

FREEDOM COLLABORATIVE

TO END HUMAN TRAFFICKING. TOGETHER.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS: CASE STUDIES FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA

2020



Cover photo: Staff members conduct awareness trainings for communities in Cambodia. (c) Free to Shine

Freedom Collaborative was launched in 2016 as an online platform to facilitate cross-border cooperation between anti-trafficking service providers in Asia. The first forum of its kind, and now in its fifth year, Freedom Collaborative continues to support collaboration between a wide range of civil society, government, and private sector stakeholders from around the world, through tools and services for data and information sharing. We are the largest community of professionals and other activists working to end human trafficking, forced labour and exploitation globally.

Freedom Collaborative is a project operated by Liberty Shared.

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Thank you to our partners for your openness, honesty and on-going support.

This report features case studies from:



INTRODUCTION

Freedom Collaborative was launched in 2016 by Liberty Shared, with support from Chab Dai International, as an online platform for cross-border cooperation between anti-trafficking service providers in Asia. Since then, we have been excited to see the momentum it has gathered and the change it has created, and have continued to shape and improve this ambitious and independent platform for the global anti-trafficking community.

During the past four years we have passed many significant milestones and are proud that Freedom Collaborative is now the primary platform that enables anti-trafficking service providers and activists across the world to come together and share information. We have enabled stakeholders with no previous access to the community to become connected, and have provided the infrastructure for organizations of all sizes to participate in the global discussion. By sharing and highlighting the expertise of local grass-roots groups, we increase their strategic visibility in the community. By providing our frontline partners with accessible data-collection and analysis tools, we bring together data sets on exploitation activity, contextual factors, and the existing response landscape.

As we moved into 2020, the need for an information-sharing mechanism for anti-trafficking stakeholders became even more evident as the COVID-19 pandemic hit vulnerable communities and responding agencies in many ways. Much of the work begun in previous years has enabled us to adjust quickly and increase our engagement with members, to help them stay focused on delivering the support their clients need.

This case study report was produced as part of the USAID Asia Counter Trafficking in Persons program (USAID Asia CTIP), which focuses on transnational and regional challenges in the fight against human trafficking. The Freedom Collaborative platform forms a key component of the program's strategy to promote cross-border cooperation, by improving information sharing and boosting civil society engagement across selected countries in the region.

We are very grateful for the support of Winrock International and USAID in funding our project activities over the past years.

The case studies in this report document the experiences of anti-trafficking organizations that work on the frontlines in Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia, and Vietnam and illustrate Freedom Collaborative's impact on their activities. The four partners featured were chosen as inspiring examples of organizations that provide critical services directly to vulnerable communities, and also for their efforts in promoting the case for collaborating with other groups. Furthermore, these reports show the ways in which organizations have used the Freedom Collaborative platform not only to share information but also to seek out support and advice, in order to work more effectively.

Our impact is demonstrated through the changes that we have instigated: a greater overview of actors and efforts, fewer barriers to information sharing, and increased access to resources and data for frontline organizations. We are proud of our accomplishments in driving progress in the global anti-trafficking community.

All our work is made possible through our collaboration with an extraordinary group of partners and members. We are grateful for your continued support, which has allowed us to build a truly global community of organizations and activists committed to fighting human trafficking and addressing the vulnerabilities of communities. We are looking forward to making further progress on the complex problems of our sector through new thinking, new approaches and new coalitions.

Julia Macher, Director of Freedom Collaborative
Xinyi Duan, Chief Technology Officer
Duncan Jepson, Managing Director, Liberty Shared

THE COMMUNITY IN NUMBERS

4661

Anti-trafficking professionals

718

Organisation profiles

556

Frontline service providers

115

Countries

59

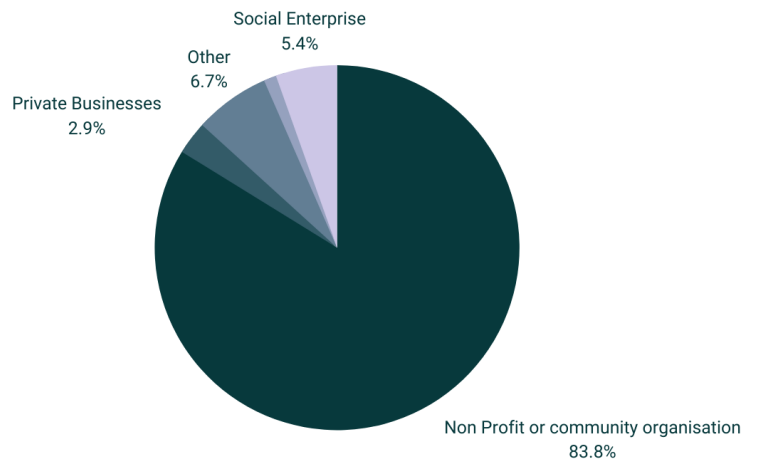
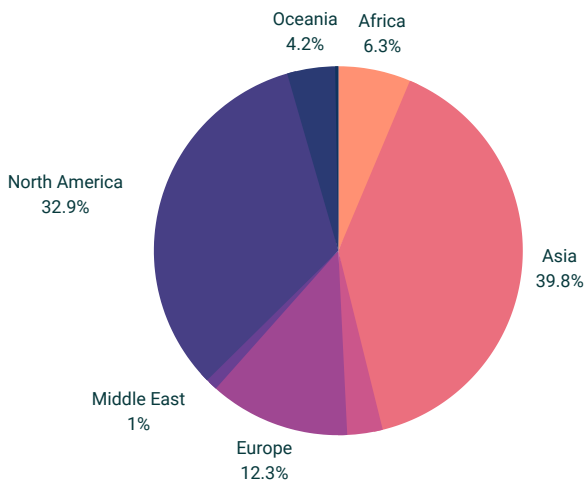
Webinars

170

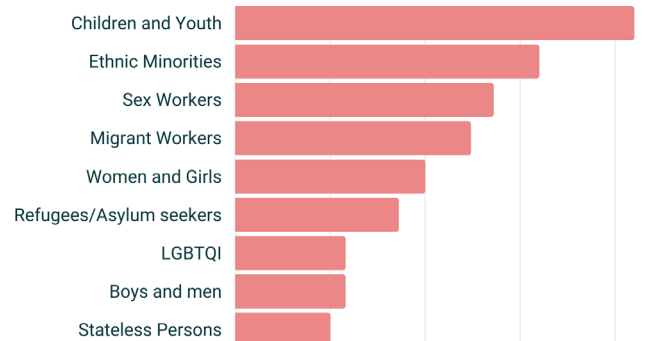
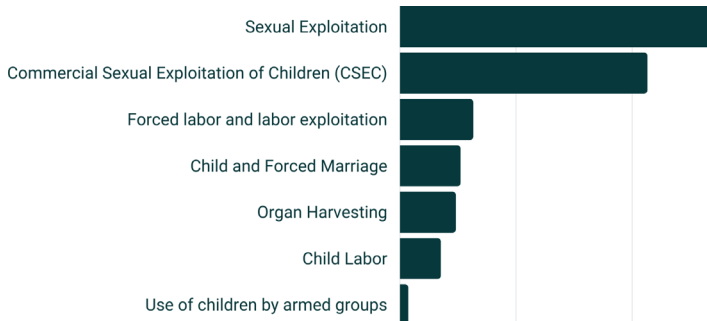
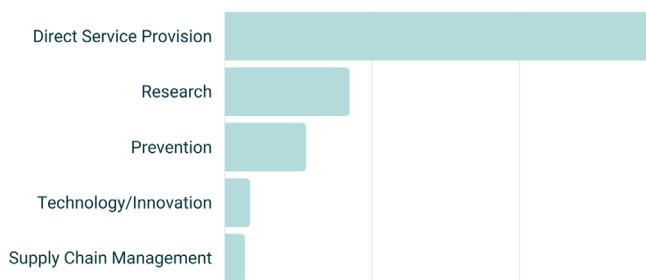
Panelists

