SIREN methodology

STRATEGIC INFORMATION RESPONSE NETWORK
United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP): Phase III

BANGKOK, THAILAND

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TARGETING ENDEMIC VULNERABILITY FACTORS TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING

*Overview: What makes a person or community vulnerable to human trafficking?[1]
Common assumptions are that poverty and a lack of education are primary
factors, but evidence often proves otherwise. In different locales, different factors
increase the risk of being trafficked. Evidence-based programming requires an
understanding of the vulnerability factors, verified through research with
individuals and communities at risk, to design appropriate interventions and
achieve measurable positive impact in preventing trafficking and risky migration.*

Many trafficking prevention programs broadly assume that, no matter the local context,
the key vulnerability factors are poverty and lack of knowledge about human trafficking.
That is, trafficking prevention interventions often move forward with poverty alleviation
programs coupled with awareness raising, without first establishing or investigating
whether the key drivers of human trafficking in the given area are household income or
lack of understanding about trafficking and safe migration. There have been many
studies throughout various parts of Asia (and beyond) demonstrating that poverty, low
education, and lack of understanding about human trafficking are *not* necessarily key
contributing factors to vulnerability at all. Thus, we must be careful with our assumptions
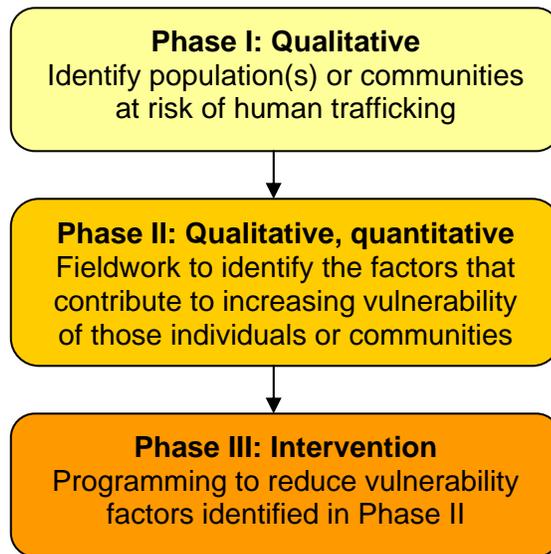lest our interventions be wrongly targeted.[2]

To date, the impact of most programs aiming to prevent and reduce human trafficking
has been low and/or challenging to measure, with a few isolated exceptions. In reality,
attempts to measure real impact from trafficking prevention programs are rare.[3] It is
clear that many populations thought to be at risk have been saturated with knowledge
about the risks of human trafficking; yet, still, thousands if not millions are trafficked
every year. It is clearly more complicated in many local contexts than simply poverty
and lack of knowledge, with clear implications for the effectiveness of poverty alleviation,
scholarship, awareness raising, alternative livelihoods, and related prevention
interventions.

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[1] Vulnerability to being trafficked can be conceived as consisting of external and internal factors. External factors may
include household, social, economic, and criminal variables within a household and community, while internal factors are
essentially a person's mindset and receptivity to entering themselves or family members into what may be considered a
risky situation, in order to gain a perceived economic and/or social return within a certain timeframe.

[2] For just a few examples, refer to Regional Clearing Point (2005). *Second Annual Report on Victims of Trafficking in
Southeastern Europe*; Mongolian Gender Equality Center (2006). *Human Trafficking in Mongolia: Risks, Vulnerability and
Trauma*; and Rende Taylor, LM (2005). Dangerous trade-offs: The behavioral ecology of child labor and prostitution in
rural northern Thailand. *Current Anthropology* 46.

[3] The ILO-IPEC Trafficking in Children and Women Project (ILO-IPEC TICW) is a rare exception in Asia, having
undergone a groundbreaking region-wide impact assessment across five GMS countries in 2006-2007.

UNIAP uses a practical step-by-step approach that is scalable and comprehensive to improve our understanding of vulnerability factors. The integration of **vulnerability targeting** into effective human trafficking prevention interventions entails three phases, as illustrated *(right)*. Two stages of research are followed by appropriate intervention based on the research results. This document provides an **overview** of the vulnerability targeting phases, with more extensive instruments and documentation available on request.

Phase I: Qualitative
Identify population(s) or communities at risk of human trafficking

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Phase II: Qualitative, quantitative
Fieldwork to identify the factors that contribute to increasing vulnerability of those individuals or communities

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Phase III: Intervention
Programming to reduce vulnerability factors identified in Phase II

Phase I is a planning and targeting stage, aiming to identify environmental, socioeconomic, and individual factors that contribute to risk of being trafficked. Much of this can be conducted through pilot field surveys and secondary data analysis.

