.

65 Rights holder respondent 3, Raptisonari Rural Municipality, Nepal.

66 Duty bearer respondent 2, Kanchan Rural Municipality, Nepal.

*shared to other people in the community, for example to the rich people. Then people will feel something bad can happen to them later, which they seek to avoid: and hence they choose not to report their human trafficking case.*<sup>67</sup>

Thus, while awareness raising and self-protection appears to be the most commonly used and promoted anti-trafficking strategy in local communities, there is clearly also a demand for stronger government action to address human trafficking through political and legal means.

## **Poverty reduction and job creation**

Thirdly, poverty reduction and job creation are mentioned as important for reducing trafficking. Notably however, only about half of the respondents mention strategies along these lines. This is noteworthy given that all respondents state that they see poverty as a cause of trafficking. Thus, while all respondents believe poverty causes trafficking, only half of them suggests poverty reduction as a way to address it. This puzzle will be further explored in the concluding discussion section of the report.

Respondents who suggest poverty reduction and job opportunities as strategies to reduce trafficking argue that this will give poor and marginalized people options for survival that does not require migration with the help of a trafficker. Further, both government and NGOs are frequently mentioned as the agents who should implement such activities. For example, a Bangladeshi respondent argues that “the government must ensure economic empowerment for the poor community so that the frequency of human trafficking can be reduced in the community. The NGOs can involve the poor community people in income generating activities and training programs”.<sup>68</sup> A Thai respondent states that local government and NGOs should cooperate and “work in teams to create jobs or handicrafts both for men and women so that they can work for their own living”.<sup>69</sup>

In India, where child labour generally and trafficking of children for forced labour specifically constitute a major issue, respondents argue that poverty reduction and income opportunities for parents are key to reducing child labour and trafficking of children.

In child labour, where the guardians forces the kids to join them, we can solve their problems by helping them financially and by making them self-reliant through training. By providing employment and by making them aware of several government schemes which can be helpful for them. So that they can fetch employment themselves and their kids do not have to work anymore. Because if the parents earn sufficient money then

<sup>67</sup> Civil society respondent 4, Svay Rieng District, Cambodia.

<sup>68</sup> Duty bearer respondent 2, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

<sup>69</sup> Duty bearer respondent 4, Sannimit village, Thailand.

there is no need for their small children to work”.<sup>70</sup>

Notably, this respondent also raises the need for information about existing efforts, such as government poverty reduction programmes, to reach the people who are intended to benefit from them. This suggests that anti-trafficking work could benefit from a greater focus on connecting vulnerable communities with the services and initiatives that already exist, and aim to address the conditions of vulnerability that push people to migrate or accept job offers in unsafe ways.

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70 Civil society respondent 3, Bhadohi, India.

## **Concluding discussion**

This concluding section discusses the implications of the findings presented above, seeking to draw out the main lessons for anti-trafficking work than can be learnt from the study. Thereby this section responds to the second part of the aim of the study: “to analyze how these local experiences and perspectives can add value in designing better preventive strategies.”

### **Understanding the awareness paradox**

The selection of respondents for this study comprises people from a great variety of life situations and social positions in seven local contexts in five countries in South and South-East Asia. Yet, across the sample, ideas about awareness are central to how people understand the issue of human trafficking. Lack of awareness is repeatedly cited as the explanation for why people are trafficked, and activities to increase awareness is the clearly most prominent avenue for combating human trafficking that is suggested by respondents. Moreover, the vast majority of currently existing local anti-trafficking strategies and mechanisms described by respondents focus on information and awareness raising. At the same time however, the results show that people do have a generally high degree of awareness about what human trafficking is, how it happens, and what they can do as individuals to protect themselves. These findings present a paradox: if people are already aware, why is lack of awareness described as the reason people are trafficked, and why is more awareness suggested as the main way to reduce human trafficking? How can this paradox be understood?