8

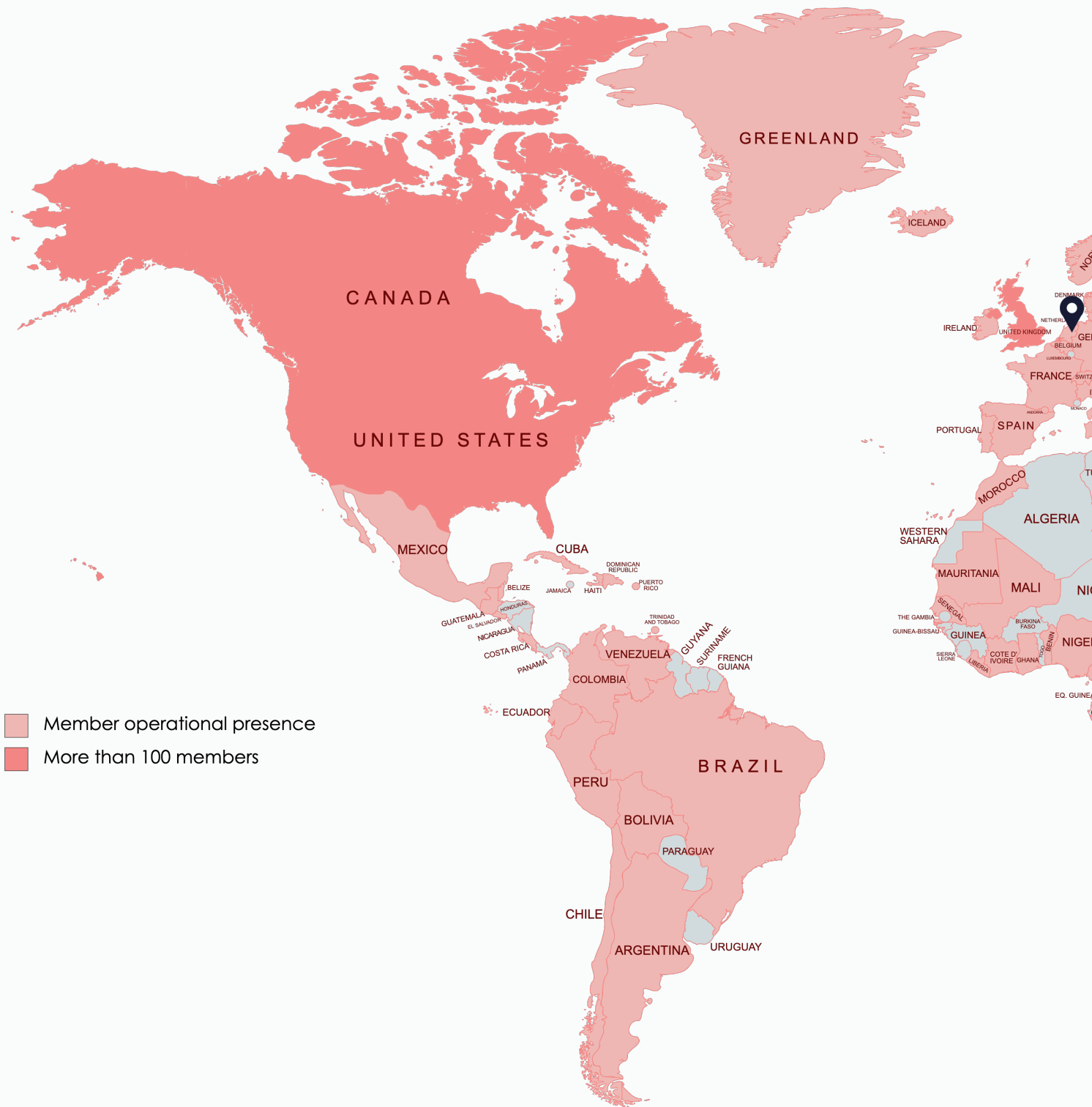
Languages



Organisations by focus



OUR GLOBAL REACH





MORE THAN 100 MEMBERS IN COUNTRY



MEMBER OPERATIONAL PRESENCE

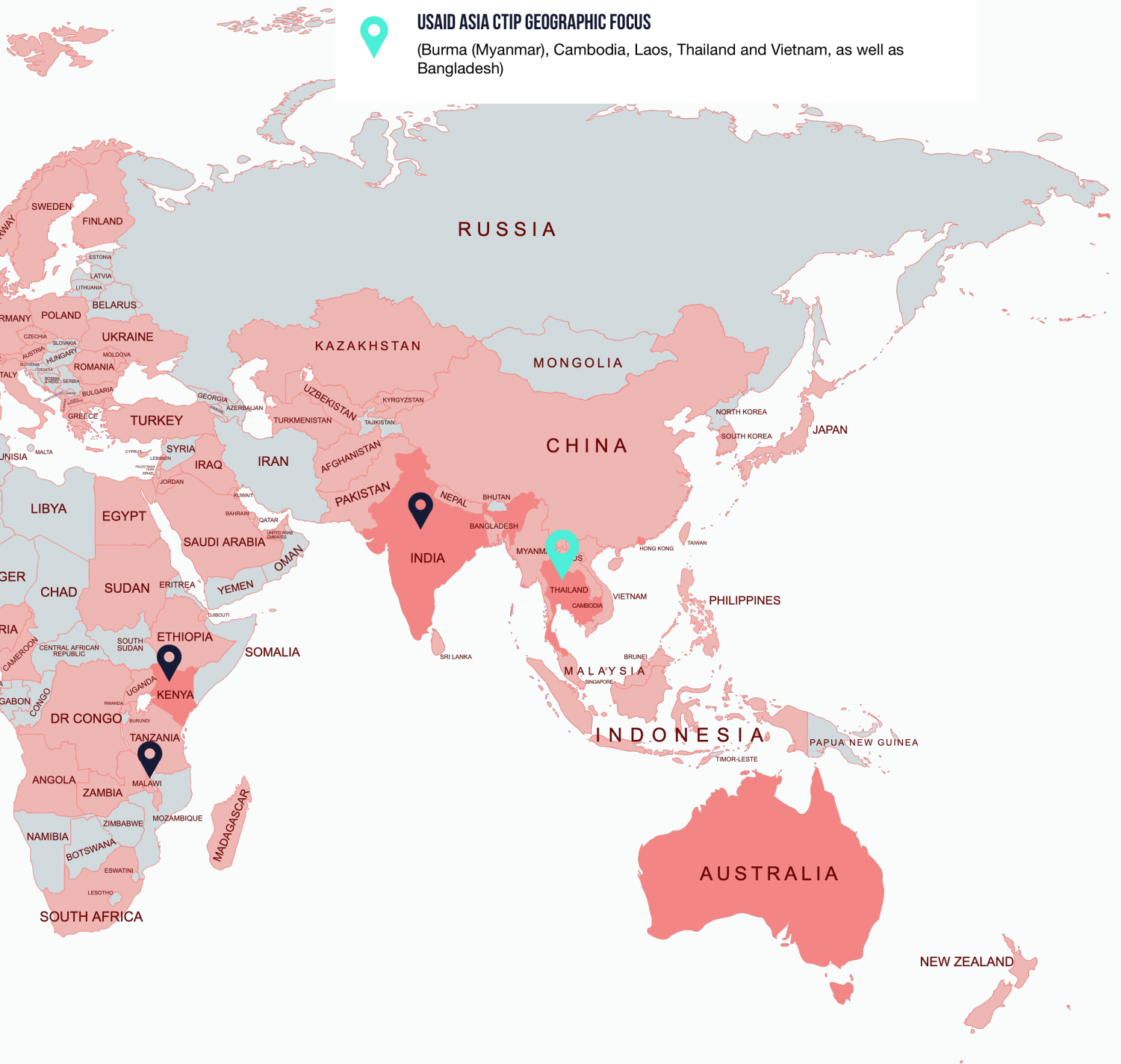


NATIONAL / REGIONAL NETWORK PARTNERSHIPS



USAID ASIA CTIP GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

(Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, as well as Bangladesh)



