

# COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN VIETNAM:

Lessons Learned and Practical Experiences for  
Future Program Design and Implementation

2002-2008



**The Asia Foundation**

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## Abbreviations

CET	Centre for Education Technology
CRISOP	Center for Raising Intellectual Standards of People
CSG	Community Support Group
EPA	Education Promotion Associations
GMS	Greater Mekong Sub-region
IEC	Information Education and Communication
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NLAA	National Legal Aid Agency
NGO	Non-governmental organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VND	Vietnam Dong
WU	(Vietnam) Women's Union
WTO	World Trade Organization

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## Preface

The Asia Foundation has worked to combat the trafficking of women and children in Vietnam since 2002. Over time, The Foundation's anti-trafficking program has steadily grown in complexity and scope, and the number of local organizations working with the Foundation to respond to the serious trafficking problem within and across Vietnam's borders has expanded concurrently. The comprehensive nature of the Foundation's anti-trafficking program was made possible by funding from both public and private donors. We would like to acknowledge and thank the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Barrett Family Foundation, the Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, the MYTWO Fund, Jerome and Thao Dodson, and other generous individuals.

The Asia Foundation works with its local partners to build stronger institutions, strengthen processes, and galvanize communities to fight human trafficking by employing several key strategies: focusing efforts concurrently at both the national

and local levels; supporting both policy-level initiatives and concrete community actions; addressing the needs of communities and populations most affected by human trafficking in targeted provinces and across the country's borders; disseminating critical information on human trafficking to communities, schools, and labor migrants through innovative communication efforts; and providing women with economic opportunities and young girls with scholarships to reduce their vulnerabilities to trafficking.

In order to capture best practice and lessons learned that will inform ongoing and future program design and implementation, the Foundation has undertaken a systematic analysis of its anti-trafficking program activities in Vietnam over the last six years. We hope that the information contained in this report will also be useful for practitioners and other organizations supporting anti-trafficking initiatives in Vietnam. We welcome your questions, concerns, comments, and recommendations.

Kim N. B. Ninh  
Country Representative  
The Asia Foundation

## Executive Summary

This report has been developed to share the achievements, experiences, best practices, and lessons learned from The Asia Foundation's six-year program to prevent and combat human trafficking in Vietnam. The report features an overview culled from The Foundation's experience in implementing program interventions in collaboration with an expanding network of local and international partners that share our commitment to bettering the lives of trafficking victims and protecting those at-risk of being trafficked.

The Foundation implemented a comprehensive program with components designed to be complementary and mutually reinforcing. Those components include: economic empowerment initiatives that target poor women and provide access to credit and vocational training; creating awareness of trafficking risks by implementing art-based communication campaigns on safe migration in schools and communities; enhancing access to justice by offering legal aid support to victims who are reintegrating into Vietnamese communities; supporting victim reintegration by developing innovative new community support group models; and facilitating cross-border cooperation to stop trafficking.

The report is divided into three main sections: I) Program Introduction, II) Analysis of the Eight Program Components, and III) Conclusions. Through descriptive analysis, case studies of individuals, program highlights, and detailed lessons learned, the report describes the contributions of the program and the challenges encountered in addressing the multiple facets of the serious and complex human trafficking problem in Vietnam.

The key lessons learned include:

- The most important component of human trafficking prevention is the effective dissemination of culturally-appropriate and locally relevant information on the problem and its consequences to local communities, particularly to those in remote areas who are at greatest risk.
- Close coordination between authorities and organizers, and the use of diverse and innovative communication methods, have been crucial to the success of the program's communication initiatives, which have helped raise public awareness of trafficking.
- Citizen participation in public decisionmaking at the local level, particularly the participation of women and other vulnerable groups, improves program effectiveness in combating trafficking.
- The community support group (CSG) model, which draws together influential community stakeholders and officials to fight trafficking, has proven highly successful due in large part to its unique, collaborative structure at the commune level. However, sustainability remains a serious concern: the lack of dedicated personnel, the need for the CSGs to remain independent of local authorities, and limited funding all threaten the scope and potential impact of the CSG model.
- Poverty remains one of the root causes of human trafficking. Consistent with information gathered from many economic empowerment initiatives, this program determined that providing access to low-interest credit and enhancing women's technical skills and economic opportunities increased household income and improved women's participation in

decision-making and community life. Our program experience revealed additional key findings related to economic opportunity and trafficking:

- 1) Although providing access to low-interest credit for vulnerable women did increase household income and improved lives, especially in remote regions of the Mekong Delta, families were still at-risk of falling deeper into poverty if faced with emergency situations, such as natural disaster, extended illness of family members, and so on.
  - 2) The policies and methods used for ranking and classifying poor households need to be reconsidered by local officials in the Mekong Delta, as many vulnerable families in difficult financial circumstances are ineligible for existing benefits under the current criteria.
  - 3) Micro-credit programs should incorporate voluntary savings strategies, and beneficiaries should be permitted to invest those savings in furthering their businesses.
  - 4) There should be a broader focus on developing greater economic opportunities in at-risk communities beyond micro-credit to ensure sustained and meaningful impact.
  - 5) Vocational training programs are critical in aiding and supporting the reintegration of trafficking victims and are best delivered through community-based initiatives that are flexible and tailored to the specific needs and capabilities of individuals.
- Keeping disadvantaged girls in school ensures them a better future as they gain the basic skills, knowledge, and confidence necessary to support themselves and participate in their communities; educated girls are less likely to fall victim to forced marriage, labor, or prostitution.
  - Efforts to strengthen cross-border relationships can play an important part in reducing overall trafficking, particularly if such efforts include a focus on trust-building and the development of concrete action plans with measurable goals.
  - The Vietnamese Government needs to develop specific, practical policy measures to address migrant labor issues, including protecting the rights of domestic migrant workers and export laborers. These measures must be gender-sensitive, as women dominate the informal labor sector and are an increasing share of the migrant labor workforce. Women are therefore subject to the particular vulnerabilities of informal employment such as lack of vigorous regulation, as well as the risks of migrating in search of work. A critical component of any new government measure to address migrant labor concerns is the protection of human rights to decrease the vulnerability of and discrimination towards returning victims of human trafficking.

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## Introduction

Human trafficking is a complex and widespread problem that affects numerous communities in Vietnam and across the Asia-Pacific region. In the context of the country's deepening process of economic globalization, in recent years Vietnam has become a source and destination country for human trafficking, and is also at risk of becoming a major transit point for non-Vietnamese victims being trafficked through Vietnam to other countries in the region. In 2007, 357 trafficking cases were reported<sup>1</sup> involving 670 perpetrators who were accused of trafficking 862 women and children. Poverty remains one of the root causes of human trafficking: the desire for economic improvement via increased income, coupled with limited availability of economic opportunities in rural localities, explains why more men, and particularly more women and young girls, migrate for jobs. However, in the act of migrating, workers are at risk of being trafficked, with heightened vulnerabilities for women and girls.