There are several possible explanations for these paradoxical findings. Firstly, as many respondents give examples of awareness raising activities and campaigns in their communities, it is reasonable to conclude that people in the communities where data was collected have been exposed to a fair amount of such projects and strategies. This may have contributed to raising the level of awareness, thus testifying to the success of such activities. In addition, being exposed to awareness raising activities may also contribute to condition people to think of these when considering how trafficking could be reduced. Thus, strategies of a type that people have seen examples of may quite naturally be the first to come to mind. Further, this explanation is plausible given that several comprehensive surveys of anti-trafficking NGOs has demonstrated that the most common type of anti-trafficking activities that NGOs engage in are different forms of education and public awareness raising (Heiss and Kelley 2017, Limoncelli 2016).

Secondly, the centrality of awareness reveals a focus on causes and solutions of trafficking at the individual level: individuals are trafficked because they are not aware, and thus trafficking could be reduced if individuals were aware and could avoid being deceived. From a position at the local level, explanations at the individual level may be easier to grasp than those focusing on broader structural dynamics. The behaviour and decisions of individuals are tangible and concrete factors that are readily visible at the

local level. The dynamics and causes of structural factors such as poverty, inequality and unemployment often lies beyond the local, and may be perceived as immobile and beyond reach. The link between an individual's decision to accept a trafficker's offer and her subsequent exploitation is very direct; but the links to the wider socio-economic structures that created her poverty and marginalization are not as readily visible.

This may explain another paradox in the study's findings. As noted above, all respondents did mention poverty as a cause of trafficking, while almost all also mentioned lack of awareness. In contrast, when discussing solutions to trafficking, all respondents suggested awareness raising strategies but less than half suggested strategies aiming to change structural causes of trafficking, such as poverty reduction or job creation. Thus, while people are aware that poverty and inequality are causes of human trafficking, it appears to be more difficult to imagine how such structures could be changed in order to reduce trafficking.

## **The limits of a focus on awareness**

Clearly, having information about human trafficking is important, as it enables individuals to accurately assess risks and protect themselves. However, a strong emphasis on individuals' level of awareness as cause of and solution to human trafficking also has significant limitations and problematic effects. Awareness raising in itself does not contribute to change any of the root causes of trafficking, such as poverty, inequality, unemployment or poor governance and law enforcement. On the contrary, a focus on awareness without an equally strong focus on structural and institutional change shifts responsibility to individuals at risk to avoid trafficking, rather than governing authorities to address structural causes and protect human rights. While NGOs and local government authorities engaging in awareness raising no doubt have good intentions, they nonetheless risk reinforcing an individualist understanding of human trafficking where rights holders themselves are responsible for avoiding being trafficked, and victims are indirectly blamed for their exploitation: had they only been aware, it would not have happened. This form of victim blaming is reinforced when victims are thought to be tricked into trafficking because they were overly materialistic, greedy or ambitious, as exemplified in this report.

At the same time, the perception that victims are trafficked because they lacked awareness underestimates their agency. This point has been made by researchers criticizing the Trafficking Protocol, arguing that its emphasis on a criminal justice perspective ignores the socio-economic factors that make people willing to risk migration or work under unsafe or illegal conditions. For example, studies of trafficking of Burmese women for forced marriage to Chinese men have shown that armed conflict, poverty and gender inequality in Myanmar for many women makes migration into an uncertain fate in China seem like their best option (Hackney 2015, Kamler 2015). Thus, these women are not naïve, hapless victims but rational agents seeking to make the best available choice in

extremely difficult circumstances. While none of the locations studied here are directly affected by armed conflict, there are many other factors that put people in positions where a trafficker's offer may seem like the best chance for survival or for a decent life, despite people being fully aware of the risks.

Relatedly, an understanding of human trafficking centered around victims' awareness, or lack thereof, fails to understand why people become involved as traffickers, brokers and recruiters. Rather, it produces an image of traffickers as bad or evil people deceiving good, but ignorant, people. As argued in a study of anti-trafficking NGOs in Thailand, this polarized narrative presents trafficking as a story with clear victims and villains, but fails to respond to the complexities of human trafficking (Jones, King and Edwards 2018). In reality, the boundary between victims and "villains" is far less distinct. As discussed above, it is well documented that traffickers often share the same background as their victims. The findings of this study shows that people in the studied locations primarily see traffickers as people close to or from within the community or even family. Several examples above illustrate that victims of trafficking sometimes become traffickers themselves. Further, decisions to become a trafficker are often driven by a need to survive and make a decent living in constraining circumstances, just like victims' decisions to migrate.