Preventing child trafficking and exploitation through culturally relevant programs for vulnerable children



and sharing their stories to empower creative, compassionate people to act.



The Freedom Story is a non-profit organization working to prevent child trafficking in Northern Thailand. Since 2008 it has focused on filling a critical service gap in the area of prevention through culturally relevant programs for vulnerable children, their families and communities.

The Freedom Story has been a Freedom Collaborative member since 2015 and considers the platform a critical resource for identifying trusted partners, accessing program advice, and staying up to date on developments in the field, which helps them see their work in a regional and global context.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in early 2020, they benefitted from the Freedom Collaborative Rapid Response webinars, learning what worked for other organizations and what didn't, during a time in which they were struggling to adjust their programming.

Overview of the Freedom Story

The Freedom Story was born from a documentary film on child sexual exploitation in Thailand, *The SOLD Project*, which highlighted the need for a trafficking prevention program in North Thailand. The three founders, who met during the making of the film, established the organization in 2008.

During filming, poverty, lack of education and a lack of options were identified as key drivers of child sexual exploitation in Thailand. The newly established organization aimed to prevent child trafficking by reaching at-risk youth before they needed to be rescued. By providing vulnerable Thai children and youth with scholarships and resources, they assisted them in breaking the cycle of poverty and exploitation.

Initially the organization was named *The SOLD Project* after the documentary which was very effective in driving attention towards the film – yet this was the opposite of what they were trying to accomplish. For this reason, they rebranded and renamed their organization *The Freedom Story* in 2016. The new name centers the single most important aspect of their work – the concept of freedom – and better aligns with their goal of telling stories that are truthful, nuanced, educational and empowering for their constituents.

The Freedom Story offers holistic programs with the following specific areas of focus:

1. Education and mentorship: Children in under-developed communities in Thailand have few opportunities for education but, in spite of this, they are expected to work and help support their families. Poverty and lack of education are two critical factors that put youth at high risk of forced labour or sex trafficking. The education program ensures students and families have the financial and sociopsychological resources needed to stay in education and develop the life skills required to care for themselves. The Freedom Story's scholarships cover costs and staff members mentor students and their families to ensure they have the support they need. In their resource centers, additional classes such as language, music and art are offered, and students also have access to computers.

2. Human rights: Through the organization's human rights program, students learn about human trafficking and how to safeguard themselves against it. By covering topics such as teen pregnancy, drug use, child abuse and online safety, the organization is equipping communities with the knowledge they need to protect themselves. In 2019, it expanded its reach to include Burmese migrant workers through the USAID Thailand Counter Trafficking in Persons project (Thailand CTIP). The Freedom Story informs migrant workers of their rights under Thai law, and helps them access the government services to which they are entitled, in order to decrease their risk of being trafficked for labour purposes.

3. Sustainable livelihoods: The Sustainable Development program builds on the existing skills of Freedom Story participants, and teaches them sustainable farming practices, business development and handicraft skills through training, workshops, and access to an Eco Learning Center. These projects aim to empower communities, prevent talent flight, and raise living standards to address the risk factor of poverty and keep families safe.

Reasons for joining Freedom Collaborative

Freedom Collaborative was recommended to the Freedom Story in 2015, as a highly effective resource offering access to a community of like-minded professionals; it would help them to make connections, identify partners and access helpful and relevant information.

In the group's experience, valuable partnerships and case collaboration can be very difficult to establish as, despite an overlap between services, there are differing expectations of responsibilities and levels of involvement. When The Freedom Story team began their work, they found there were many other organizations in the anti-trafficking space working on various different aspects of the movement, which made it difficult to form an overview of the situation and the services required. With so many active actors engaged in the same sphere, there also comes competition for funding and attention, and organizations easily become defensive about their work and their focus within the anti-trafficking community.

The Freedom Collaborative platform has thus proven to be an effective tool for The Freedom Story, helping them understand who is doing what in Thailand and across the region, to identify suitable partners, and to build connections across sectors. The team often recommend Freedom Collaborative to contacts as an unbiased, centralized platform for the sharing of information, the search for advice, and practical expertise. They particularly value the diversity of perspectives within the information shared and the opportunities to contribute, and they also appreciate the platform's ability to bring together professionals from all corners of the anti-trafficking space.

The ability to bring together diverse organizations around the goal of sharing and learning became particularly evident during the Freedom Collaborative Principles of Practice roundtables in Bangkok and Chiang Mai in 2018. Many different actors from Thailand participated in these events to discuss the situation on the ground, exchange observations from northern and southern Thailand, and share the lessons learned.

The Freedom Story now considers Freedom Collaborative to be a unique and much needed platform that is unparalleled in the level of resources it provides to the anti-trafficking movement. Since joining, it has benefitted from the platform in a number of ways that are highlighted in the following sections.

Identifying organizations with whom to collaborate in Laos

Over the past year, The Freedom Story has been exploring potential expansion of its operations into Laos. Instead of having to rely on word of mouth recommendations from its existing pool of contacts, it was able to use the Freedom Collaborative platform to find organizations and associates that were already established in the country. These partners were very helpful, and through their suggestions The Freedom Story has been able to connect with a wide network of groups and individuals who have been able to help them further.

The team has also noted that Freedom Collaborative confers a reassuring legitimacy on the organizations and professionals that are registered with them. When researching potential partners, The Freedom Story always checks for membership of the Freedom Collaborative community, considering it to indicate that an organization is open and interested in collaborative efforts, and aware of the wider movement. They find the platform helps them to more efficiently identify partners with professional values that align with their own, and have experienced an enthusiastic willingness from Freedom Collaborative members to support other groups, share expertise and help out with requests.

Extending their reach and sharing their approach to ethical storytelling

The Freedom Collaborative team has worked with The Freedom Story a number of times to highlight its work and valuable initiatives. In 2017, the group launched the Ethical Storytelling project to provide conversations and resources around storytelling in the social impact space. The opportunity to tell others about the initiative through Freedom Collaborative newsletters, including the workshops they conduct and the resources they provide for others, has created greater awareness about The Freedom Story and its approach.

In early 2020, The Freedom Story participated in a Freedom Collaborative webinar, hosted in collaboration with the USAID Asia Counter Trafficking in Persons project, on the topic of ethical storytelling in anti-trafficking programming. Over 400 people registered and The Freedom Story was hugely encouraged by this connection with so many interested groups. The webinar gave them the opportunity to share the story of their own re-branding, discuss the importance of deep consent, and explain how they navigate competing priorities between client-facing and donor-facing storytelling.

