Understanding the complexities of responding to child sex trafficking in Thailand and Cambodia

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Abstract

Purpose – The market in trafficked children bought and sold for sexual exploitation is one of the most inhumane transnational crimes that appear to have been facilitated by globalisation and its many effects, such as growing disparity in wealth between North and South. Child sex trafficking (CST) in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) is an extremely complex problem, deeply rooted in historical injustice, gender inequality and poverty. In addition to the complexities of the child trafficking issue, the organisations that seek to combat CST are themselves not always a united force and display their own internal and inter-agency complexities. The purpose of this paper is to examine some of the key complexities of responding to CST in Thailand and Cambodia.

Design/methodology/approach – The methodology for this research consisted of 22 semi-structured interviews with anti-child trafficking experts in Thailand and Cambodia, in addition to field observations in various child sex tourism hubs in Southeast Asia.

Findings – The complexities of the CST problem in Thailand and Cambodia are discussed as well as analysis of the internal and inter-agency barriers faced by the organisations that seek to combat CST. The research finds that, due to limitations in donor funding, anti-trafficking organisations face difficulties in effectively responding to all aspects of the CST problem. The recommendation is made for improved advocacy networking against this transnational crime. Recent success stories are highlighted.

Research limitations/implications – The research for this paper involved semi-structured interviews with staff from non-government organisations and United Nations agencies, but not with government representatives. The lack of available data from Thai and Cambodian government representatives limits the ability of the researcher to evaluate the effectiveness of anti-trafficking organisations’ response to the child trafficking issue. Also lacking is the voice of child trafficking victims, the key beneficiaries of anti-trafficking organisations’ aid and advocacy efforts.

Originality/value – There is an abundance of literature on the subject of CST but a dearth in scholarly literature on the subject of advocacy and policy responses to CST in Southeast Asia. This paper provides a valuable contribution the knowledge base on child trafficking by analysing both the complexities of the CST issue and the complexities, for anti-trafficking organisations, of effectively combating CST in the GMS.

Keywords Globalisation, Poverty, Partnerships, Disadvantaged groups, Social change, Sex and gender issues

Introduction

Child sex trafficking (CST) occurs in all Southeast Asian countries. In a region where the demand for young brides, sex with children, images of child pornography and cheap labour is strong, children may be trafficked at source or during migration, either en route or after reaching their destination. Origin, transit and destination countries for child trafficking exist throughout the Southeast Asia region with some countries characterised as origin, transit or destination, and others encompassing origin and...
transit, or indeed all three models. Internal trafficking, from rural to urban centres and from small towns to big cities, is also a considerable dynamic although far less researched than cross-border trafficking. Complex market supply and demand, and “push” and “pull” factors including poverty, gender inequality, unemployment and forced migration complicate the CST issue and prevent effective policy and advocacy responses.

In the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) children are trafficked either within their own countries or over the border into neighbouring countries, for example from Laos to Thailand or Cambodia to Thailand, or Myanmar to Cambodia, and so on, although the major regional destination remains Bangkok. Some children are moved vast distances across international borders and some are trafficked across the world into developed regions such as Europe, the USA and Australia. Whilst adults might choose sex work as an occupational choice, children can only be considered victims of coercion and trafficking (Lim, 1998). Children, in contrast to adults, are clearly much more vulnerable and helpless against the established structures and vested interests in the sex sector, and are thus more likely to be victims of debt bondage, violence, exploitation or trafficking. Marshall (2001) has argued that children’s “choice” is questionable as it is often motivated by poverty or other extenuating circumstances. Because of extreme poverty families in the Southeast Asia region have been known to be manipulated into giving up their children to recruiters to make ends meet when faced with bleak economic opportunities (Leung, 2003). Some children are turned over to recruiters by their families as part of an ancient practice known as debt bondage, in which children, usually girls, are sent to work for creditors until they pay off a family’s debt (Blackburn et al., 2010). In many cases of trafficking in the GMS, the children have themselves initiated the migration process, motivated by real and/or perceived differences in lifestyles, employment opportunities and pay levels between Thailand and surrounding countries (Huijssmans, 2008).