In 2002, The Asia Foundation began to implement a program designed to combat and prevent the trafficking of women and children in Vietnam. To accelerate the effective participation of women in all aspects of the program, the Foundation partnered with the Vietnam Women's Union both at the national and local levels, and also engaged local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the fight against trafficking to ensure that locally relevant solutions would be offered. Drawing upon input from local partners and

building on lessons learned from the Foundation's regional counter trafficking projects, the Foundation program in Vietnam grew through successive phases to encompass eight key components that address the multiple issues facing victims of trafficking and those at-risk. The program also expanded geographically, eventually including major activities in five provinces known to have serious trafficking problems: Quang Ninh,<sup>2</sup> An Giang,<sup>3</sup> Can Tho City,<sup>4</sup> Nghe An,<sup>5</sup> and Thanh Hoa.<sup>6</sup>

The major program components are:

1. Prevention, Education, and Communication;
2. Community Support Group Models;
3. Women's Economic and Social Empowerment;
4. Safe Migration;
5. Legal Aid for Trafficking Victims;
6. Cross-Border Cooperation;
7. Reintegration of Trafficking Victims; and
8. Scholarships for Disadvantaged Girls.

The program began with Community, Education, and Communication activities, which were designed to raise awareness about the risks of

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1 Statistics quoted from a report by the Department of Criminal Police, Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security.

2 Phase I, 2002: province borders China.

3 Phase I, 2002: province borders Cambodia.

4 Expansion in Phase II, 2004.

5 Expansion, 2005: densely populated Central province with high rates of migration.

6 Expansion, 2005: densely populated Central province with high rates of migration.



trafficking among vulnerable populations and communities. In 2003, the program developed and piloted the Community Support Group (CSG) Model, a highly collaborative model that brings together community members, civic leaders, and organizations to serve as the first line of defense against trafficking in local communities and to provide counseling and support to poor and disadvantaged people who are often likely to migrate unsafely. Over time, CSGs were established in many of the communities/provinces targeted by the program.

In the second phase of the project, in 2004, The Asia Foundation added a legal aid component designed to support the reintegration of returnees in all three target provinces. The Foundation recognized the need to strengthen the capacity of agencies in the legal aid system, raise public awareness of existing anti-human trafficking laws, and improve legal counseling and legal education services for the community and for victims of trafficking.

As the program evolved and interaction deepened with the target communities, it was evident that migrant workers required special targeted information to better understand the dangers they might face when migrating. To address this problem, in 2005 the Foundation built upon the Prevention, Education and Communication component of the program, and began to provide education on safe migration practices to potential migrants, their families, and the community as a whole. The safe migration component provided information to prospective migrant workers before they departed their communities about life skills

that would assist in a safe and successful migration, along with discussion of the risks of becoming victims of human trafficking in labor migration, and strategies to mitigate that risk. At the end of 2006, the Foundation, in partnership with the Centre for Education Technology (CET) within the Ministry of Education and Training, expanded this initiative by introducing a pilot program on safe migration education into the formal school curriculum. Local authorities, schools, and students enthusiastically and actively participated in the project.

Since the end of 2006, The Asia Foundation has increased its focus on sustainability through efforts to support local partners to design and implement human trafficking prevention programs more effectively. Integral to this process has been a call for more participation and support from the community and local authorities. The program phase initiated in 2006 had three additional components: the design and implementation of a creative and effective performing arts-based communications program to engage local communities; efforts to strengthen bilateral cooperation with bordering countries in order to promote economic development as well as safe migration across borders; and a strong focus on increasing community participation, especially among women, in the distribution of local budget resources, with the belief that community participation fosters the creation of more economic opportunities for women and youth at the local level and will mobilize more resources for safe migration education.

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## Program Activities

### 1. THE PREVENTION, EDUCATION, AND COMMUNICATION PROGRAM

The Asia Foundation's Prevention, Education, and Communication Program to combat trafficking in Vietnam raised awareness and engaged local communities to prevent trafficking of women and children. The Foundation utilized a variety of awareness raising activities to reach a multitude of audiences, including prospective migrant workers, youth, at-risk women, and minorities. Primary awareness-raising strategies included public speaking forums, distribution of Information Education and Communication (IEC) materials (such as leaflets and posters), performing arts productions, advocacy, and mass media campaigns to raise awareness.

The Women's Union (WU) has primary responsibility for implementing communication and education programs to raise the community's awareness on human trafficking, as stipulated by Government Decision No. 130/CP (Approval of the National Plan of Action Against the Crime of Trafficking in Children and Women during the period of 2004-2010). Therefore, The Foundation partnered closely with WU to advance their mandate and to strengthen their capacity to provide detailed, effective anti-trafficking messages. The Foundation and WU gave careful consideration to the types of outreach undertaken, as each communication method has both strengths and weaknesses, and each requires different inputs. Prevention education programs were deemed successful when awareness levels among women and the community clearly improved, measured that the fact that more women and youth approach the WU and other local organizations for advice before migrating

### Lessons Learned

The most important components of an effective prevention program are providing more information and knowledge on the human trafficking and its consequences, and describing different forms of trafficking, and the abuse and exploitation that arise from the many forms of trafficking. Providing such information helps to educate the community as a whole, and at-risk individuals, so that they can protect themselves and their families, and call for support when needed. Lessons learned from six years of designing and implementing education and awareness-raising programs for WU staff and at-risk communities include:

- i. Frequency: Additional efforts to provide information about trafficking are needed. Dissemination of information about human trafficking remains very inadequate in most provinces. Most awareness-raising campaigns are only held on special days or at big events, and the campaigns are only held in pilot or targeted areas, not nationwide. The frequency of broadcasting information about this problem in the mass media remains much lower in comparison to other social issues, such as prostitution, HIV/AIDS, and family planning.
- ii. Relevance: The program has found that the more tailored a communication program is to the target population, the more effectively the message is delivered. Nevertheless, most current forms of communication have not been tailored to specific groups or regions. For example, brochures, IEC materials, and handbooks have been delivered to regions where many people are illiterate or can't read the Kinh

majority language. Anti-trafficking practitioners should seek to ensure that all communication materials are locally relevant and in accessible forms (i.e. reflect degree of literacy and commonly used languages of target populations). In addition, to ensure local relevance The Asia Foundation believes that communities should be supported to design their own communication programs to prevent human trafficking, in line with the plan of action of the 130 Steering Committee (under Decision 130). For maximum effectiveness, it is critical that poor women and children, as central beneficiaries, participate in designing and planning such programs.

- iii. Creativity and impact: The program found that methods incorporating community culture offer great potential to raise awareness and ought to be fully explored and developed as a communication tool. For example, Foundation programming demonstrated that art-based communication via local performances are an effective way to educate and engage local communities, as traditional art forms continue to be a significant source for entertainment and education, particularly in rural areas.<sup>7</sup> In addition, The Foundation's experience has shown that, for prevention, positive educational messages and illustrations attract more attention and create a stronger base of knowledgeable community members within a locality.
- iv. Access: Efforts to improve access to information must be increased. Currently, even when information about trafficking is available, many citizens cannot access the information, especially in remote areas.

For example, many programs on VTV2 (a TV channel focused on science and education) raise people's awareness of social issues, including the problem of trafficking. However, people in remote places cannot view these programs because signals fail to reach the areas. Moreover, programs are frequently broadcast at inopportune times, such as when most citizens, especially farmers, are working.