The Freedom Story feels strongly that the resources created under the Ethical Storytelling initiative could benefit many organizations and their clients, and positively influence the narrative around human trafficking. The team are therefore very grateful to Freedom Collaborative for helping them extend the reach of the campaign. As a small organization, they do not have the resources to promote it by themselves in such an effective way, and to reach so many anti-trafficking professionals around the world.

Learning from global perspectives and experts

The Freedom Story are loyal subscribers to Freedom Collaborative newsletters, which they read every week. They enjoy them because they provide an overview of events around the world from a truly global perspective, which goes beyond the updates from single countries or regions that other newsletters provide. The information helps them to draw inspiration from other groups, and offers a sense of what others in this space are experiencing – the team describe it as a ‘helpful sanity check’ which allows them to understand more about the changes and challenges that they, as an organization, also face. The round-up of opportunities included in each newsletter for submissions, resources, and access to webinars and podcasts, offers valuable connection with organizations whom they may not have previously encountered.

The group is keen to always promote Freedom Collaborative webinars to others, as they find them especially well curated, covering a wide variety of topics and always featuring different speakers instead of the same voices each time. They consider the experts to be very knowledgeable and willing to share valuable practical experience, which they find extremely helpful. Having access to such a variety of perspectives isn’t always easy for front-line organizations, but Freedom Collaborative provides this at no cost.’

Access to rare data and the opportunity to contribute to a communal dataset

Since Year 2, USAID Asia CTIP has supported the development and launch of a Freedom Collaborative data-gathering initiative, which maps out and visualizes trafficking routes based on members’ case information and service provision. The Freedom Story has recommended this data collection tool to a number of its partners, and has also used it for internal staff meetings.

As a result of participating in this initiative, The Freedom Story has experienced a shift towards greater awareness of data collection and its usefulness in guiding operational strategies, not only within the community but also among its staff.

They have developed a much greater understanding of why data is important, and how it can benefit their organization and support their work. For instance, the team has a good knowledge of the internal trafficking situation within Thailand, and this data visualization helps them to clearly illustrate the scale of movement from, to, and through the country, and communicate it others.

The Freedom Story notes that the Freedom Collaborative victim journey map is unique in that it captures the global picture, and access to such data is unusual for smaller groups. Usually only large international organizations have data on cross-border and regional trends and, sadly, it’s still unusual for groups to share the data they do have within a larger communal dataset.

Timely support during COVID-19 pandemic

When the pandemic hit in March 2020 Freedom Collaborative, in collaboration with the USAID Asia Counter Trafficking in Persons program, put together a series of COVID-19 Rapid Response webinars that allowed frontline organizations to share news of their situations and their responses to the pandemic.

The Freedom Story joined every webinar, and very much appreciated their timeliness. The first few weeks under lockdown were quite challenging and staff felt isolated, as they had little insight into how other organizations were coping. Freedom Collaborative was able to organize the webinars quickly – a genuinely rapid response – which helped the team find out what had worked for other organizations and what hadn't, and how they were adjusting their programming.

The Freedom Collaborative Facebook group was also incredibly helpful, allowing groups and individuals to come together with other organizations, exchange news from the frontlines during the COVID-19 outbreak, and learn more about what others were experiencing and the action taken.

Access to invaluable resources

Together with the USAID Thailand CTIP project, Freedom Collaborative has produced a toolkit geared toward organizations and agencies serving migrant workers and victims of trafficking, which provides a catalogue of materials and resources in a number of relevant languages. The Freedom Story highlights this toolkit as a fantastic set of materials that they use often, and one that is not available anywhere else.

The group emphasizes that the platform has always proven to be a valuable tool for reaching out and connecting with partners that can support requests. For instance, when The Freedom Story was looking for a new Executive Director it was able to share the call for applications through Freedom Collaborative.

Conclusions

The Freedom Story considers the Freedom Collaborative platform an essential resource, both for its own work and for the anti-trafficking community as a whole. It is not only a trusted tool which can be used to find and identify reliable partners, but has also supported the group in its efforts to gain greater visibility and engagement with partners around the world, and to drive a new standard of story-telling in anti-trafficking. The Freedom Collaborative platform provides The Freedom Story – a small front-line organization – with access to connections, resources and data from which they would not otherwise benefit.

Empowering marginalised communities



with strategic tools to achieve social justice.



North South Initiative (NSI) builds advocacy and leadership capacities among migrants, refugees and stateless persons in Malaysia, both documented and undocumented, to help them understand and claim their rights. The group also monitors labour and immigration-related abuses by authorities, employers and local workers, and ensures that migrant organizations are connected to a strong solidarity network that enables them to work with other civil society organizations (CSOs), migrant organizations and trade unions.

Since 2011, Freedom Collaborative has given North South Initiative access to shared learning in human trafficking and related issues through its diverse community. The platform has also enabled the group to share local issues within the public domain and through international media – an alternative outlet for free expression.

As the COVID-19 crisis hits migrant workers in Malaysia particularly hard, and NSI continues to deal with the consequences of the Movement Control Orders (MCOs) imposed by the government in March 2020, Freedom Collaborative's Facebook group provides them with vital information on evolving labour market trends and exploitation risks across the region.

Overview of North South Initiative

North South Initiative (NSI) is a social justice organization focused on the empowerment of marginalized groups in Malaysia. It was established in 2011 to work with marginalized communities from conflict areas, however, over the years it has extended its focus to include communities such as asylum seekers, refugees, migrant workers, domestic workers, stateless persons, and victims of human trafficking.

Migrants in Malaysia are at risk of exploitation from a combination of unscrupulous recruitment agents and employers, harsh immigration policies, unmonitored supply chains, and a lack of enforcement of labour protections. They are subjected to passport confiscation, low pay in violation of minimum wage laws, salary deductions, poor living conditions, punishment by fines, high recruitment fees and debts to recruitment agencies and employers, forced labour and human trafficking.

North South Initiative has close ties to a number of community-based migrant and refugee organizations and solidarity networks. It works with them to promote greater protection from this exploitation by coaching community leaders – they are trained to ensure that community members have access to the services they need, and that the groups that provide these services have accurate information about client requirements.

In addition, NSI works closely with a number of civil society partners, in particular the Migration Working Group (MWG), a national coalition of civil society organizations and individuals who coordinate programming and conduct advocacy on behalf of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, trafficked victims, stateless persons and foreign spouses in Malaysia and the surrounding region.

NSI is also a member of the Migrant Workers Right to Redress Coalition (R2R), which has recommended a comprehensive policy on migrant labor to Malaysia's government. In addition, NSI works with the Bar Council Malaysia, the statutory body regulating lawyers in Peninsular Malaysia. NSI is also part of the Ke Arah C189 Coalition (Towards C189 Coalition), which campaigns for Malaysia to ratify the ILO domestic workers' convention and to pass local regulations for the domestic work sector. Finally, NSI is also a founding member of the Labour Law Reform Coalition (LLRC), spearheaded labor reforms collectively since 2018. Their partnership with international organizations like CARAM Asia, Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA), the Task Force On ASEAN Migrant Workers (TFAMW), Building and Wood Workers' International, and the IndustriALL Global Union has helped NSI address migration using cross-cutting and multidisciplinary strategies.

North South Initiative focuses on the following program priorities:

1. Emergency support: NSI provides migrant workers and other excluded groups with meeting spaces so they can organize themselves more easily and work together to improve and enforce their rights. It also helps with accommodation needs and, during the government's COVID-19 Movement Control Order response, has provided help for those Malaysian and migrant workers who are not able to cope under lockdown conditions.