An effective advocacy and policy response to the CST issue is complicated by the fact that the organisations that work to combat CST are not always a unified body. There are a vast number of anti-trafficking organisations – United Nations (UN) agencies, non-government organisations (NGOs) from both North and South and government agencies – advocating against CST in the GMS region, and coordinating programs to protect trafficking victims. These organisations sometimes have different perspectives on a number of important elements of the child trafficking problem – definitions of the “child” and children’s agency to work; the issue of prostitution; campaign messages and goals; the issue of “rescues”; and the role of legislation and policy in anti-trafficking efforts, amongst others. These areas of contention are at times further complicated by donor demands; diminishing aid; the rapidly changing nature of trafficking dynamics and children's migration movements; government corruption; regional political and ethnic strife; inadequate laws and systems for protecting children; unemployment; poverty; and gender inequality. These factors combine to make the policy and advocacy response to CST an inherently complex one.

This paper examines two important themes: First, the complexities of the CST issue in Thailand and Cambodia; and second, some of the key internal, external, and inter-agency complexities associated with the organisations and advocacy networks that combat trafficking. The paper will first discuss the methodology for data collection. Second, the paper will examine recent definitions of “child trafficking” and estimates of the CST problem in the GMS. Third, the paper will provide a review of the recent literature on CST. Fourth, the paper will provide an historical overview of
CST in Thailand and Cambodia and discuss the complex supply and demand factors that exacerbate the CST problem. Fifth, the paper will discuss the findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted with anti-trafficking experts and highlight some of the key complexities of combating CST, as well as the complexities of working collaboratively with anti-trafficking organisations in advocacy partnerships. The paper will conclude with a discussion of the various complexities faced by the organisations that combat CST in the GMS, and some recent successes in inter-agency collaboration against CST. The paper adopts a critical globalist approach to CST that situates CST as a problem exacerbated by modern globalisation and closely associated with other global problems such as poverty and gender inequality.

Methodology
Data collection for this research was conducted in Thailand and Cambodia over a six-month period. Interviews were organised with anti-trafficking experts working within NGOs and UN agencies by, first, researching the international and domestic NGOs and UN agencies performing anti-trafficking advocacy in Southeast Asia, particularly Thailand and Cambodia; second, sending interview requests to the organisations’ email addresses; and third, following an initial response, organising one to two hour interviews with identified anti-trafficking experts employed in these organisations. From an initial shortlist of 25 interviews, 22 interviews were conducted with child trafficking experts employed in NGOs and UN agencies in Bangkok (Thailand), Pattaya (Thailand), Chiang Mai (Thailand) and Phnom Penh (Cambodia). Three of the interviews originally organised could not be conducted due to the interview participants being too busy or their senior managers not consenting to the interviews. In total, 22 research participants from 16 organisations were interviewed for the study. A number of participants were prominent activists in the international anti-trafficking movement, and most had many years of experience working for a variety of both non-government and intergovernmental organisations. The NGOs included: seven international NGOs and five domestic (Thai and Cambodian) NGOs. In addition there were participants from four different UN agencies. All participants were still active employees in their respective organisations. Three interview participants were founding members of their organisation. Of the participants, eight had been with their organisations for at least five years, and one had been working in an NGO for less than a year. The interview participants are referred to as “experts” in this paper, as they were identified by their organisations as the most knowledgeable and experienced staff. Their positions varied from social workers to advocacy and policy specialists, to researchers, and program coordinators. To protect the identity of the participants neither the experts’ names nor their organisations are revealed in this paper.

Each interview recording was transcribed and analysed as soon after the interview as possible. The accuracy of the transcription was checked against the interview recordings, and changes to the transcripts were made where needed. For the analysis and thematic coding of the interviews I sought the assistance of NVivo software. Initially the themes appearing in the research were used in order to develop the “codes”. As the analysis proceeded new categories emerged from the data that led to the development of additional “codes”. The data was therefore decontextualised and taken away from the context of the interview, then recontextualised in the new context formed by the specific category or “code” that had been created to analyse similarities and differences in research participant responses. All the material was
analysed this way and then subsequently re-read and re-analysed in order to proceed with data interpretation.

