

Human Trafficking in Vietnam: The situation, root causes and recommendations for prevention.

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Abstract: *In recent years, human trafficking has been a complicated issue in Vietnam, as many human trafficking cases have occurred via illegal migration with increasingly sophisticated tricks. The crime has directly harmed the lives, health and human dignity of the victims, mostly women and children. Vietnamese agencies have conducted several measures to prevent trafficking. In this paper, the author intends to investigate the trafficking situation, root causes, as well as some recommendations for Vietnam.*

Key words: *Human trafficking, prevention, situation, cause, recommendation.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

It is investigated that human trafficking throughout the world remains complicated, especially the trafficking through illegal migration from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East to Europe. The European authorities have investigated and discovered thousands of transnational human trafficking and illegal organ trade. In Vietnam, according to statistics from the Ministry of Public Security, in the period 2008-2017, 3,897 human trafficking cases were detected with 6,188 individuals and 8,363 victims. The problem is more serious in provinces closed to the border.

The prevention and fight against human trafficking in Vietnam is facing a number of difficulties and challenges. The implementation of policies and laws, as well as State management and social supervision in some areas, has failed to weaken criminal activities. A prevention movement has not attracted a large number of people, especially women. Communications and information dissemination activities in many places are still formal, lack specific plans, measures, guidance, and inspection.

Most recent studies carried out in Vietnam have focused on commercial sexual exploitation. Very little concrete research has been carried out that would have a clear focus on non-sexual types of trafficking or that would offer a comparative analysis of trafficking in a “non-sex trade” context with trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Therefore, a few limited valuable contributions have been provided for the whole trafficking situation. For example, Duong (2014) focused on trafficking of women and children while Hoang (2013) has focused on victim protection. To successfully combat trafficking in persons, a system of comprehensive measures is a strict requirement. This paper, firstly, outlines the situation of human trafficking in Vietnam, examining root causes for the existence of human trafficking and then recommends some feasible solutions for the future prevention.

II. THE SITUATION OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

As a developing country, Viet Nam is a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking whose offenses have become even more complex and sophisticated. Vietnamese victims are trafficked to Taiwan, Malaysia, South Korea, Laos, China, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Indonesia, and the United Kingdom and so on. Vietnam is a source country for men and women who migrate abroad for work opportunities. According to statistics from the Ministry of Public Security, the number of incidents has been on the rise since 2008 and peaked in 2013 with 507 reported incidents. After 2013, the number of cases tends to decrease, but the number of trafficking victims tends to increase. The number of victims detected in 2015 is slightly reduced compared to 2014 but in 2016 this number increased sharply. The general trend throughout the period was the increase in trafficking victims. Around 70% of all human trafficking was to China. Land border trafficking from Viet Nam to Cambodia was mainly in women for prostitution and forced labor, surrogacy or for forced marriages in a third country. Meanwhile, along the Viet Nam–Lao People’s Democratic Republic border, there was smaller-scale trafficking for prostitution or forced marriage. Trafficking in the form of illegal marriage brokering and false marriages to Malaysia, China, Republic of Korea, and Taiwan occurred more often in southern provinces, while cases of child trafficking, substitution and appropriation were more prevalent in northern border provinces.

It is believed the actual number is considerably higher, as program experience has shown that the majority of trafficked persons return without reporting they have been trafficked, and due to stigma and discrimination, often do not tell their families and friends. As has been the case with trafficking in many other areas, the number of trafficked persons within and from Vietnam has often been given in the form of estimates whose source or basis have not been established and are thus unreliable. As reported, many different estimates have been given by different stakeholders due to their different methods of estimation. This is the case not only in domestic studies, but also in regional research regarding human trafficking in Vietnam. In general, data on the trafficking issue in Vietnam is affected by the fact, universally agreed upon, that accurate figures are impossible to come by. Reasons popularly given for this dearth of adequate data include 'the unauthorized and clandestine nature of the activities', 'poor data collection', and 'the reluctance of victims' to report trafficking cases. However, another important reason, which seems to be the most important in the situation of trafficking data in Vietnam, is the inadequacy of the compilation and dissemination of trafficking statistics among authorized institutions at both national and regional levels. Remarkably, this inadequate statistics on human trafficking in Vietnam has been attributed to the political sensitivity of the issue and the government's fear of outsiders' political intervention under the guise of concern with human rights if they reveal the real figure on the number of trafficked persons.