2. Case management: The group works on the cases of migrant workers and refugees and supports them in the process of pursuing justice. It provides tailored assistance for clients who are taking their cases to court and supports them in accessing the available services. It is important to the group to give migrant worker communities confidence in reporting abuses and pursuing cases to secure justice. It also coordinates returns for migrants who are being sent back to their countries of origin.

3. Advocacy: In collaboration with its partners, NSI aims to build a national coalition of migrant workers to help them develop a strong, unified and consolidated campaign to improve their rights, in particular their labour, security, health and socio-cultural rights. Besides policy advocacy in Malaysia, the group also does advocacy work at the ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML) and contributes inputs to the International Labour Conference (ILC-ILO) and the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD).

4. Solidarity building: Over the years, NSI has made efforts to strategically network the migrant worker communities with the local unions with the hope of building more robust understanding, solidarity, and collaboration. To achieve these goals, the migrant community must have strong and comprehensive bargaining skills and tools to negotiate with the local unions in Malaysia. NSI has supported the formation of the Labour Law Reform Coalition, bringing together labor unions, Malaysian NGOs, Women's Groups, and Migrant Workers to advocate for labor reforms. This partnership is one of a kind in Malaysia.

Reasons to join Freedom Collaborative

In Malaysia, civil society is very small. There are very few NGOs working on migrant rights and refugee issues and only a few actors in this space. The question of how groups can mobilize adequate support to overcome the challenges they face and achieve positive change is critical for civil society actors who face significant challenges in accessing key resources to sustain their work.

Malaysia as a destination country has around two million documented migrant workers and an estimated four million undocumented migrant workers. All are highly vulnerable to various human rights abuses, including forced labour, trafficking, smuggling, abuses by enforcement agencies, labour violations, corruption/extortion, unlawful detention, racism, xenophobia and other human rights violations.

At the same time, Malaysia is a very challenging place in which to obtain funding for human rights work as many donors don't see this upper-middle-income developing country as a priority. The relationship between CSOs and the government in Malaysia continues to be complicated, and Malaysian authorities have in the past imposed restrictive laws which limit their freedom.

North South Initiative represents a continuation of its founder's various advocacies and previous work in conflict resolution, and it knows that the protection of migrant workers and refugees is an extremely broad field of work that interlinks with many concepts and sectors. It therefore joined Freedom Collaborative in 2017 to maximize its opportunities for shared learning through the platform's diverse member base and partners.

Freedom Collaborative has provided NSI with communication channels and access to support among peers for continued learning and knowledge exchange. Because the experts working on issues relating to human trafficking, forced labour and labour exploitation in Malaysia are so few, the team at North South Initiative feel it's crucial for them to follow global perspectives in order to build their knowledge.

The NSI team view the Freedom Collaborative platform as a game changer which allows them to capture and share learning around key challenges and discover solutions that can be adapted to their needs. They feel the platform positively influences broader advocacy practice and shows grass-roots organizations examples of actions that have worked, along with useful insights into those experiences.

Supporting partnerships between CSOs in countries of origin and destination

As a member of Freedom Collaborative, North South Initiative has been able to connect with organizations in the origin countries of labour migrants whom they encounter in Malaysia. Most of the migrants they work with come from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar and Nepal.

The team at NSI emphasize that such connections are critical for their work. In fact, they believe that any organization in a destination country would benefit from cooperation with groups in source countries. These links are vital for effective efforts to protect migrant workers in destination countries, for example, there is a need to understand the recruitment aspect of the migration cycle because the events that precede the eventual exploitation happen in the country of origin. Groups in destination countries can also receive help with translations from these partners, as interactions with migrant communities are difficult without knowledge of their native language. Such partners also offer a resource that builds NSI's cultural competency, helping it to understand how exploitation may be embedded in the culture of home countries, clarifying misconceptions, and better educating migrant workers about their rights.

North South Initiative is pleased to see that Freedom Collaborative is mapping all the anti-trafficking organizations in relevant locations and working towards improving collaboration between them. They point out that trafficking is nearly always a cross-border event, and they see many opportunities for information sharing and joint advocacy. In future they hope that critical information will be shared across networks, for example, details of fraudulent recruitment actors. Cases should also be shared with groups in the countries of origin. While they feel the movement is not there yet, NSI hopes that it will take this direction. For them, Freedom Collaborative pushes the cause closer to the goal of tighter partnerships by not only providing the tools for connection but also by establishing partnerships as an essential component of all efforts.

Amplifying grass-roots reports on migrant workers' realities

Due to the structural challenges faced by organizations in Malaysia, there is a significant need to amplify their voices and to bring their experiences to the attention of the media and global sphere. However, over the past months, reports have documented the decline in press freedom in the country and the increasing pressure on Malaysia's news organizations, making independent reporting by the international media even more critical.

In 2020, North South Initiative wrote about the plight of Malaysia's migrant workers during the pandemic in a Freedom Collaborative newsletter. These weekly mailings bring the latest anti-trafficking news and field reports from around the world to 3,200 subscribers, including journalists, funders and policy makers, and thus gave North South Initiative an opportunity to share what they were witnessing with the global community and to create greater awareness of the situation on the ground. Following the newsletter feature, the group received several enquiries and gained greater recognition for their work from various media organizations around the world.

North South Initiative feels this has helped their mission to develop people's understanding of Malaysia's trafficking and exploitation issues.

Expanding professional knowledge

North South Initiative notes that advocating and protecting the rights of migrant workers and refugees in Malaysia is extremely complex work. There are multiple agencies involved, and there are many overlapping concepts and policies such as the ASEAN migrant workers treaty, the Global Compact for Migration, the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, the UN human rights monitoring and accountability system, and the systems of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and International Organization for Migration (IOM).

As a result there are few opportunities for capacity building, and so NSI believes the most effective approach is to learn from groups in other countries and adapt their solutions to meet Malaysia's country-specific needs. They note that, unfortunately, Malaysia is a good case study for problems but not for ways to fix them. In Freedom Collaborative webinars, however, they have the opportunity to learn from professionals in other countries by finding out about successful strategies and initiatives that can be adapted to Malaysia's needs.

They are particularly interested in learning about efforts that address specific migration issues, ways to build networks for migrant rights at national scale, and how documentation can support advocacy efforts.

NSI's work can be challenging, as they operate in a system that makes it very difficult to prove abuse and establish that human rights violations have taken place. That, coupled with a lack of freedom of information, makes promoting their work to generate positive outcomes for workers and vulnerable groups an ongoing struggle. However, by gaining international attention, they and other CSOs in the country feel they can have some influence and may be able to help bring about institutional change.

Connecting human trafficking and its related issues

The group explains that there is a need to look at human trafficking from a wider perspective, in order to truly understand the exploitation and its interconnected elements. For practitioners, it's important to understand the various interlinked issues so they can determine what action can be taken against perpetrators.

Trafficking cases can be extremely difficult to prove and prosecute, and seeing the issue through a narrow lens means that many cases of exploitation won't fit the legal definition of trafficking or will lack sufficient evidence for a prosecution to be successful. A greater understanding of related issues and offenses will ensure that legal service providers are able to be more rigorous in securing compensation and justice for victims.

North South Initiative values the variety of resources and information shared through the Freedom Collaborative platform, which enables them to develop a more holistic view of human trafficking and exploitation. By highlighting initiatives from across the anti-trafficking community, but also related issue sectors such as child labour, forced labour, labour exploitation, anti-corruption and organized crime, they are able to learn more about potential alternative responses.