The following subjects and themes emerged from the process of data analysis: anti-trafficking organisations’ and networks’ history, ethos, mandate, the nature of advocacy and policy activities, organisational structure, procedures, rules, financial arrangements; relationships with NGO, government and UN partners; organisations’ and networks’ relationships with external environments and stakeholders; areas of collaboration and contention within and between organisations and networks; complexities in responding to CST. Open coding was used to flag conceptual themes such as the organisations’ and networks’ assessment of the strengths and advantages of inter-agency collaboration against child trafficking and the internal and external factors that supported or impeded the creation and survival of partnerships. Coding helped to further develop the conceptual theme coded “the complexities of responding to child sex trafficking”, producing seven new themes that were coded as: “issues of leadership, resource sharing and power within partnerships”; “North-South contention in advocacy partnerships”; “organisational processes – starting and sustaining partnerships”; “organisational and inter-agency politics”; “child trafficking conceptualizations”; “structural issues around child trafficking”; and “measuring advocacy effectiveness”. These themes became the key categories for data analysis.

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to build a complete picture of the complexities of the child trafficking problem in Thailand and Cambodia, and a picture of the complexities of anti-trafficking organisations in the region. In particular, the interviews addressed the questions of the causes of CST, experts’ perspectives on combating the various supply and demand elements of CST, and the barriers and obstacles to an effective response to CST, for individual organisations and organisations working in partnerships. Due to the difficulties of quantifying a complex and transnational social problem, employing a qualitative research methodology allowed the exploration of normative and theoretical questions within the social science framework. The strategies employed enabled the illumination of complex advocacy networking processes against child trafficking in Thailand and Cambodia.

**CST definitions, estimates and dynamics**

**Definitions**

Today the most widely accepted definition of human trafficking comes from the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, better known as the Palermo Protocol (November 2000). The Palermo Protocol has proved a highly useful tool in establishing a widely used definition of trafficking that all organisations can adopt – governments, UN agencies and NGOs. According to the Protocol:

(a) “Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery servitude or the removal of organs.
(b) The consent of the victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in the subparagraph (a) of this paper shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in the subparagraph (a) have been used.

(c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons” even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in the subparagraph (a) of this paper.

(d) “Child” shall mean any person under 18 years of age.

As the Protocol implies, sexual trafficking refers to a specific subset of wider phenomena of human trafficking. It can be understood as the component of human trafficking that deals with the use of persons – almost exclusively young women and children – in prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation. As subsection (b) of the Protocol clarifies, the use of whether a victim “consents” or not is “irrelevant”. In essence, the Protocol holds that consent cannot truly be given when acts such as fraud and deception are employed. Exploitation rather than consent is the central feature of the Palermo Protocol’s definition. The emphasis on traffickers is also evident in the fact that the Palermo Protocol is a supplement to the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime. It is these organised criminal networks of traffickers that have played an instrumental role in the globalisation of sexual trafficking.

Wylie and McRedmond (2010) argue that the adoption of the Palermo Protocol and its tripartite definition of trafficking as involving deceptive/coercive recruitment, movement and exploitation of a person, has driven the debate on trafficking forward and has been a crucial factor in states’ recognition of human trafficking as a serious problem.