- v. Complementarity: It is important that Vietnamese agencies, organizations, and donors maintain close cooperation in the design of communication programs and IEC materials that have synthesized content and messages. Such cooperation is essential to ensure that materials are not duplicated and that messages are clear, thus enhancing the effectiveness and outcomes of each project.
- vi. Simplicity: When raising awareness, human trafficking should not be equated with other social issues, such as prostitution or drug addiction. Although many of these social issues are inherently bound together, presenting the issue of trafficking as a major problem in its own right has proved most effective, and prevents confusion. Currently, local agencies frequently combine human trafficking with prostitution and HIV/AIDS in their communication programs, which has the unintended consequence of increasing the community discrimination and stigma toward trafficking returnees and hinders reintegration efforts.
- vii. Variety: Communication methods should be diverse in order to prevent attention fatigue. Examples of communication

<sup>7</sup> For example, in Quang Ninh, Can Tho and An Giang, The Foundation and its partners organized nighttime performances using traditional melodies and dramas of ethnic minority groups, with story lines that reflected the daily lives and work of the people in the these provinces. These performances attracted large audiences, but budget constraints and facility availability limited the number of performances that could be offered.

methods that can be used include: drawing or writing contests on human trafficking for students and women; the organization of clubs for women and children, such as Anti-Trafficking Clubs, Happy Family Clubs, and Girls' Clubs; the organization of traditional games for children that incorporate information on human trafficking; and setting up notice boards on trafficking prevention at commune and village meeting halls.

- viii. Leverage local resources: Local government agencies have annual budgets for addressing social issues, but practitioners and community members must advocate that the resources extend to the trafficking issue.

## 2. THE COMMUNITY SUPPORT GROUP MODEL

The Community Support Group (CSG) project model was piloted in 2003. Situated at the community level and staffed by influential community actors, the CSG acts as the first line of defense against trafficking, as well as providing counseling and support to poor and disadvantaged people. The comprehensive CSG model depends upon participation of local authorities at commune and hamlet levels, as well as representatives from relevant agencies and social organizations. To date, the project has established 23 CSGs.<sup>8</sup>

### CSG Structure

After a CSG's establishment, the commune People's Committee issues regulations stating the CSG's mission, functions, responsibilities, and delegation of duties between the Chairman, Vice

Chairman, and CSG members. The regulations also outline the group's working mechanisms, such as a regular monthly meeting as well as additional meetings if urgent cases arise. Each CSG consists of a representative of the Commune People's Committee, representatives from relevant local agencies, and social organizations at the commune level. These organizations may include the WU; the Police; the Fatherland Front; the Committee of Population, Family and Children; the Department of Culture and Information; the Department of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs; the Youth Union; and the Head of the village or hamlet. The CSG is led by a leader of the People's Committee who serves as the Chairman, and a member of the commune's WU serves as Vice Chairman. Each CSG includes 15 to 20 members.

The establishment of a CSG can be initiated by the People's Committee or the WU. For example, the CSG in the town of Troi was established by the WU, while the one in Nui Sam commune was set up by the Ward's People's Committee. Since the adoption of Government Decision 130/2004/QĐ.TTg on July 14, 2004, communes and wards established a Steering Committee called Committee 130<sup>9</sup> to implement the Decision. Committee 130 cooperates with the steering committees of the CSGs to facilitate and direct the CSG's activities.

### CSG Function

The CSGs organize public information sessions to raise awareness of trafficking problems. They work to include trafficking on commune meeting agendas, to monitor the local trafficking situation, and to identify illegal residents that may be acting as traffickers. They also monitor the migration of women and children who have been lured by strangers, as those persons are at risk of having

8 Quang Ninh province: in Troi town, Thong Nhat and Son Duong commune (Hoanh Bo District), Dam Ha commune, Tan Lap commune, Dam Ha town (Dam Ha District); Duong Hoa, Quang Long, Dai Binh commune (Hai Ha District); Can Tho city: Thanh Quoi, Trung Hung, Vinh Trinh (Vinh Trach District); Ba Lang, Hung Phu commune (Cai Rang District); Trung Nhat, Trung An commune (Thot Not District); An Giang province: Binh My, Binh Thuy, Thanh My Tay (Chau Phu District); Phu Huu commune, Long Binh town, Phuoc Hung commune (An Phu District); Nui Sam, Chau Phu A, Chau Phu B commune (Chau Doc District).

9 The broad responsibilities of Committee 130 include legal functions, labor and employment, capacity building, awareness raising, and counseling.

been trafficked. Furthermore, through extensive training provided by the Foundation's project on counseling skills, safe migration, labor law and trafficking-related laws, members of the CSGs are able to provide basic counseling to returnees, as well as vulnerable women and children. Finally, the CSGs play an important role in prevention education, in supporting at-risk women and children, and in reintegrating returnees.

Over the last few years, the CSGs have been effective not only in the prevention of trafficking

in women and children, but also in the protection of victims of domestic violence. The CSG model is a sharp contrast to the traditional effort of establishing a stand-alone committee/group at the commune level to deal with one issue or task; these stand-alone groups frequently result in program overlap (for example, several projects might each have a committee in the same location) and can ultimately hinder support to the community. Agencies and organizations should therefore pilot the establishment of CSGs as an integrated and responsive model.

## Highlights - Program results in the provinces

### In Quang Ninh Province:

- The CSG in Troi town has held 41 public speaking sessions on related laws, life skills, general information about human trafficking and the tricks traffickers use, and has addressed the issue of gender equality for a total audience of 1,660 people. Attendees have included male and female staff of mass organizations. The CSG has provided counseling to six returnees and 124 at-risk women and their families, and organized two communication campaigns
- The CSG in Dam Ha commune organized 30 awareness-raising sessions in the villages and five in the communes, reaching a total of 2,170 people. Sessions focused on issues related to human trafficking in women and children, gender equality, laws related to human trafficking, life skills, and other social issues. The project management committee also delivered 2,420 leaflets and hung 13 large educational posters in offices, schools, and living quarters.

### In An Giang Province:

- The Nui Sam CSG organized 17 public speaking sessions attended by 4,587 people, and distributed 2,750 brochures.
- In Phuoc Hung commune, the CSG held regular meetings and awareness raising for 3,750 people, including 1,600 women and children. They also organized eight communication campaigns.

### In Can Tho City:

- The CSG in Vinh Trinh commune held nine public speaking sessions on human trafficking for 450 people. In one district, one commune and six hamlets, the group broadcast trafficking prevention programs using either radio or loudspeaker systems.
- The CSG in Hung Phu commune organized 10 public speaking sessions with the participation of 500 people. In June 2006, the group held 38 public speaking sessions on human trafficking prevention for 1,700 people, including at-risk women. It broadcast 32 programs on local radio, and organized 117 awareness-raising sessions in different places.