Access to real time information on the impact of COVID-19

In line with global efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19, Malaysia enacted large-scale social distancing via a nationwide Movement Control Order (MCO) in March 2020. This partial lockdown involved a complete restriction of movement and assembly and the closure of government and private businesses. Malaysia's MCO caused many migrant workers in the construction, manufacturing, cleaning and service sectors to lose their jobs overnight. However, civil society service providers couldn't enter the enhanced MCO areas to provide critical support services. Months later, many migrant workers remain without jobs and continue to need aid. North South Initiative foresees the problems continuing for many months to come.

Freedom Collaborative's Facebook group has been vital for them, as it allows NSI to come together with other organizations and exchange news from the frontlines during this pandemic. Members have been sharing field reports and updates on issues for international migrants, accounts of government action and inaction, emerging trends and patterns, and opportunities to engage in new research. North South Initiative closely follows the information shared as they seek to prepare for the impact on vulnerable workers that is yet to come.

Conclusions

The North South Initiative team have benefitted from the diverse resources shared through Freedom Collaborative, which have allowed them to improve their professional knowledge and strengthen their ability to build coalitions and implement effective programs. The platform has improved their recognition and participation in the global discussion and provided a useful tool for amplifying grassroots struggles and local civil society perspectives. Freedom Collaborative has supported North South Initiative in its ongoing efforts to access and share information among civil society across borders, issue sectors and at scale.

Preventing the exploitation of girls,
by strengthening family and community systems



to help them prioritise the safety and education
of their children.



Free To Shine is a child protection organization that prevents school-aged girls being trafficked into the commercial sex industry in Cambodia by addressing the many factors that make children vulnerable to exploitation. Families that experience migration, irregular employment, debt, gambling, divorce, family violence or have many children often struggle to give them appropriate care which, along with the factors described below, increases their risk of being exploited and trafficked. Free To Shine focuses on strengthening family and community systems to prioritize the safety of these children.

Freedom Collaborative has tools that enable Free to Shine to follow and participate in the wider anti-trafficking discourse and become more connected with initiatives in this space. Available resources for learning are a privilege the English-speaking anti-trafficking community takes for granted, however, there is little information with which to train a new generation of local leaders in this field. Freedom Collaborative is one of the few platforms that has resources in the Khmer language which staff can use to develop their professional skills and knowledge.

Overview of Free to Shine

Free To Shine is an independently funded non-profit organization founded in Australia 10 years ago, working to prevent sex trafficking in Siem Reap Province in Cambodia. Their work is child protection focused and human rights based, and is designed to strengthen families and keep children in education. The Cambodian team works with local authorities and communities to reach the most at-risk rural girls, reducing their vulnerability to trafficking by improving their access to education and providing them with social work support.

The organization's mission is based on the premise that if the girls are in school and engaged during the day they are less vulnerable to exploitation by people they might otherwise meet in local villages, and their chances of moving out of poverty will be much higher.

The organization currently works with around 450 girls, who have been identified as being at risk based on specific assessment criteria. Working to keep girls safe requires a holistic approach that integrates girls' individual wellbeing with their material needs and implements three activity streams:

1. Education: A team of education officers from Free To Shine conducts monthly safety visits with the girls and their families, in order to understand their current situation and address issues such as poverty, hunger, illness, unemployment, migration, addiction, violence, family breakdown and debt. They also provide essential educational support and the materials necessary for each girl to access school, including a uniform, books, pens, a backpack and a bike. A significant part of this programming involves working closely with parents, to ensure they will actively encourage their daughters to go to school.

2. Social work: The education program is supported by social work, to provide extra support to girls who face additional stressors. If education officers identify risk factors during their safety visits, the group initiates crisis interventions by social workers which prioritise safety and offer close support to those girls at high risk. The girls are given a support team to help them achieve their human rights and provide them with the tools, resources and confidence they need to be change-makers in their own communities.

3. Community training: In addition, the group facilitates Community Trainings that build capacity within the community, increase knowledge of human rights, and teach families how to protect themselves from exploitation and abuse. These trainings are conducted in collaboration with a Commune Council for Women and Children (CCWC) and village leaders, who decide on topics for discussion based on the most pressing issues faced by their communities in terms of keeping girls and families safe. These include safe migration, child protection, child development, drug and alcohol abuse, and human trafficking.

The impact of COVID-19

In 2020, school closures and emergency public health measures have made Free to Shine's work more challenging and the group has had to make adaptations where necessary to comply with recommendations and best practice. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many families on the Free To Shine program have lost their jobs and incomes and are facing extreme poverty, leading to food insecurity and overcrowding as unemployed family members move in with relatives. Many parents who had found work in Thailand have returned home after losing their jobs.

Because the girls have not been at school, their risk of being trafficked or exploited is now much higher. Many girls in the Free To Shine program have gone to work in other provinces or in garment factories in Phnom Penh, taking jobs with poor working conditions out of desperation, due to the economic hardship faced by their families.

In these cases, Free To Shine's focus has shifted to follow up with the girls and their families, find out where they have moved to, and keep in contact. Schools in Cambodia are slowly opening, but there is concern that many girls won't return. While they know they shouldn't be doing certain work, they intend to continue because their families need the money.

Fortunately, Free To Shine is able to offer emergency food packages, seeds for growing vegetable gardens and livestock (chickens) for self-sustainable living to support families in need, help them survive the crisis, and encourage girls to continue their education.

Reasons for joining Freedom Collaborative

For more than a decade, Cambodia has been monitored by NGOs and government agencies as a source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking. The anti-trafficking community in the country is very active and provides critical services for survivors of sex and labour trafficking. Freedom Collaborative initially launched with support from Chab Dai, a membership network of anti-trafficking NGOs in Cambodia, and therefore many of Freedom Collaborative's first members were Cambodian.

Free To Shine joined Freedom Collaborative in 2016 even though, at the time, they felt their organizational model differed in focus from the majority of organizations in the local anti-trafficking community. As a non-denominational organization focused on prevention work, they haven't been so closely connected with other groups in Siem Reap and Cambodia.

Much of the anti-trafficking work in Asia focuses on the identification and protection of survivors of sexual exploitation and/or labour trafficking, and most of the anti-trafficking community is engaged in case management, service provision and rescue of victims. While there has been a shift in recent years to view human trafficking, child protection, labour rights, economic empowerment and education as more interconnected, in practice the groups that work on these issues remain somewhat disparate.

However, the Freedom Collaborative platform has allowed Free To Shine to participate in the wider anti-trafficking discourse. Human trafficking is one of their topics of concern and, where they previously found it difficult to access up-to-date information and learning resources, Freedom Collaborative has been invaluable in allowing them to expand their knowledge and build familiarity with trafficking-related concepts and programmatic standards. The platform offers Free To Shine a wider perspective, not only on the diversity of organizations engaged in this work – and others that operate under a similar anti-exploitation approach in other locations – but also on the complexity of human trafficking and exploitation issues across the region and globally.

As a member of the community, the group benefits from the wider view and variety of perspectives that are shared and represented on the platform. They have used the available resources for their work and to support the learning and training of team members in various ways over the years.

An opportunity to learn from anti-trafficking practitioners across Asia

Free To Shine particularly values Freedom Collaborative for the wide range of learning opportunities it offers them. While they admit that they are not the most active and visible contributors to the platform, they follow the content and opportunities that are shared through newsletters and announcements closely.