Estimates

The UN Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (2008) states that there are no universally accepted estimates of child trafficking numbers throughout the world. Difficulties in identifying victims and differences in applying trafficking definitions to local realities make such estimates virtually impossible. However, some commonly quoted figures provide some sense of the magnitude of the problem. UNICEF (2009) suggests that globally, about ten million children, mainly girls, are subjected to various forms of sexual exploitation worldwide. A further one million children are estimated to enter the commercial sex trade each year (UNICEF, 2009). UNICEF (2009) further estimates that a third of all sex workers in Southeast Asia are between the ages of 12 and 17. Kristof (1996) similarly notes that more than a million girls and boys, aged 17 and younger, are engaged in forced prostitution in Asia. A recent study by the International Labour Organisation (2008) estimates that 43 per cent of all victims of forced labour worldwide are trafficked for sexual exploitation. According to Child Wise (2007), an Australian NGO working on the human trafficking issue both domestically and internationally, more than 250,000 sex tourists visit Asia each year, with 25 per cent coming from the USA, 16 per cent from Germany and 13 per cent from both Australia and the UK. This includes those seeking sex with children, a practice better known as child sex tourism, and those specifically targeting pre-pubescent children, that is, paedophilia (Peters, 2007). However, in most countries the major demand that creates a market for commercial sexual exploitation of children is still domestic. Local perceptions of childhood, which often differ from the international legal norm, contribute to this phenomenon.
Recent literature on child trafficking

Due to its all-encompassing nature and the fact that it is perceived, at once, as a human rights issue, a feminist issue, a poverty issue, a migration issue, and a criminology issue the problem of CST has attracted interest from a diverse range of groups – feminists, governments, NGOs, child protection experts, UN organisations and academics, amongst others. While there persist conflicting definitions and inconsistent estimates of the nature and scope of child trafficking, a wide range of researchers and academics acknowledge that the illegal trafficking of children is a growing social phenomenon greatly in need of continued research (Bales, 1999; Anderson and O’Connell Davidson, 2003; Farr, 2005). NGOs have, in particular, contributed to the literature on child trafficking by defining the problem, and citing frequent though often conflicting statistics on the number of children trafficked. However, despite recent research and scholarship on human trafficking, debate over the universal causes of child trafficking still persists. An emerging trend among NGOs and the UN and in current academic literature is that child trafficking is not just a criminal justice problem, but a migration issue caused by globalisation (Banerjee, 2003; Brown, 2007). In other words, children migrate illegally and clandestinely because poverty in the current political economy forces them to do so. It is this risky migration that leads children to situations of increased vulnerability and trafficking.

According to a critical globalist reading, it is not only inequality between rich and poor states that is increasing but also inequality and poverty within states (Held, 2002). Held (2002) has argued that the new global division of labour reorganises rather than ameliorates patterns of global inequality and exclusion. Consequently, the world is no longer divided as it once was on geographic lines, that is, between North and South, but rather exhibits a new social architecture (Held, 2002). This architecture, which divides humanity into elites, the bourgeoisie, the marginalised and the impoverished, cuts across territorial and cultural boundaries, rearranging the world into the winners and losers of globalisation (Held and McGrew, 2002). The unevenness of globalisation divides the world and nations into polarising zones of affluence and poverty, inclusion and exclusion, and generates a deepening fragmentation of world order which finds expression in, among other things, transnational organised crime and other conflicts (Held, 2002). Child trafficking is but one symptom of the unevenness of globalisation.

Roby (2005) has suggested that the factors contributing to human trafficking can be broadly divided into two major levels. First, the macro-level, constituting the international, national and local demographic, social, economic, ethnic and cultural environments in which trafficking occurs, and, second, the micro-level of individual and familial risk factors (Roby, 2005). Economic injustice and poverty are among the major macro-level risk factors for sex trafficking (Roby, 2005). Other scholars of human trafficking suggest that there are a number of key reasons for the growth of trafficking internationally. Gupta (2010) argues that there are six global trends that accentuate vulnerability to trafficking and have caused the surge in growth of trafficked people. First, an increase in demand for trafficked people, from end users to those who make a profit from the trade, has become the most immediate cause for the expansion of the human trafficking industry. Second, new technologies have made moving and recruiting people much easier. Third, petty criminals have been replaced by organised criminals in the human trade, turning it into a large-scale industry. Fourth, natural disasters have driven people from their homes. Fifth, displacement and migration in the absence of protection mechanisms have increased vulnerability to human trafficking. Sixth, the global economic crisis of 2008-2010 has increased unemployment.
and undermined social safety nets, contributing to increased vulnerability by exacerbating the effects of existing sources of marginalisation (Gupta, 2010). These events have led to an increase in the number of vulnerable people that can easily be targeted by traffickers, “disposable people” as Bales (2004) calls them.