## Lessons Learned

- i. Capacity strengthening: It is necessary to improve the capacity of the CSG's key members, especially to mobilize resources. Group members also need to be trained to act in official CSG capacity to represent community voices, particularly those of women, children, and other disadvantaged people.
- ii. Time constraints: Although the CSGs are independent from Steering Committee 130,<sup>10</sup> most members of the Steering Committee are concurrently members of the CSG. Such participation has been vital, as it facilitates rapid CSG start-up, and because these members are highly influential in the community. At the same time, the CSGs experienced some challenges because many members had concurrent responsibilities in the commune, and the additional CSG duties resulted in heavy workloads for representatives. Experiences drawn from project implementation show that many key members of the CSGs were too busy to lead scheduled activities. The lack of available personnel limited the results and the scope of the group.
- iii. Program sustainability: To ensure that the prevention education programs are effective and sustainable, communes must develop volunteer networks to help carry out awareness-raising activities. The project can support initial steps such as: selection of volunteers; skills training for facilitation, communication, and counseling; and offering informational resources regarding trafficking prevention to volunteers.
- iv. Financial sustainability: Most local authorities have committed to providing minimum financial assistance to maintain

existing CSG activities; however, budgets for CSGs are low. It is necessary for the CSGs to have the resources necessary to operate effectively.

## 3. WOMEN'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM

Poverty remains a serious problem in the Mekong Delta region. The lack of farmland has become an increasingly difficult factor in poverty alleviation efforts; in 2002, 29 percent of people were landless, but 39 percent of landless people ranked in the "poorest" category. Landless farmers have to live on income gained from hired work, but availability of non-agricultural employment is extremely limited and agricultural employment is highly seasonal and therefore unreliable. Daily income from hired labor in the region remains terribly low; typically, landless women find employment as hired laborers for only 50-60 days a year, with monthly income ranging from 70,000 to 90,000 VND (US\$5-7).

In addition to the challenge of landlessness, at the onset of the program The Asia Foundation found that at-risk women and girls, especially in the Mekong Delta Region, find it difficult to 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, or impossible, for 'high risk' women to approach these financial institutions. Moreover, the banks did not provide technical training, and their interest rates were very high (20-30 percent was common). Debt from these sources is one of the root causes for many parents allowing their daughters to drop out of school and begin work early, especially in the Mekong Delta Region. In turn, many of these girls become victims of exploitation and deception, often being coerced into the sex trade.

<sup>10</sup> Nui Sam commune is an exception, where the CSG and Steering Committee 130 merged into one.

Experience with anti-trafficking interventions has proven that women and children isolated from socioeconomic activities at the local level run a higher risk of being trafficked. Therefore, the Foundation's anti-trafficking programs placed special emphasis on assisting women living in poor and extremely harsh conditions. Foundation programs aim to improve women's economic status and their position in their families and the community by improving their confidence and self-determination through economic empowerment activities, thus enabling women to more actively participate in making decisions in the family as well as in the community.

### **Contribution to poverty alleviation in the communes**

The Asia Foundation program identified a category of families/individuals that were falling through the cracks of the social safety net at the local level. The project found that families that were listed as poor households at the local level were able to access a variety of pro-poor programs (including financial assistance, training courses, and so on). However, families that were marginally better off, and therefore did not qualify for the poor household list, faced a serious daily struggle to maintain their standard of living. These families, particularly the women and children, were therefore extremely vulnerable. In some families, parents or relatives forced the women and girls to work in brothels or marry foreigners to get money to pay back debts or overcome financial crises.

As a result of this analysis, the Foundation program targeted families just above the "poor household" designation. Families participating in the project met the following general description: low or unstable incomes; generally lacked the collateral to access official financial institutions; lived in temporary, dilapidated homes; and had

low education and limited vocational skills. Most of the women had not finished their basic education and had no chance to attend training courses and become literate (therefore they were doubly disadvantaged). Girls born into these families usually dropped out of school to work early, but due to their low education levels and lack of skills, they were rarely recruited by local companies or enterprises. Also included in the Foundation's target group were vulnerable women of minority ethnic groups who lived in substandard conditions and lacked access to local support resources.

Access to credit was identified as an important input in changing the socioeconomic status of these families. As a result, the project launched a micro-credit program for women to address this gap. Through a combination of micro-credit loans and skills training, the project provided opportunities for poor and at-risk women to create or gain employment and increase incomes. The program concentrated on developing the knowledge and skills of its beneficiaries as a means of improving job access. Several poor families were supported with new jobs, which helped to improve their living conditions. Through its credit and savings programs, the project helped many women reduce their dependence on providers of high interest loans. For example, after receiving project loans and vocational training through this program, numerous women in Binh My and Phuoc Hung communes (in An Giang) made enough money to pay back their high interest loans. These women, after getting out of debt, were confident in their ability to run their businesses and protect their daughters and themselves from the dangers of human trafficking. Overall, the loans improved the livelihoods of credit group members, brought about more stable incomes, helped families get out of poverty, and allowed them to gradually save some money.

## Case Study: Strengthening women's capabilities and access to local financial sources

Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, who was born in 1968, lived in Dam Ha District in Quang Ninh Province. In 2004, Mrs. Binh attended training classes on business start-up and animal husbandry that were organized by the project. She successfully invested her loan in farming. She explained, "In the past, we were poor, due to the lack of capital and technology. We did not know how to access available credit sources." After two years, her family's living conditions improved greatly and her household no longer ranked as poor. She could afford to send her daughter to Uong Bi Pedagogy College and to pay the school fees for her son, currently in the 9th grade.

### Strengthening Women's Economic Empowerment

The project's activities also provided opportunities for women to be more involved in the activities of their community and society. When borrowing money, the women participated in regular group meetings. There they could 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 and WU activities. Now that their voices are being heard, they can play a role in making important decisions in their families and their communities. Their dependence on their husbands and on other family members has also been reduced.

Some beneficiaries also said the micro-credit program opened their eyes to the availability of other development resources including vocational training, access to land, technological assistance, and basic services such as health care and education. The project also made available technical documents that improved their knowledge of production and business management. Beneficiaries learned how to use and manage capital and other resources to improve their family's income. Thus, the project not only helped women to access cheaper sources of credit, but also improved their ability to use and manage their money effectively.

## Case Study: Technical and vocational training to strengthen economic capacity

Mrs. Bui Thi Chiem was born in 1964, in Son Hai Hamlet, in Quang Ninh Province. In August 2005, she joined the project and borrowed 2 million dong (US\$120). She applied the knowledge learned in the technical training course and invested her money in pig breeding. Each year, she sold two batches of pigs for a profit of 300,000 to 400,000 VND/each (US\$18 – \$25). By 2005, her family no longer ranked on the poverty list. She bought a bicycle with the savings she made from raising pigs. She said, "Animal husbandry training classes were very useful and I became more knowledgeable."



## Case Study: Adopting a more market-oriented business approach

Mrs. Trinh Diem Thuy, who was born in 1975, dropped out of primary school in Grade 1. She lived in Hamlet 2, Phuoc Hung Commune, An Phu District, in An Giang Province. In 2004, she joined the project and borrowed money to invest in python breeding. After seven months, she earned two million dong after selling two 7-kilo pythons. Each gained more than six kilograms from the time they were purchased. She then spent six months raising the second batch, which will be sold soon.