They find information that goes beyond their immediate focus, and therefore expands their professional horizons. The Free To Shine team appreciate the fact that content is driven by community members, all of them experts in their area of anti-trafficking work – this provides them with perspectives they hadn't previously considered but which they can incorporate in some shape or form into their programming.

One highlight of their Freedom Collaborative membership was the opportunity to participate in the Asia Region Anti-Trafficking Conference (ARAT) in Bangkok. Organized jointly by Chab Dai and Stop the Traffik Australia, the conference aims to bring together anti-trafficking practitioners from across the region for three days of in-person learning and networking. Freedom Collaborative has been pleased to support the organizers in publicizing the event, and has played an active role in facilitating sessions around data and information sharing.

Free To Shine attended the conference in 2019 for the first time, after reading about it in a Freedom Collaborative newsletter.

The event offered them another learning opportunity, in particular exposure to perspectives from legal experts and representatives from the private sector. Learning about supply chains, and hearing how companies are working to address exploitation within them, led to a shift in their approach and in the way in which they view their work in a wider context. Free To Shine considers the conference a highlight of their program development, and an opportunity they wouldn't have known about without Freedom Collaborative.

Access to regional routes data

Free To Shine first came across Freedom Collaborative's victim journey map through a presentation at the ARAT conference in 2019. In the opening session, and to set the tone for the event, Freedom Collaborative presented an overview of routes relating to the Asian region. The presentation demonstrated the amount of data that can be collected – and its usefulness – when individual organizations share what they know and contribute to a collective data set.

Free To Shine described the routes as eye opening and a clear illustration of the complexity of the issue that we, as a community, are dealing with. They now often refer back to the journey map and have included the route information in their quarterly and annual reports for donors – these reports always include an overview of the human trafficking situation in the region to provide context for their work. Globally, there are very few data sets with such detailed location information available for everyone in the space to access and use, and the data available through the victim journey map provides reliable information from groups working directly with victims and vulnerable populations, and the real cases they have encountered.

Critical professional development resources for local team members

Free To Shine's long-term vision is to transition the organization to local leadership. They view the lack of available resources in local languages as one of the main challenges for staff professional development in this field – there simply isn't much available. Their staff often have an educational background in social work or education so, when they join Free To Shine, they need to learn more about the problem of human trafficking and anti-trafficking programming.

Sadly, there are few resources on anti-trafficking available in languages other than English. This makes it very difficult for local staff to access professional knowledge and learning – a privilege the English-speaking community takes as standard.

It simply isn't as effective or helpful for western team members to educate their colleagues as it is to point them towards a credible resource to read and learn from independently, and which they can revisit over time. While the group wishes there were more translations, it's helpful to be able to pass on opportunities and materials – and Freedom Collaborative is the only platform they know of that has any resources available in the relevant Southeast Asian languages.

Despite the urgent need for a new generation of leaders to fight exploitation, there is little investment in accessible learning for young anti-trafficking professionals in Southeast Asia. Free To Shine appreciates the fact that Freedom Collaborative provides and shares resources and webinars in Khmer which their local colleagues can use and take part in.

Ethical storytelling training

Under the USAID Asia Counter Trafficking in Persons project, Freedom Collaborative hosted a webinar on ethical practices and lessons learned which support anti-trafficking organizations and others to tell stories in an ethical way. Freedom Collaborative has also highlighted the ethicalstorytelling.org initiative as a resource for the anti-trafficking community through updates and features over the years.

Free To Shine has greatly benefitted from the Ethical Storytelling initiative resources – developed by The Freedom Story who are also featured in this report – and have incorporated the lessons learned into their own external communications.

Recently, Khmer staff joined the communications team for the first time. Their colleagues recommended Ethical Storytelling materials and webinars as incredibly helpful resources for instruction and advice on storytelling considerations in this field. These include the importance of deep consent from the constituents portrayed in stories, the identification of stories that are attractive to donors and which convey a nuanced understanding of the issues, and the importance of holistic prevention measures.

The COVID-19 resource library

The first cases of COVID-19 reported in Cambodia were linked to the Siem Reap area, and the Free To Shine team were concerned that, as they might be asymptomatic carriers, they risked passing the virus on especially to the elderly in rural villages.

Following this concern, as well as recommendations to cease in-person safety visits from the World Health Organization and the Cambodian Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, the group started to conduct safety checks, distribute information about COVID-19, and provide psychosocial support by telephone.

Free To Shine used Freedom Collaborative's COVID-19 resource library to find information and awareness-raising materials in Khmer which they could use to share critical health information with the families they work with. Having these ready-prepared materials in one place was very helpful as this saved the group a lot of time – time they could use instead for critical outreach work during the pandemic.

Conclusions

Free To Shine values Freedom Collaborative for giving them access to knowledge on anti-trafficking that goes beyond their specific focus but which they consider critical for their work. They have used the platform for staff training and to support the professional development of their team, finding it one of the few places that produces and collects resources in the Khmer language. Freedom Collaborative provides the group with credible information to support their reporting and to contextualize their work as one valuable contribution to addressing an incredibly complex issue.

Providing exceptional care to Vietnamese children and families in crisis



while creating long-term change for a better world.



Blue Dragon Children's Foundation works in urban and impoverished rural areas of Vietnam. It rescues and supports street children, runaways and trafficked young people, offering them food, shelter, psychological and emotional support, legal advocacy and a route back into education, training or employment. Blue Dragon works with vulnerable families, particularly in remote areas, to increase their resilience against the risk of trafficking and encourage children to attend school. It aims to provide exceptional care for children while working for long-term change.

The group has worked with Freedom Collaborative since 2017, as both a consumer and a valuable contributor of data and route-mapping information. Although there is a national anti-trafficking network in Vietnam, Blue Dragon is extremely thankful for the opportunity to connect with other groups and keep up to date with developments on the ground, so they can adapt their programming as needed. It particularly values the regional context that Freedom Collaborative's victim journey map adds to both its casework and its training sessions so that participants – including its own team members, community representatives, social workers and police cadets – can all gain a better understanding of the human trafficking situation within the wider area.

Overview of Blue Dragon Children's Foundation

Blue Dragon Children's Foundation is based in Hanoi, Vietnam. Founded in 2002 by Australian teacher Michael Brosowski, and registered in Australia, it initially combined a drop-in centre and office in an impoverished area of the city, ran a weekly football club for homeless children, and created a shelter for former street boys, incorporating a pathway back to school. This work soon led to the rescuing of trafficked children from street work, garment factories, brothels and forced marriages. Today, Blue Dragon's center remains one of the few safe spaces for homeless children in Hanoi – a place where they can access teachers, psychologists, social workers and lawyers, take part in youth development activities, and have healthy meals. Blue Dragon has become a force for change around Vietnam, serving 1,500 children and young people while successfully advocating for law and policy reform.

Blue Dragon's anti-trafficking work started in 2005, when it rescued a 13-year-old boy trafficked to work on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City. So far, the group has directly rescued almost 1,000 victims and has supported the repatriation of about 600 others. The group is now registered to work in five provinces, and fights every day to protect both street children and victims of human trafficking. In recent years it has seen a growth in cases with added complexity, such as victims of human trafficking with serious mental health issues, and more cases of trafficking into China.

