Introduction to Human Trafficking

Human trafficking constitutes one of the gravest forms of human rights abuses, whereby people are deceived or coerced into severe forms of exploitation.

The ILO in 2012 estimated that some 20.9 million people around the world are in conditions of forced labour, which the organization defines as largely equivalent to human trafficking. A 2014 ILO research indicates that the related illegal profits are in excess of US$ 150 billion, making human trafficking one of the largest criminal industries in the world.

The Asia-Pacific region records an estimated 11.7 million trafficked people, by far the highest figure of any region in the world. Within Asia-Pacific, the Greater-Mekong Sub-region (GMS: Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam) features some of the most extensive flows of migration and human trafficking.

While human trafficking is truly a global phenomenon, it most commonly occurs intra-regionally, with each region and sub-region experiencing distinct patterns. In the GMS, such flows are characterized by a strong cross-border dimension due to factors such as cultural linkages, traditional migration trends, long and porous borders, significant imbalances in socio-economic development levels, and at times conflict.

Human trafficking in the GMS occurs for a wide range of purposes, such as for forced labour in the fishing and seafood industries, in agriculture, construction, domestic servitude or begging; as well as for sexual exploitation or forced marriage.
Introduction to the UN-ACT Project

In 2013, UNDP conducted a series of visioning workshops on the next 5 years of anti-trafficking interventions. The consultations were organized in all 6 GMS countries, engaging more than 200 stakeholders from governments, civil society, international organizations and UN agencies.

In the process, it was concluded that the anti-trafficking sector often operates in a fragmented fashion, without consensus and coordination on desired outcomes. This fragmentation leads to confusion, conflicting efforts and an ineffective overall response to human trafficking.

Based on these findings, the UNDP-managed United Nations Action for Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons (UN-ACT) project was developed, with the following goal in mind over the next 5 years (2014-2018):

“Key anti-trafficking stakeholders in the region are working in a more cooperative and mutually supportive manner to effectively combat trafficking in persons”

The main tool for UN-ACT’s work is the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking, better known as the COMMIT Process. The COMMIT Process is a unique sub-regional mechanism based on a comprehensive MoU that brings together the six governments in the GMS in a joint effort to combat human trafficking.

UN-ACT functions as the Secretariat to the COMMIT Process, allowing it to link COMMIT with its other project components and partners. To support key actors in the GMS to combat human trafficking more effectively and strategically, UN-ACT has four inter-linked outcomes:

1. **Strengthen National & Regional Capacities** through support to the six Governments in the COMMIT Process, to ensure that they are able to effectively prevent human trafficking, deliver the services that victims are entitled to, and punish the perpetrators of the crime of trafficking in persons.

2. **Increase Regional Cooperation** between COMMIT countries and other countries or regional mechanisms, in view of the significant human trafficking flows and linkages that exist between the Greater Mekong Sub-region and many other countries in the broader region.

3. **Further Evidence-Based Research** to fill the gap of reliable data on human trafficking, which has long been recognized as a significant weakness and obstacle in effective anti-trafficking work.

4. **Support Civil Society & Other Non-State Actors** to contribute more effectively to anti-trafficking efforts by providing services directly to victims on the one hand, and holding governments responsible for fulfilling their duties to protect and support victims, and punish perpetrators on the other.

**UN-ACT’s Strategic Framework**

- **Central Process**
- **Regional Cooperation**
- **Knowledge Base**
- **Civil Society & Other Non-State Actors**
- **Greater Mekong Sub-region**

**Assumptions**

- **Political will (including values & attitudes)** exists amongst COMMIT members towards ending human trafficking.

- **Anti-trafficking stakeholders operate in an environment, in which they are able to use their capacity in an effective manner**

- **Sufficient resources are available**