Mrs. Trinh said, “Python breeding is quite easy and they did not require as much care or regular feeding as pigs. I only had to feed them once a week. It is really profitable, so I could do other work every day. I hope I can borrow more money to expand my business.”

### Improving project management skills for local Women’s Union staff

The project also focused on improving the project implementation and management skills of the Women’s Union (WU) and other local agencies. Through training classes, workshops, and communication, the project’s specialists, the WU staff, and local authorities had numerous opportunities to share and learn. These opportunities have improved their organizational, management, and project implementation

capacities. By being involved in the project’s management, the WU staff gained experience in managing micro-credit programs, and strengthened their leadership, presentation, communication, and bookkeeping skills. The WU also launched its first effort to cooperate with banks through this program. Through a trusteeship of the WU, many poor women were able to access small loans, cumulatively amounting to billions of dong, without needing to provide collateral.

## Highlight: Repayment a success

In the Northern provinces, the Economic Empowerment Program for poor women and at-risk girls had a noticeable impact. After three to four years, project beneficiaries’ economic independence had demonstrably improved, and beneficiaries were able to access different local financial sources. Over the life of the project, the micro-credit programs funded by The Asia Foundation in Quang Ninh and other northern provinces had repayment rates of 100 percent.

Over the life of the project, official credit systems evolved to better serve poor people and poor households. Some financial institutions in rural areas, such as the Society Policy Bank, the Agriculture and Rural Development Bank, and the People’s Credit Fund, made contributions to developing financial services in rural areas.

However, despite these policy advances, many women still lack the opportunity to access these credits sources due to lack of collateral, or knowledge of the programs. Women, especially those in the Mekong Delta and other remote areas, should be supported so that they can effectively access other financial sources and markets.

## Lessons Learned

The cycle of poverty in An Giang Province in particular, and in the Mekong Delta region more specifically, has still not been broken. No land, limited vocational skills, no access to credit, and no development all combine to limit poverty alleviation efforts. Although many households supported by the Foundation and other local agencies were able to overcome their poverty in a few years, they are still at risk of falling back into poverty. This is particularly true if families experience an emergency, such as illness, natural disasters, or business losses. The micro-credit programs funded by the Foundation in Quang Ninh and other northern provinces had repayment rates of 100 percent while the rate of that program in the Mekong delta is only 87 percent due to reasons mentioned above. Therefore, besides supporting programs funded by non-governmental organizations and social associations, local authorities should develop a favorable pro-poor policy that specifically helps the poor access education and training programs, and social welfare. Otherwise, this vulnerable demographic runs the risk of becoming isolated and even more impoverished.

The Asia Foundation offers the following recommendations based on the experience gained from each stage of the pilot program:

- i. Beneficiary selection: The selection of beneficiaries for the micro-credit program should be public and transparent. The WU's should organize meetings so their members can vote for and select the borrowers. Preference for loans should be given to women at high risk of trafficking, such as women aged 18 to 45 whose families are near or below the poverty line.
- ii. Loan size: The size of the loans should not be fixed, but should vary from 2 to 5 million dong (US\$120-US\$310) depending on the type of business. The loan cycle should be for at least one year to allow enough time for borrowers to complete a business cycle and earn back the principal and some of the interest.
- iii. Foster a habit of saving: Credit and savings models should be promoted to help borrowers develop the habits of saving and business planning. Savings can be on a mandatory and/or a voluntary basis. The rate of mandatory savings should be determined by credit group members. The regulations for using or lending savings should be agreed upon and abided by all project communes. Beneficiaries should not be required to maintain their savings until the end of the project, but rather should be permitted to access the funds for reinvestment purposes.
- iv. Credit group establishment: Because of the time required, as well as limited accounting skills and bookkeeping experience at the grass-root levels, the WU should not be involved in providing loans directly because it takes too much of the staff's time to carry out the bookkeeping and maintenance of the accounts. Rather, the WU should support the establishment of credit groups for the members to share experiences, organize technical training, and coordinate with other financial institutions to facilitate their members' access to these sources. The capacity of the WU staff in charge of the credit and savings program should be strengthened by providing training on credit and saving management for local staff and credit group leaders. This should be done with the goal of improving the respective WU's ability to leverage resources and other financial sources for poor women. At commune and group levels, bookkeeping should be simplified. Worksheets and report forms should be standardized. The capacity of project accountants at the commune level should be strengthened by selecting capable people and by providing training for newly recruited staff to ensure

they have enough capacity and knowledge to do the job.

- v. Meetings: The quality of the credit group meetings should be improved to provide further technical guidance and supports among members enabling them to be more successful in their business and/or production. Groups must keep accurate minutes of all meetings and provide reports on their activities for managers of credit programs.
- vi. Invest broadly in women: In addition to the micro-credit and vocational training opportunities described here, poor women can benefit greatly from education and training opportunities, including learning to read and write, and learning basic arithmetic. These disadvantages prevent them from benefiting from local training courses on manufacturing and business. Local authorities should pay more attention to informal and unofficial education programs, including literacy and vocational training programs that are designed for women beyond school age.

jobs far away from home for 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. 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 labor export programs, although only limited numbers are successful as they lack the requisite expertise and/or language skills. Other families consider marriage of a daughter to a foreigner as an immediate solution to family poverty. But overall, migration is a risky proposition. Many migrant workers do find stable work with a reliable salary and are able to improve their family's economic conditions. However, in many other 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.

Given the inexorable migration trend, it is critical to provide relevant and sufficient information, vocational skills, and support services for potential migrants. During the last few years, the CSGs established by the project played an important role in providing basic and essential information, as well as vocational skills for migrant workers. Furthermore, in order to reach more people, the Foundation program provided information and skills to community clubs, public education centers, schools, and other organizations.

#### 4. THE SAFE MIGRATION PROGRAM

Migration for the purpose of employment is increasingly common in Vietnam. Laborers, especially those from the countryside, search for

### Program Results: Reaching out to at-risk migrant laborers

The Asia Foundation cooperated with local partners to develop and publish several training materials, brochures and posters related to safe migration. These materials were designed to improve knowledge and raise awareness in the community before they left their villages. The publications focused on women and other at-risk groups and included: 6,000 handbooks entitled *For Safe Labor Export*; 1,200 Trainer's Guides for local educators called *Supporting Migrant Workers for a Safe Migration*; three types of leaflets, 4,000 sheets of each, entitled *Information on Labor Export to Korea*, *Safe Migration for a Better Life*, and *Essential Information for Working in Cities*; four types of posters, totaling 50,000 sheets each, entitled *Safe Migration for a Better Life*, *Working Far Away from Home Safely*, *Safe Labor Export and For a Happy Family and Community*, *Let's Combat Human Trafficking*. Lastly, five kinds of stickers that provided essential information, addresses, and telephone numbers were distributed to workers in the five provinces of Quang Ninh, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, An Giang, and Can Tho.

### Safe Migration in Schools

Since January 2007, The Asia Foundation has partnered with the Ministry of Education's Center for Education Technology (CET) to carry out a pilot project to integrate a safe migration education program into schools. This program was incorporated into the school curriculum in subjects such as vocational training and outdoor education. The activities were designed creatively based on students' interests, including competitions; games such as crosswords, quizzes, tests, and puzzles; local art performances such as role-playing, poetry readings, folk songs, singing and fashion shows; and, in the 16 pilot schools in Nghe An and Thanh Hoa provinces, writing and drawing contests.