## **From individual responsibility to political accountability**

The findings of this study demonstrate that what is needed for more effective prevention of human trafficking in communities like the ones included here is not simply more information or more awarenessraising campaigns. Further, the discussion has highlighted the significant limitations and problematic effects of an emphasis on awareness raising without corresponding efforts in pursuit of structural and institutional change. In particular, a focus on awareness places the emphasis of anti-trafficking efforts at the individual level and fails to engage with the root causes of human trafficking. In order to move the fight against human trafficking forward, this report suggests that increased efforts to address structural and institutional conditions that make people vulnerable to human trafficking are needed. Further, the emphasis of awareness and information activities could fruitfully be redirected towards a focus on root causes of human trafficking and on the roles and responsibilities of governing authorities in combating it. Awareness raising on these topics, rather than about what human trafficking is, can heighten people's understanding of the broader socio-economic dynamics of human trafficking and empower them to demand political action and accountability in relation to governing authorities. Further, it is suggested that a rights-based approach constitutes a useful framework for moving in this direction (UN Development Group – Human Rights Working Group 2018, Swedish Mission Council 2015).

A central principle in a rights-based approach is to prioritize the participation of stakeholders, and particularly rights holders, in project design and implementation. This principle is central to increase anti-trafficking efforts focusing on safeguarding human rights and human security, addressing root causes such as poverty, inequality and unemployment through locally appropriate interventions. Obviously, there are many aspects of these root causes that lies beyond the reach of NGOs or local government authorities working at the local level. Nevertheless, there is much that can be done by these stakeholders in response to local situations and needs. Crucially, this requires careful analysis and consultation with local people in a variety of social positions. For example, interventions could focus on poverty reduction and job creation through skills-training and small business schemes, and should be designed and targeted based on an analysis of how vulnerabilities to human trafficking are distributed in a particular context. For example, where child labour is prevalent, analysing the causes and social distribution of child labour and addressing the factors that compel children to work is a key avenue for preventing human trafficking.

Working with local development and poverty reduction to prevent human trafficking makes it possible to simultaneously reach potential victims of trafficking and potential traffickers. Such strategies focus on changing the conditions that make people see no other option than either to accept a trafficker's offer, or to become a trafficker. Thus, the problem of human trafficking is approached in a multidimensional way, without reproducing polarized and unhelpful representations of victims and villains. Further, strategies for policy advocacy targeting duty bearers should be developed, calling for policy change that can contribute to address root causes of human trafficking beyond the local context.

Moreover, to move beyond the individualist focus of awareness raising and better engage with structural and institutional driving forces, awareness and information activities could fruitfully be redesigned to equip rights holder to see the bigger picture and to demand political accountability. As noted above, beyond individual behaviour, respondents appear to have difficulties imagining what types of changes that could reduce human trafficking. Learning more about international and national legal frameworks and policies on human trafficking and the responsibilities of various authorities both for addressing human trafficking and for safeguarding people's human rights more broadly can empower people to claim their rights and demand political accountability in relation to duty bearers. Promoting accountability through increased dialogue between rights holders and duty bearers, where rights holders know their rights and duty bearers know and fulfil their obligations, is central to a rights-based approach.

Interventions along these lines would address a gap between the actions of duty bearers and the perspectives of rights holders identified in this study. While the material demonstrates that governments and NGOs are taking action against human trafficking, many rights holder respondent do not know or do not believe that authorities or



civil society are doing anything about the problem. This indicates that strategies for connecting rights holders and local communities better with relevant duty bearers and existing efforts would be an important contribution. However, the material also shows that rights holders are dissatisfied with current government performance and repeatedly call for government authorities to do more, for example through better policies, stricter implementation, more effective law enforcement and an end to corruption. Increasing the visibility of and knowledge about existing anti-trafficking policies and efforts, but also policies and strategies for local development and poverty reduction, enables more people to benefit from ongoing efforts. Importantly, it also gives people tools for pointing out weaknesses and holding duty bearers responsible, demanding policy change and political action addressing the root causes of human trafficking beyond the local context. Thereby the focus of local anti-trafficking work could be moved from individual responsibility to political accountability.