III. ROOT CAUSES FOR THE EXISTENCE OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

There is a wide-ranging agreement about causes of human trafficking. In Vietnam, trafficking is caused by range of factors including inequality between men and women, poverty, lack of employment opportunities, economic imbalances, lack of education, lack of awareness of trafficking, decline of border controls.

It is investigated that many trafficked persons in Vietnam migrated originally because of economic problems and needs at home. The economic reform in Vietnam - starting in the late 1980s have brought about substantial transformation toward a more diversified and open society. It has benefited national economic development as well as many people in the country. However, inequality still occurs between the rich and the poor and between urban and rural areas. Poverty remains a serious problem in Vietnam. In rural areas, the declining role of agriculture also has pressured many families. The lack of farmland has become an increasingly difficult factor in alleviation of poverty. Landless farmers have to live on income gained from hired work, but availability of non-agricultural employment is extremely limited. Daily income from hired labor in the region remains slow. In addition to the challenge of landlessness, it difficult for many people access existing financial institutions. For example, to access loans from the Social Policy Bank, women must belong to an officially designated "poor household". Collateral is required to borrow from the Agriculture Bank. These conditions made it difficult for "high risk" women to approach these financial institutions. Moreover, the banks' interest rates are very high. For those reasons, laborers, especially those from the countryside, search for jobs far away from home. In the cities, migrant workers seek employment in such areas as industrial zones, as domestic helpers, or in entertainment facilities. Many others seek work overseas under labour export programs, although only limited numbers are successful as they lack the requisite expertise and/or language skills. In many cases, while seeking jobs, laborers are deceived, lose their money, and fail to gain employment. Many women or young girls fall prey to trafficking, either while seeking employment or on entering into marriage.

Regarding trafficking in children, many of them are trafficked by even their parents. This is particularly true for children from poor families. In such cases, debt is one of the root causes for many parents allowing their daughters to drop out of school and begin work early. Other families consider marriage of a daughter to a foreigner as an immediate solution to family poverty. In turn, many of these girls become victims of exploitation and deception, often being coerced into the sex trade. In some cases, because of very limited economic opportunities, parents actually approach traffickers and ask the traffickers to take their children, with the full knowledge that their children will be sexually exploited.

In conjunction with the other factors noted above, persons who are unaware of the specific risks involved in trafficking are also vulnerable to being trafficked. A recent study revealed that only small amount of Vietnamese people understood the risk of being coerced into prostitution. A lack of information services, such as television, radio and newspapers in poor and remote areas, means it is difficult to warn women of the risks of trafficking. Usually, they are lured by the prospect of a good marriage, of a good job. Some researchers also find that the lack of Chinese women together with the lack of available Vietnamese men is one of the reasons fueling women trafficking from Vietnam to China. The geographic trafficking ring targets are being generally poor provinces and also experienced shortage of men due to the past wars and urbanization.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTION

First, rising public awareness on human trafficking.

The most important components of an effective prevention program are providing more information on the human trafficking. To do this, authorities should describe different forms of trafficking, its consequences,

and the abuse and exploitation that arise from the many forms of trafficking to the community. Providing such information helps to educate the community, especially at-risk individuals, so that they can protect themselves and their families, and call for support when needed. Furthermore, Ministry of Education and Training should cooperate with other government agencies to carry out education programs on human trafficking into schools. The activities need to be designed creatively based on students' interests, including competitions; games such as crosswords, quizzes, tests; art performances such as role-playing, poetry readings, folk songs, and singing. Specific instructions should be discussed, like: life and work in big cities and industrial zones; common work for migrating rural people; the difficulties and challenges of migrating. Local authorities also have to develop booklets to provide detailed instruction to the citizens.