Blue Dragon's mission is to provide exceptional care for Vietnamese children and families in crisis while creating long-term change for a better world. To this end, Blue Dragon has developed a wide range of programs offering both responsive and preventative anti-trafficking services to help children and families:

1. Preventing trafficking in rural provinces: Blue Dragon works in very poor areas where many children and their parents are unschooled and illiterate. It also works in provinces with ethnic minority communities including the Hmong. Due to geographical remoteness, poverty and their ethnic minority status, these communities are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. Blue Dragon's prevention programs aim to build resilient communities that are resistant to human trafficking in both the short and long term. Children who have been trafficked, or are at risk of being trafficked, are supported to live with their families and return to (or begin) school. Families are educated on the realities of trafficking, and given material assistance if necessary. Teachers are trained to identify at-risk students, and government officials are advised on anti-trafficking policies.

2. Case management and service provision: Blue Dragon Children's Foundation provides intensive recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration support for survivors of trafficking, including psychological counselling, meals, safe accommodation, personal supplies, and health checks. When they are ready, survivors are helped to return to their families or are supported to stay in Hanoi and access education and training. The program provides survivors with long-

term psychological and emotional support, as well as the financial help necessary for a return to education, vocational training, to establish a small enterprise, or for moving on to independence.

3. Legal advocacy: The Legal Advocacy Department offers advice and representation to any Vietnamese child or young person in crisis who needs legal help. The department rescues children and adults who have been trafficked and are trapped in slavery, and facilitates their repatriation. If an arrest is made, Blue Dragon lawyers represent the victim throughout the investigation process and in court. Vulnerable communities are assisted to obtain legal registration papers so they can access public services such as school. The department trains Vietnamese police officers, border guards and local officials, in order to improve their skills in fighting human trafficking. In addition, the department advocates for improvements to policy and the law that will better protect children and victims of trafficking. Blue Dragon's court representation and advocacy for victims of abuse and human trafficking gives the group insight into those aspects of Vietnamese law which need strengthening and reform.

Reasons for joining Freedom Collaborative

In Vietnam, there are very few organizations that work on anti-trafficking – far fewer than in Cambodia and Thailand. Membership of Freedom Collaborative allows the team to stay abreast of new trends and developments in the anti-trafficking space and adapt their work as necessary.

Over the years, the organization has adjusted its programming to meet new types of cases and needs. While it initially dealt primarily with children exploited in informal sweatshops and garment factories within the country, it is not seeing many of these cases any more – the majority of cases in recent years have involved victims taken across the border to China and exploited there.

These constantly changing trends and patterns mean the group has had to learn and adapt as it goes along and to develop new strategies in order to remain effective. While this is challenging, Blue Dragon is proud of its flexibility, its capacity to respond to new forms of exploitation, and its ability to keep more vulnerable children and people safe.

Blue Dragon is therefore very much aware of the need to access relevant information and constantly stay up to date – there are always new realities in this field of work. So when the organization learned about Freedom Collaborative in 2017, through a donor, it was very keen to become a member of the platform.

The group finds Freedom Collaborative helpful for keeping up with news, trends and evolving situations across the Asia region. It can be difficult to follow all the events and initiatives taking place in other countries, and the platform provides an overview while also helping the team to gauge current developments and opportunities. They have recommended Freedom Collaborative to other contacts and NGOs, and to researchers and journalists who are interested in learning about human trafficking and existing anti-trafficking efforts in the region.

The group has contributed to a number of Freedom Collaborative initiatives, including the victim journey data collection. The attention and funding in this field can be very much focused on specific types of trafficking, which do not always tally with the cases that organizations most often see on the ground. Blue Dragon Children's Foundation views Freedom Collaborative as instrumental in collecting and highlighting data from the frontlines and in channeling this information into publicly available resources, so it can be seen by policy-makers and funders.

Channeling on-the-ground realities into a global evidence database

The vast majority of trafficking victims Blue Dragon has rescued have been Vietnamese girls and women who were deceived and sold into forced marriages or brothels in China. The organization is the main NGO supporting local law enforcement with rescues and case investigations.

In 2019, the group contributed over one hundred source and destination routes from these cases to Freedom Collaborative's Victim Journey Mapping Tool. These routes map a number of distinct locations of origin and destination, and give an overview of the vast amount of movement between the two countries.

The group finds that sharing this data is of critical importance in creating an accurate picture of the situation on the ground. This is not only helpful for people inside the sector, but also helps those outside it to understand what movement is happening within the region.

Within the anti-trafficking space, attention is often directed to trafficking across regions – such as from Asia to Europe – or for specific industries. As this attention often drives funding decisions, it's often the case that less money is spent on more prevalent forms of trafficking because they lack documentation and representation in global data sets.

The victim journey map presents an effective tool with which to channel accurate information from the ground into the global sphere, providing data on high activity locations that is accessible to everyone in the community, including policy-makers and funders.

Capturing changing routes during the COVID-19 pandemic

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Blue Dragon has seen another change in the kinds of cases it's dealing with – over the past few months, domestic exploitation has been on the rise in Vietnam. For instance, the group has seen a sudden spike in cases of underage girls being taken from rural villages – usually from ethnic minority communities – and sold within Vietnam to brothels, or to businesses that are fronts for brothels. Traffickers are using new routes to take these girls from rural areas to the larger Vietnamese cities.

Blue Dragon is contributing these new routes to the victim journey map on the Freedom Collaborative platform. As the movement adjusts to respond to COVID-19's impact, it's crucial that data on new routes such as these is collected, in order to understand and document emerging trends. The map provides community members with a more accurate overview of the situation and thus helps them to make the appropriate adjustments to their responses.

Enhancing anti-trafficking training for different audiences

Blue Dragon Children's Foundation uses Freedom Collaborative's routes map in its own training sessions, which it conducts for a variety of audiences. The group has developed an overall anti-trafficking curriculum, which it modifies for the respective groups it trains. These include teachers, students, grassroots social workers, women's union representatives and staff, and community prevention teams.

Since 2018, Blue Dragon Children's Foundation has partnered with the Vietnam People's Police Academy in the development of training programs for more than 10,000 police officers and cadets per year who work throughout the country. The aim of this strategic move is to incorporate anti-trafficking efforts into the formal training programs delivered every year by the People's Police Academy in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. At its core, the new curriculum focuses on two major outcomes: how to develop and implement practical approaches to combat human trafficking, and how to ensure the welfare and protection of victims in the long term.

The victim journey map is a fixed element used at the beginning of each training session to help participants visualize the larger context of Vietnam's trafficking issues. Using the map, Blue Dragon team members talk through the trafficking situation in the region as a whole, before focusing specifically on Vietnam.

Blue Dragon finds the Freedom Collaborative platform extremely helpful as it pre-screens content and functions as a central clearing house for information related to human trafficking.

A central clearing house for relevant content

Within the anti-trafficking sector, a lot of research is produced, and it can be overwhelming to follow all this information on top of dealing with individual workloads. A large number of materials are published, but it can be difficult and time-intensive to locate them and identify those which will be most useful and informative.

The newsletters deliver content in a convenient format, helping team members to digest a round-up of information and news that is high quality, relevant and diverse.

Conclusions

Blue Dragon Children's Foundation relies on Freedom Collaborative for quick access to useful, comprehensive and varied information on fast-changing patterns and emerging trends in the anti-trafficking space. Without a national network for support and information sharing, Blue Dragon can use the platform to connect with and learn from other groups in the region and across the world. The shared data collections, in particular the Victim Journey Mapping Tool, are invaluable in providing an overview of the trafficking situation in the wider region. Blue Dragon is able to use Freedom Collaborative resources to train other groups whose work takes them into the anti-trafficking sphere, such as teachers, social workers and police officers.

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