## **Addressing neglected victim populations and forms of trafficking**

Finally, the broad and nuanced local perceptions of human trafficking and the diversity of trafficking experiences uncovered in this study contrasts sharply with the dominant themes and ways of working that have characterized previous anti-trafficking work as well as academic research. As discussed in this report, both research and practice has disproportionately focused on female victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. While women victims and trafficking for sexual exploitation is certainly one important aspect of the problem of human trafficking, findings in this study suggests that there are victim populations and types of trafficking that may need more attention.

Firstly, although prevalence estimates are uncertain and detected case data partial, together existing data clearly suggests that men and boys constitute a significant share of trafficking victims, especially in trafficking for forced labour in sectors such as fishing and manufacturing (Pocock et al 2017). While male victims have received somewhat more attention in previous years, there is still comparatively little research as well as NGO interventions that focus on men (Russel 2018, Limoncelli 2016). Moreover, the increasing attention to male victims have primarily focused on men as victims of forced labour in industries like those mentioned above. Male victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are still largely invisible (Davis, Glotfelty and Miles 2017). The results from this study shows that local people do not generally perceive women as more vulnerable than men, but women are seen as vulnerable to trafficking for sexual exploitation and men for other forms of forced labour. The exception is the data from Chiang Mai, Thailand, which includes several male respondents that have themselves been victims of sexual exploitation. However, in the data from the other locations there is no acknowledgement that men can be victims of sexual exploitation.

Secondly, trafficking for organ harvesting and for forced begging have not received significant attention in research on human trafficking (Russel 2018), and only very few NGOs have focused specifically on these forms of trafficking in their work (Limoncelli 2016). Against this background, it is noteworthy that respondents in this study frequently mention both trafficking for organ harvesting and for forced begging. Moreover, these forms of trafficking are described as specifically affecting children. Thus there are good reasons to further explore how trafficking for these purposes manifests itself in specific local contexts, and seek to address them as relevant, particularly in projects with a focus on trafficking of children.



## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the present study, this report suggests the following recommendations. The recommendations are primarily directed to civil society and authorities that are involved in practical anti-trafficking work at the local level:

### Redirect emphasis beyond awareness

*Redirect awareness raising from general information about human trafficking towards root causes, solutions and empowering rights holder:*

#### NGOs and other parts of civil society:

- Assess the level of awareness about human trafficking in the target population (as it is probably higher than expected) and adjust interventions accordingly.
- Raise awareness about legal frameworks on human trafficking and the responsibilities of various duty bearers to combat human trafficking and protect human rights.
- Educate rights holders about the structural causes of human trafficking that are not readily visible in the local context, and mobilize people to hold authorities accountable for changing these structural causes.
- Build networks and connect rights holders in local communities with existing strategies and programs that may benefit them, for example focusing on anti-trafficking, poverty reduction, local development, and safe labour migration.
- Ensure that awareness raising materials and interventions do not place the responsibility for protection against human trafficking on individuals, and do not reinforce victim blaming.

#### Local authorities and other duty bearers:

- Assess ongoing information campaigns about human trafficking and include information to rights holders about existing programmes and strategies, and how they can benefit from them.
- Make ongoing and future anti-trafficking efforts more visible in communities, to NGOs, and to other parts of civil society to increase impact.
- Enable and encourage NGOs and other relevant actors to network and collaborate with each other and with the government on anti-trafficking efforts.

### Focus on structures

*Increase efforts to address structural and institutional conditions that make people vulnerable to human trafficking:*

#### NGOs and other parts of civil society:

- Consult with local stakeholders, especially rights holders, to learn from local

perspectives about human trafficking and create adequate and context specific interventions.