Safe migration education includes specific instruction in labor law, as well as discussion of key topics like: life and work in big cities and industrial zones; common work for migrating rural people; the difficulties and challenges of migrating; and information on trafficking in women and children. Instruction was combined with school-based activities at events or on anniversaries such as the International Women's Day (March 8th), the Anniversary of the Youth Union's Establishment (March 26th), or International Labor Day (May 1st).

By the end of 2007, the project had established a network of 32 core trainers in each province. Training modules were designed, and four training courses were organized for trainers to familiarize teachers with the contents and subjects covered in available training materials on safe migration. Campaigns and competitions on the topic of safe migration were launched in 16 pilot schools. A Trainer's Guide developed by local educators to provide detailed instruction for organizing safe migration activities was distributed to teachers, and booklets developed by the schools to present the best product/work by students participating in the writing and drawing contests were also distributed.

Raising awareness on safe migration was not only implemented in schools, it was also expanded to some community areas and to other organizations, such as the local Women's Union, Youth Union, and local authorities. This has helped raise awareness on safe migration among students, parents, and the community.

### Lessons Learned

Local partners reported that the pilot activities did lead to a drop in incidents of trafficking, with cases of women actually avoiding potentially suspected foreign marriage and job offers due to their enhanced knowledge and awareness. Based on this initial success of the pilot activities, and with a supporting grant from the Gerbode Fund, The Asia Foundation is now expanding its school-based activities to 30 schools and Continuing Education Centers in the two provinces of Nghe An and Thanh Hoa. The Foundation will also continue supporting the 16 pilot schools, bringing the total number of participating schools to 46. Additionally, the Foundation is currently piloting this model in 12 schools in An Giang Province. Future activities will be grounded in the following lessons learned:

- i. Targeting: Safe migration awareness-raising efforts for students in search of employment were successful because the students were equipped with the necessary basic life skills to change risky behaviors. Providing a greater understanding of employment and migration will help to reduce unsafe migration and the trafficking situation.
- ii. Ensure local relevance: All the modules were designed by local trainers in pilot schools and as a result were suitable and appropriate to local people and students. The project found that ensuring local relevance resulted in greater participation and creativity on the part of students and local community members.

iii. Expand impact: The project sought to engage local authorities, prospective employers, and other influential organizations in safe migration programming. Cooperation between the schools and local authorities, companies, organizations, and labor-exporting businesses to hold advocacy campaigns indicates the social impact of the project, which helped sustain and expand the program on a broader level.

## 5. LEGAL AID FOR TRAFFICKING VICTIMS

Since 2005, The Asia Foundation has partnered with the National Legal Aid Agency (NLAA) and other Legal Aid Centers in the provinces of An Giang, Quang Ninh, and Can Tho city to 1) provide better legal aid services to trafficking victims and vulnerable groups through the NLAA's structure at the provincial and district levels; 2) increase in-country coordination among government agencies and mass organizations tasked with victim protection, reintegration, and investigation; 3) organize training courses on Vietnamese law and other related international conventions, and on professional skills in legal aid services for legal aid providers, lawyers, members of CSGs, and other members of legal aid clubs; and 4) organize legal education and mobile counseling services for communities.

In addition to direct legal service provision, the project also sought to strengthen the capacity of legal aid providers. In 27 communes across three

provinces, more than 400 CSG members were trained on related laws to prevent and combat trafficking. They also received legal aid training and counseling skills. Over the last two years, the project organized six training courses for legal aid officers and collaborators who directly provide legal services to victims. The An Giang Legal Aid Center organized two training courses with the participation of 186 members from 31 legal aid clubs. The project also held 12 round table meetings in three provinces with the participation of provincial local authorities. These included the Legal Aid Center, the People's Committee, the People's Court, the People's Procuracy, the Border Guard Command, the Police, the Fatherland Front, the local Department of Labor, War Invalids, and Social Affairs, and the Women's Union. Regular meetings between these organizations helped to identify critical issues related to human trafficking in the provinces, and identified gaps in responding to the needs of victims.

Public education on legal issues was also a priority. The project organized 60 legal education sessions in the community with the participation of more than 3,000 people, most of them women. Moreover, the project developed, published, and distributed 210,000 leaflets and brochures on legal issues relating to trafficking in women and children, and supporting returnees.

## Highlight: Extending legal aid in the provinces

Between May 2005 and December 2007, the project provided some form of legal service for a total of 361 legal aid cases,<sup>11</sup> including 342 cases in which legal counseling was provided, 8 cases wherein the project gave legal assistance, and 11 cases in which victims were represented at court hearings.

- Ms. Chu Thi Hoa was born in 1971 and lived in Dam Ha, Quang Ninh. She was deceived by an acquaintance and trafficked to China. There she was forced into marriage with a Chinese man in Dongxi province, although the marriage was not registered legally. In 2001, she escaped and returned to Vietnam with her two children, born during the 10-year marriage. As her Vietnamese legal identity documents were lost when she was trafficked, she had to live a “temporary” life (from the perspective of the authorities) in the town of Dam Ha, in Quang Ninh Province. The local Women’s Union informed her about a vocational training course and allowed her to participate in it despite her documentation problems. The Quang Ninh Legal Aid Center also helped her get her two children’s births registered.
- Ms. Huynh Thuy Hang was born in 1980, in Phu Tan, Ca Mau. In June 2005, she was deceived by a friend who was working in a textile factory in the suburban area of Hanoi, and was trafficked to the Mong Cai border gate. She learned that she had been sold to a brothel owner in China, where she was forced to be a sex worker. On July 1st, 2005, she was arrested by the Chinese police and taken to a detention center for three months before being repatriated to Vietnam. Returning home, she asked the provincial Legal Aid Center for advice on how to borrow money from the Social Policy Bank. The Center showed her how to get a loan so that she could open a small tailor shop.

On 15th December, 2005, in Quang Ninh, the first trafficking-related criminal trial commenced. The accused offender was 20 years old Vu Thi Thuy. Once a trafficking victim herself, she was accused of trafficking 27 women and children. Four of the victims were from Ha Long, Quang Ninh. They had escaped from a Chinese brothel, where they were forced into sex work. The four victims had returned to their hometown, where they were presented at the Court as witnesses in the case, and represented by lawyers from the Legal Aid Center in Quang Ninh. In addition to providing representation, the Legal Aid Center had been instrumental in convincing them to act as witnesses in the case. The court handed down a sentence of 24 years in jail for the offender, and ordered her to compensate the victims for psychological and physical damages.

### Lessons Learned

In the three targeted provinces, the capability of the legal aid network has been strengthened. Building upon the legal aid programs funded by the Foundation in the three provinces, the National Legal Aid Agency opened legal aid offices for women in five provinces and cities: Hanoi,

Khanh Hoa, Ha Tay, Thai Binh, and Bac Giang. This is an encouraging harbinger of sustainability.