Second, running micro-credit program.

Access to credit is identified as an important input in changing the socio-economic status of the poor and at-risk people. The government should launch a micro-credit program to address this gap. A combination of micro-credit loans and skills training will provide opportunities for them to create or gain employment and increase incomes. Poor families should be supported with new jobs, which help to improve their living conditions. It will help many people reduce their dependence on providers of high interest loans, and to be confident in running their businesses as well as protect them and themselves from the dangers of human trafficking. Therefore, the loans could improve the livelihoods of credit group members, bring about more stable incomes, help families get out of poverty, and allow them to gradually save some money.

Third, developing the knowledge and skills of loans' beneficiaries.

The projects should provide vocational training courses for loans' beneficiaries as well as opportunities for them to be more involved in the activities of their community and society. When borrowing money, they need to participate in regular group meetings to share experiences, improve their legal and financial knowledge, and develop their social skills. Over time, beneficiaries became more confident, enabling them to join in further community activities. For women, their dependence on their husbands and on other family members has also been reduced. If possible, beneficiaries should be accessed to other development resources including access to land, technological assistance, and basic services such as health care and education. Technical documents that improve their knowledge of production and business management will help beneficiaries learn how to use and manage capital and other resources to improve their family's income.

Fourth, providing scholarship program for disadvantaged students.

Government should cooperate with NGOs to support scholarship programs for disadvantaged students. Beneficiaries are selected on the basis of such factors as poverty in the family; number of siblings; limited school attainment; and likelihood of drop-out if financial assistance was not obtained. The scholarship support covers all direct and minimal basic living expenses, including uniforms, stationary supplies, bicycles for transportation, and other essential costs of the students. The scholarships ensure that the beneficiaries are able to attend school on a full-time basis. Keeping these students in school not only provides them with the basic skills, knowledge and confidence they need to ensure a brighter future, but also reduces their risk of being trafficked as they will be less likely to be forced into labour, marriage, or prostitution in order to provide income for their families.

Fifth, running safe migration programs.

As mentioned above, many people have to migrate because of a variety of reasons, including lack of farming land, low skills, low income available from farming, and the large economic gap between urban and rural areas. To protect them from being trafficked, it is critical to provide relevant and sufficient information, vocational skills, and support services for potential migrants. Furthermore, in order to reach more people, the program should provide information and skills to community clubs, public education centres, schools, and other organizations.

Sixth, improving skills in trafficking prevention for local authorities.

It is investigated that there was a need for a comprehensive training programs for key agencies working on human trafficking. This includes government agencies who faced various challenges in being tasked with the responsibility to address human trafficking. Therefore, the Vietnamese government should run training programs which would lead on to establishing mutual understanding of the issue of trafficking across all sectors, and provide them with analytical skills that enable them to critically reflect existing initiatives. Through training classes, workshops, and communication, the project's specialists, the local authorities have numerous opportunities to share and learn. For example, training for the Vietnam women union's staff need focus on skills like managing micro-credit programs, presentation, communication, and bookkeeping skills.

Seventh, running cross-border cooperation program.

As a transnational crime, the complex problem of human trafficking requires information sharing and the coordinated action of affected countries. Vietnamese authorities should organize cross-border workshops with Cambodia, Laos, and China frequently. Through the workshops, representatives from the relevant agencies, organizations, and associations in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and China can exchange ideas, opinions, and information. These exchanges will enable the participants to improve their knowledge and understanding of the trafficking situation in each country, as well as to share experiences and lessons learned, and to build trust toward future cooperation. Participants also study effective models of preventing human trafficking in other countries. Furthermore, government organizations also need to be carrying out advocacy campaigns in the border regions in order to raise public awareness.

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