- Address the root causes to human trafficking and assess the need for contributing to poverty reduction and job creation, especially for marginalized or particularly vulnerable groups.
- Empower rights holders to hold duty bearers accountable for their obligations to reduce human trafficking.
- Develop strategies for advocacy targeting duty bearers, calling for policies and actions that address root causes of human trafficking beyond the local context.
- Design strategies to address child labour as a way of preventing human trafficking.

Local authorities and other duty bearers:

- Increase anti-trafficking efforts focusing on protecting human rights and addressing root causes such as poverty, inequality and unemployment especially for marginalized or particularly vulnerable groups.
- In particular, intensify efforts to address child labour through targeted improving livelihood opportunities and facilitating access to education.
- Create mechanisms to ensure transparency in local government and enable rights holders to hold government officials working on anti-trafficking measures accountable.

## **Identify neglected areas**

*Assess the need for and design interventions to address neglected victim populations and forms of trafficking:*

NGOs and other parts of civil society:

- Review whether current anti-trafficking efforts adequately target both women and men (e.g. are men included in interventions targeting sex trafficking victims?).
- Investigate if and how trafficking for organ harvesting and for forced begging takes place in the specific context of implementation, and design measures to address it, especially in projects focusing on trafficking of children.
- Recognize that traffickers, and potential traffickers, are part of the target community and include strategies to reach them and prevent further human trafficking.

Local authorities and other duty bearers:

- Review whether current anti-trafficking laws and efforts adequately include both women and men.
- Investigate if and how trafficking for organ harvesting and for forced begging takes place in the specific local context, and design measures to address it, especially in efforts focusing on trafficking of children.

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# Appendix A: Interview guide

**Category of respondent:**

**Name:**

**Age:**

**Gender:**

**Address:**

**Date:**

**This research is about human trafficking. When I say human trafficking, what comes to your mind?**

- How are people trafficked?
- What happens to the victims after they are trafficked?
- Do you personally know any human trafficking case? If yes, can you elaborate on how it happened? What do you think about that?
- What types of trafficking cases has mostly happened or may happen in your community?

**Why do you think that trafficking is happening?**

- What makes people vulnerable to human trafficking?
- What methods do traffickers use to convince the family and the victim?
- Why do people agree to be recruited by traffickers?
- Who is doing the trafficking? How do they become successful in human trafficking?
- Why do you think people recruit and transport other people for forced labour, commercial sexual and slavery without their will or by deceiving them?

**How can people be protected from trafficking?**

- Has the topic of HT been discussed in your community or in your family?
- Do you know of any example of how your society prevents people from being trafficked? How?
- What can an individual or a family or a community can do to protect vulnerable people from HT?
- Are there any strategies used by people in your community to prevent HT from happening?
- Does local government or other leaders in your society have any strategies to prevent HT? What do they do?
- Does local NGOs, religious associations or other citizen associations in your society have any strategies to prevent HT? What do they do?

**Which people do you think are most at risk of trafficking?**

- What types of risks can you identify in your community regarding HT? Who is more vulnerable? How and why?
- Why and how are children at risk of HT?
- Why and how are teenagers at risk of HT?
- Why and how are adults at risk of HT?

**How do you think human trafficking can be reduced?**

- What do you think should be done to reduce HT in your community?
- Who can prevent and reduce HT?
- What should the role of individuals, families, and other people in the community be?
- What should the role of local government and other leaders in your community be?
- What should the role of NGOs, religious associations and other citizen associations be?

# Appendix B: Participant information template

## INFORMATION AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are being asked to participate in a research study on “Local Perceptions on Human Trafficking in South and South East Asia” conducted by Interact Asia. The interviews will focus on respondents’ perceptions and experiences of human trafficking. Your information will be used in anti-trafficking project design, advocacy and awareness raising efforts in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Laos, Thailand and Cambodia, as well as in Sweden.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary and your information and identity will be kept confidential. The interview will only be recorded under your consent. If you understand and are interested to be part of this research, please give the verbal consent. (Clarify if they have any questions).

If you have any future questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:  
(Address) (Phone) (Email)

Respondent’s code:..... (Short form name or any code to identify respondent)

Verbal consent has been taken.

Signature:.....

Interviewer:.....

Date:.....

Research partner:.....



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