

USAID / BANGLADESH

TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Every year, more than 1 million women and children worldwide are believed trafficked and sold for sexual purposes. This trade results in unimaginable mental and physical abuse, loss of human dignity, and violation of countless human rights. It is a modern form of slavery. It violates many national and international laws (rape, torture, abduction, murder, etc.). Public health implications of trafficking are significant: Many are put at risk of AIDS and condemned to a painful death, by being forced to have unprotected sex an average of 10 times per day.

Quantitative data on trafficking is unreliable. In Bangladesh, the number of women and children trafficked is estimated to range from 10,000 to 20,000 per year. Estimates cannot easily be tested because of the clandestine nature of trafficking. Trafficking occurs both within Bangladesh and across its borders to India, Pakistan, and Middle Eastern countries – primarily Dubai and Kuwait. From Bangladesh, most women and children are trafficked for prostitution, domestic work, and industrial labor (textile factories), or to Arab states for begging or to be camel jockeys.



Local street theater depicts a young girl trapped in the trafficking web.

PROGRAM RATIONALE

Trafficking is the transportation of a person against her/his will or under false pretenses to be sold or coerced into work against his/her will. Such persons are often taken from one location to another, i.e. a different country or language area. The trafficking trade is:

- a human rights issue
- a public health issue
- a cross border issue
- a tragedy that cannot be ignored

Many NGOs in Bangladesh that address trafficking in some way. Most focus on awareness raising and prevention. Some focus on reintegration of those who have been trafficked. Many of these activities are carried out in isolation, with little interaction with other groups working on the same issues, limited analysis of the effectiveness of alternative strategies, and misunderstandings about the impact of different interventions. The Government of Bangladesh is considering policies and plans on trafficking, but is not yet organized to address the issue.

Until recently, donor support has been characterized by small grants to a variety of groups working in isolation. There are no “major” donor-funded projects in Bangladesh and no comprehensive strategies for the sector. However, availability donor funds are increasing this year, and discussions among donors for coordinating assistance are just beginning.

PROGRAM STRATEGY

When initiating anti-trafficking programs, it is essential to understand the cultural, religious and societal factors that contribute to this trade. The trafficking process is often over-simplified, and there can be serious negative consequences from some of the more obvious interventions. Raids on brothels, for example, may free some victims, but result in the death or further restriction of others.

USAID/Dhaka is implementing an anti-trafficking strategy built on five basic pillars:

- Appropriate, targeted **research**

USAID is supporting “situation analysis” to fully describe the trafficking process and identify the points of intervention in Bangladesh. It will critically examine existing models and suggest ways to support and improve interventions targeting different actors.

- Strengthening Bangladesh’s anti-trafficking **network**

USAID is supporting a national network, “Action Against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children (ATSEC),” to bring together organizations addressing the trafficking issue. ATSEC is establishing a resource center, collecting information identifying high risk areas, organizing training and advocacy seminars, and providing technical support to grassroots organizations fighting the trafficking problem.

- Supporting NGO/CBO **capacity building**

A number of NGOs working on trafficking can benefit from technical support to develop their capacity to implement and monitor trafficking programs, and improve their networking, coordination and strategic planning. USAID has hired a full-time staff member to provide technical or management support to these NGOs.

- Developing and implementing appropriate, targeted anti-trafficking **prevention** efforts

Culturally sensitive prevention and awareness-creation efforts are desperately needed that reach the community level. The situation analysis described above will be used to identify cost-effective prevention approaches. Communication strategies will be developed to identify effective prevention messages for different target groups in Bangladesh.

- Assist victims of trafficking **protecting** them and **prosecuting** traffickers.

USAID is supporting efforts of the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) to “protect, prosecute, repatriate and rehabilitate.” Existing legal procedures on child/women trafficking will be presented in an easy-to-understand format and distributed to those working in the legal system (investigators, police, lawyers, para-legals and judges). Systematic mechanisms will be developed to repatriate victims in a cost effective manner will be developed, with assistance of NGOs and in-country legal experts in sending and receiving countries. Rehabilitation will be set up to give victims a chance to recover from their ordeal and eventually reintegrate into society.

ASSESSMENT

USAID's recent work on trafficking issues is responding to an important need in Bangladesh. Much remains to be done to identify the most effective anti-trafficking strategies and produce reliable information about trafficking. Though major differences in philosophy have inhibited cooperation among international NGOs opposing trafficking, that does not seem to be the case with domestic NGOs in Bangladesh. However, with a focused U.S. Mission strategy articulated and resources being invested to implement that strategy, USAID is optimistic that progress will be made in reducing trafficking within and from Bangladesh.

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