Future programming should reflect the following lessons learned:

- i. Coordination: To prevent trafficking in women and children and to effectively

<sup>11</sup> Out of 361 cases, 3 were in An Giang province, 304 in Quang Ninh province, and 54 cases were in Can Tho city.

support victims, close coordination should be maintained among relevant legal agencies, social organizations, and communities. For example, the Legal Aid Center must work with the Women's Union, the Criminal Police, the Border Guard Command, the Courts, and local authorities in order to provide updated information on trafficking cases and returnees. This facilitates improved assistance to victims in terms of legal aid and reintegration, as well as supporting the investigation and prosecution processes.

- ii. **Appropriate training:** Legal aid workers need assistance to strengthen their skills, and need access to relevant information that describes how to meet the special needs of trafficking victims. For example, in order to provide appropriate legal aid to trafficked women and children, the legal aid officers require counseling and communication skills, in addition to providing legal advice. Many of their prospective clients are victimized women and children who lack confidence and feel isolated upon their return to their communities. Thus, legal aid workers, especially female staff (as victims would prefer to receive assistance from women), should be trained with relevant skills to approach these victims with sensitivity and understanding.
- iii. **Service availability:** By carrying out frequent mobile legal aid counseling sessions in remote areas, legal aid centers and staff can better prevent trafficking and provide legal aid counseling to vulnerable women and children and trafficking victims in a timely manner.

## 6. THE CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION PROGRAM

As a transnational crime, the complex problem of human trafficking requires information sharing and the coordinated action of affected countries. Drawing upon the country knowledge and partner networks of The Asia Foundation's offices in China and Cambodia, the Foundation in Vietnam worked with the WU and relevant Vietnamese authorities to organize two cross-border workshops with Cambodia (11/2004) and China (5/2005).

Through these workshops, representatives from the relevant agencies, organizations, and associations in Vietnam, Cambodia, and China directly exchanged ideas, opinions, and information. These exchanges enabled the participants to improve their knowledge and understanding of the trafficking situation in the three countries, as well as to share experiences and lessons learned, and to build trust toward future cooperation. Participants also studied effective models of preventing trafficking of women and children.<sup>13</sup> Suggestions and proposals for bilateral and regional cooperation were put forward, and a Plan of Action was developed to strengthen cooperation and collaboration among governmental and non-governmental organizations in the areas of combating and preventing trafficking of women and children. The participating organizations also committed themselves to carrying out advocacy campaigns in the border regions in order to raise public awareness.

Cooperation between Vietnam and Cambodia, as well as Vietnam and China, has improved through the activities of international organizations and NGOs. Agreements among stakeholders were made to establish a network and the bilateral means to promote cooperation and project implementation among governments and NGOs. These agreements were developed to ensure effective cross-border interventions to

<sup>12</sup> The parties supported the creation of more jobs, the improvement of women's incomes through vocational training and micro-credit programs, and enhanced legal aid and health service provision. The parties also aimed to enhance the provision of legal aid services and health care for victims.

prevent human trafficking and support victims' reintegration into their communities.

### Lessons Learned

Building on these achievements, the Foundation continue to support specific activities to promote cross-border cooperation between the Vietnamese province of An Giang and the Cambodian provinces of Takeo and Kandal. Specifically, from September 2006, The Foundation assisted the An Giang Women's Union to coordinate with other organizations and agencies in An Giang, Kandal, and Takeo to convene a series of discussions and shared meetings between Vietnam and Cambodia that facilitate the exchange of information. It will also enable participating organizations to craft clear, well-articulated recommendations for effective cross-border cooperation.<sup>13</sup> Participants will then submit proposals for funding initiatives to prevent trafficking across the border. These new activities will build upon the following lessons learned:

- i. Foster relationships: The opportunity to meet face-to-face fosters greater understanding and commitment among participants of different nations. Given the complexity of the trafficking issue, direct meetings over several days facilitate stronger relationships and heighten the prospect of future cooperation.
- ii. Reach concrete agreement: Encouraging the parties to come to agreement in written form, such as establishing a Plan of Action, facilitates greater understanding of the actual opportunities and challenges each country faces. It also allows all parties to consider and comment upon strategies for cross-border cooperation, and promotes long-term accountability.

## 7. THE REINTEGRATION OF TRAFFICKING VICTIMS

Since 2003, in order to help trafficked returnees reintegrate into the community, The Foundation has supported the An Giang Committee for Population, Family and Children, and the An Giang WU to carry out a project designed to protect trafficked survivors' rights and assist them in making a new life. Interventions designed to assist survivors included supporting vocational training such as tailoring, hair-dressing, and business accounting, and job placement for 65 victims and vulnerable girls, ages 13 to 19 years old. Training courses in social work skills for local partners' staff, and life skills programs for the girls were also provided. Additionally, small loans and technical training were provided to beneficiaries' families to improve their living conditions. To ensure relevance of the vocational training, local research on market opportunities for the economic development of poor women was supported. Lastly, peer education to raise public awareness on human trafficking was provided.

The vocational training program built upon lessons learned across Vietnam, where the impact of vocational training had been seen as marginal and implementation difficult. After the vocational training courses, some beneficiaries were hired to work at their training places, while others chose to open their own shops or small businesses. Those who learned tailoring and business accounting were offered jobs at textile factories or other businesses. To date, most have jobs with stable incomes.

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<sup>13</sup> Targeted areas for regional collaboration are based on the MOU signed on October 10, 2005, between Vietnam and Cambodia and on the Plan of Action agreed at the Vietnam – Cambodia cross-border workshop organized by The Asia Foundation in November 2004.



## Case Studies of program beneficiaries in An Giang

- Ms. Nguyen Minh Tam is 18 years old and from Chau Gioi II, Chau Phu District, Chau Doc, An Giang. In 2004 she joined the program and took part in a training course on nail painting. After three months of training, Tam got a job. Her income is now fairly stable, ranging from 450,000 to 500,000 VND/month (US\$28-31), and she expects that it will increase in the years to come.
- Ms. Huynh Ngoc Nu was born in 1982, in My Long, Long Xuyen City. Her father became disabled when she was in the fourth grade, and after dropping out of school, Nu had to help her mother sell food. Through the project, she decided to sign up for an accounting course, and then followed it with a computer course. At the same time, her mother joined the micro-credit program and borrowed \$190 USD to set up a small food store. The store was successful, and her mother was able to repay the loan with interest and still obtain some profit. Utilizing her new skills, Nu became an accountant for a construction materials business, with a monthly income of \$80USD and other benefits.
- Ms. Tran Ngoc Truc from My Hoa, Long Xuyen City, was born in 1987. In her family there were five children but the family had a low income. Truc dropped out of school in 5th grade. At first, Truc worked as a tailoring at a small textile factory. However, after being mistreated by her old employers, Truc quit her job and learned to do nails and hair-dressing. Now she is at home, helping her mother and working as a nail technician for her neighbors. Her monthly income is between \$20-\$25, and the local Women's Union has also encouraged Truc to continue taking some other courses available in the district. Her mother also borrowed \$125 to set up a small grocery store, and was able to repay the money with interest.