'How many of you have family members who have migrated from the village?'

– Phase I pilot targeting in the Myanmar Dry Zone, through a UNDP-UNIAP joint initiative

Phase II combines community-based focus group discussions and hotspot surveys to identify the real factors that contribute to vulnerability, and the sub-populations most at risk. Focus groups in target locations can gather the perceptions of risk factors in the eyes of various members of the community. This method is relatively quick and easy, and employs a scale prop to generate dialogue within groups, and comparable information between groups.

The **focus groups** initiate conversations and data collection in a community, where it is often sensitive to survey directly on human trafficking. Without even using the phrase 'human trafficking,' the focus groups can act as a platform for conversation to get people thinking about and discussing together how migration might go wrong; how parents or young people might be deceived; what work and social opportunities are appealing, and how to check out opportunities that might seem too good to be true; and, how communities can analyze their own situation and play a prominent role in the design of solutions.

The data collected from focus group surveys is used to identify variables that should appear on the **quantitative hotspot surveys**. While also serving an awareness-raising function in themselves, for the purposes of vulnerability reduction, quantitative hotspot surveys provide further insights on actual behaviors and decision-making that may not come to the surface in focus group discussions (which often center around common perceptions and cultural beliefs). Quantitative hotspot surveys, therefore, measure not what people say is happening or what people think is happening, but what really *is* happening.

Hotspot surveys consist of in-depth interviews of a sample from the target group in the hotspot, stratified into two groups: those who have been trafficked or exploited, versus those who have not. Information is then collected on various family, household, and community variables for each individual in the sample through in-depth interviews, and compared between the two groups to ascertain which factors are the most significant drivers of entrance into exploitation or trafficking situations.

UNIAP Myanmar staff conduct Phase II vulnerability targeting focus groups in the Myanmar Dry Zone (left); Smiles are an indicator of engagement and openness to participation (we hope), as learned in this vulnerability targeting focus group in Kandal, Cambodia.

Phase III is the intervention design and modification phase that applies what is learned from the research Phases I and II directly into counter-trafficking programming. The table at the end of this section lists an illustrative sample of some of the more common vulnerability factors that can be found throughout the Greater Mekong Sub-region, with examples of broad intervention types that may be more or less successful at reducing that vulnerability factor. In reviewing the table, it is important to consider that, in many environments, combinations of several vulnerability factors actor together to create vulnerability – and this must be considered as well when designing appropriate interventions.

In summary, the overall objective of the vulnerability targeting approach is to target and gain entry into a hotspot community; to get people thinking and talking about the issue as it affects them; and to get them involved in the analysis and the design of their community's solutions. At the same time it gives communities and development workers an understanding of the real (not just perceived) risk factors to enable the collective design of more effective trafficking prevention and vulnerability reduction programs.

How can we more effectively address some of the common trafficking vulnerability factors that exist in the Greater Mekong Sub-region?	
Vulnerability data	**Appropriate interventions**
Young people want to leave the village in search of work and adventure, no matter what their family's economic condition People considered 'middle class' are more likely to migrate, rather than the poorest, since they have the means to do so Attaining a relatively high level of education drives more educated young people to seek urban jobs	- Promotion of safe, informed migration for those youth who will migrate - Life and career skills training if applicable - Promotion and enforcement of safe, quality job brokering and recruitment
Financial emergencies in the family, such as illness of a parent, lead children to urgently seek money to pay emergency bills, often ending up in debt bondage	- Low-interest medical or emergency loans available to villagers - Policy advocacy towards improved welfare provision
Depletion of fish stocks in some traditional fishing localities have led to loss of livelihood options for males, the traditional fishermen	- Support for alternative livelihoods - Agricultural or environmental programs, as applicable - Promotion of safe, informed migration for boys/men who migrate
Seasonal natural disasters in some locations make livelihoods in the locality very difficult	- Agricultural or environmental programs - Support for alternative livelihoods - Promotion of safe, informed migration for those who migrate

UNIAP / SIREN PROTOCOLS USED FOR VULNERABILITY TARGETING
▪ Qualitative assessment of source-side knowledge and perceptions ▪ Quantitative hotspot surveys, for source or destination areas ▪ Victim surveys with route tracing and mapping ▪ Choice experiments to establish risk tolerance and preferences
OTHER SELECTED UNIAP / SIREN METHODOLOGIES
▪ Documenting debt bondage ▪ Convicted trafficker interview protocol ▪ Mapping broker/trafficker operations ▪ Evaluation: counter-trafficking capacity building programs ▪ Evaluation: aggregate impact assessments

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