### Lessons Learned

Drawing on these experiences and previous lessons learned, as well as achievements in An Giang, the Foundation has expanded its program into Thai Nguyen Province, where it will continue to raise community awareness and to support and reintegrate returnees into the community.<sup>14</sup> The new program reflects the following lessons learned:

- Local relevance:** By creating a community-based vocational training program, the type of training provided was flexible to the needs, desires and capabilities of each individual. Moreover, before implementing the project, the WU carried out an assessment survey to explore beneficiary

needs and to provide employment orientation to each potential beneficiary.

- Achieving efficiencies:** The project did not gather all participants in one training class but instead sent them to respected local businesses selected by the project. The project paid the training fee for each participant directly to the service providers, which also achieved a cost savings as the providers charged less than the standard price of creating a separate training class. This model was a combination of training, working, theory, and practice and it proved both practical and cost effective.

<sup>14</sup> The project activities will include a community survey to identify victims; direct support to victims based on their needs and capabilities; and public awareness raising of human trafficking through arts-based community communication. The project will also create favorable conditions for beneficiaries to approach local credit funding programs and provide technical training to beneficiaries in An Giang.

## 8. THE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM FOR DISADVANTAGED GIRLS<sup>15</sup>

Since 2004, The Asia Foundation has supported a scholarship program for disadvantaged girls, implemented by the Center for Raising Intellectual Standards of People (CRISOP) and the provincial Education Promotion Associations (EPA). The program provides long term scholarships for 140 disadvantaged girls in the three provinces of An Giang, Nam Dinh, and Can Tho. Beneficiaries were selected on the basis of such factors<sup>16</sup> as poverty in the family; number of siblings; limited school attainment (i.e. primary and/or lower secondary school); and likelihood of drop-out if financial assistance was not obtained. Due to a limited number of scholarships, recipients had to meet high selection standards. Accepted girls had

to have good academic records, a dedicated work ethic, and recommendations from their respective schools, the local EPA, and local authorities.

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 girls 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 labor, marriage, or prostitution in order to provide income for their families.

### Case Studies: Some thoughts of the scholarship recipients

*“...My father passed away in an accident when I was six years old. My mother has to do all the work to bring us up. Therefore, my family is very poor. Thanks to the scholarship from the Foundation, I can have a chance to go to school with notebooks, pens and on a school bus just like other pupils...”*

—Luu Thi Tuyet, grade 4, Tan Ly commune, Truc Ninh, Nam Dinh Province

*“...I promise to you all that I will do my best to be an excellent student in my school so that I won't make you disappointed or regret awarding me the precious scholarship. I owe you a deep thank for your great consideration to me...”*

— Nguyen Thi Tuyet Trinh, class 5A1, primary school of An Binh 3, Ninh Kieu district, Can Tho Province

*“...My family's situation was in very difficult circumstances. My father was a soldier, retired and now repairs bicycles to earn a living for the whole family of seven members. This year my parents were supposed to keep me at home because we didn't have enough money to afford my studying. Thanks to my school and the Foundation's scholarship program, my parents can now buy me studying materials and other things to help me continue going to school like my friends...”*

— Nguyen Thi Kim Oanh, class 9A5, secondary school of Tran Ngoc Que, Ninh Kieu district, Can Tho Province)

<sup>15</sup> Financial support for this program was provided by The Foundation, the Barrette Family Foundation, Jerome and Thao Dodson, and the MYTWO Fund.

<sup>16</sup> In addition, some girls were members of ethnic minorities.

## Lessons Learned

- i. Encouraging broader participation: The scholarship program has encouraged the girls, as well as other members of their families, to continue studying at school. Moreover, the program has had a great impact in the communities where the project was carried out, especially in areas where no other scholarship programs were available. Feedback from local partners indicated that the Foundation's focus on disadvantaged young girls was unique and much needed. Over time, the Foundation's scholarship program has become prestigious in local communities, giving these young girls, their parents, as well as their teachers and school administrators a sense of confidence and achievement.
- ii. Changing family norms: The provision of scholarships can have an impact on the way a girl is perceived within her family, thus enhancing her self-confidence. Thanks to the program, parents now pay more attention to their children, encourage and support them, and create favorable conditions for their study. The girls themselves have become more focused on their learning and try to do their best at school in hopes that they too can receive a scholarship next time.

## Conclusions: Recommendations for Policy Changes

This report provides a number of recommendations based on lessons learned through The Asia Foundation's six years of fighting trafficking in partnership with the Government, the Women's Union, Legal Aid Centers, communities, and community members themselves. Recommendations and lessons learned in the sections above are focused at the level of specific interventions, but the overall policy environment must also be adapted if trafficking is to be entirely eliminated in Vietnam.

In recent years, the Vietnamese Government has increased its efforts to combat human trafficking, and communities and other agencies have become more engaged in the fight against exploitation. These efforts are to be commended, as the increasing trend of migration for employment, both within Vietnam and from Vietnam to neighboring countries, continues to put many Vietnamese at risk. There is a clear trend of internal rural-to-urban migration, which frequently leads to discrimination of labor migrants. Yet the internal migration receives little attention from policymakers, scholars, researchers and NGOs. In addition, the female-dominated informal sector has not been taken into full consideration by all stakeholders. For instance, many women and girls migrate to work in domestic service or as small traders, and a large undocumented number of them are engaged as sex workers (many of them catering to the male migratory workforces). Therefore, internal migration and related problems such as housing, access to public utilities, health care services, and other social issues need to be comprehensively addressed by policymakers and planners, to ensure that internal labor migrants do not face discrimination in Vietnam. Additional local resources should also be distributed at the commune level to enable more sustainable socio-

economic development, reducing migratory "push factors."

In addition to internal migration, large numbers of Vietnamese migrate across the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), both spontaneously and through formal industrialized labor exportation. There is also a significant trend of Vietnamese women migrating to Asian and Western countries for marriage. All these migrants are at risk of trafficking, and therefore the government should further develop practical and specific measures to address international migrant labor issues. The government must protect the rights and benefits of domestic migrant workers and export laborers, as well as protect their human rights to decrease the vulnerability of and discrimination towards the returnees. Moreover, the support of a safe migration program should be considered one of the main strategies in preventing human trafficking in the provinces.

In general, the fight against trafficking continues to be hampered by a lack of reliable data on which to base interventions. Data on trafficking patterns, scope and scale remain limited and unreliable, and the data are scattered in separate reports and in the mass media. A comprehensive, reliable source of data would greatly further efforts to combat trafficking.

At the public policy level, it is necessary to increase public participation in drafting laws and in the refinement process. Civil society organizations and mass associations need to be included as well. Until now, the WU, NGOs, and the at-risk community have not been widely consulted in the decision and policy making processes. Their participation in the refinement process is important to ensure that the needs of victims and communities seeking justice are reflected in the

amended policies. Therefore, in the long run, strengthening the legal capacity of the WU and other NGOs is essential in helping these organizations play stronger roles in the fight against trafficking in women and children.

The Asia Foundation plans to continue working together with communities, organizations, and government agencies in Vietnam to develop better designs and implementation of similar programs to prevent and combat trafficking. The lessons learned through six years of anti-trafficking program will prove critical in further refining the interventions and ensuring their success.