ECPAT (2002) has argued that most trafficking victims come from families in poor communities lacking in economic and job opportunities. It is in such environments of dire poverty that traffickers prey, luring unsuspecting young victims with false promises of employment (ECPAT, 2002). In a similar vein, Tumenaitė (2006) argues that the single, most important root cause of human trafficking is the supply side of poverty. This is based on the ideology that individuals who cannot feed, clothe, and house themselves or their families due to lack of work are the most susceptible to the lure of traffickers (Marshall, 2001). Similarly, Pettman (2008) has identified poverty as a form of coercion that makes the prostitution of family members a viable option. Pettman (2008) questions the validity of the voluntary/coerced distinction of prostitution and argues that this distinction is difficult to maintain as the element of “choice” is suspect in conditions of economic need, lack of options, and asymmetrical power relations, including gender relations within the family.

Authors such as Peralta (2006) argue that, while not a new phenomenon, trafficking in humans is currently taking place within the context of neoliberal economic globalisation and against a complex web of global, national, and gender, class, and race disparities. Samarasinghe (2003) has argued that the phenomenon of globalisation has been crucial in the expansion of human trafficking: Samarasinghe (2003) has argued that the latest chapter of globalisation has actually been the catalyst that caused the explosion in human trafficking. Prior to the last chapter of globalisation that began in the 1970s and 1980s, human trafficking did certainly exist, however, in that period human trafficking was mostly contained within country borders (Marshall, 2001). At its greatest extent it may have involved some cross border movement into neighbouring countries but it was mainly restricted to certain regions of the globe (Marshall, 2001). However, as globalisation has entered its most recent and rapid phase of transition in the last few decades, human trafficking has begun to spread beyond its previously localised areas. Trafficking victims have begun to travel further and further from their home countries in search of work opportunities. This has included the leagues of children who migrate in search of work to support their families (Marshall, 2001). Children of poor families, by nature of their poverty, are less likely to be protected and thus face a higher risk of commercial sexual exploitation.

Scholars of human trafficking agree that little can be achieved without dialogue and cooperation between regional and international bodies, governments and NGOs (Cameron and Newman, 2008). In a similar vein, Magis (2009) has suggested that NGOs, when acting in isolation, have little power in the international system. It is only when the various anti-trafficking organisations form inter-agency partnerships that they acquire the power to influence international decision making above and beyond their weak formal status (Magis, 2009).

**Historical overview of trafficking in Thailand and Cambodia**

**Cambodia**

Cambodia is noted as being one of the poorest countries in the world (Blackburn et al., 2010). Of the Southeast Asian countries touched by child trafficking, Cambodia is one of the most affected, especially in regard to health issues such as HIV/AIDS. Human trafficking in Cambodia has been heavily influenced by its history of civil conflict,
the growth of the sex sector as a result of UN intervention and presence in the country, and Cambodia’s lagging economic development. Due to decades of conflict in the country, Cambodian society and infrastructure was virtually destroyed and has been slow to recover following the peace settlement of 1991 (Owen, 2005). Sweeping purges and political repression were common in Cambodia for decades, resulting in several generations of Cambodians being affected by death, unemployment and acute poverty (Owen, 2005). The aftermath of the Khmer Rouge regime is still felt both psychologically and economically and plays a direct role in labour and sexual exploitation arising from ill-prepared migration (Shelley, 2010). The upheavals caused by the conflict and lack of opportunities in rural areas have fuelled a return to the cities and urban areas, all but emptied during the Khmer Rouge period (Shelley, 2010). With well over half the population below the age of 20, Cambodia faces a growing problem of providing decent work for its young population, with growing unemployment further increasing the drive towards cross-border migration for employment, and perpetuating the cycle of vulnerability to human trafficking (Shelley, 2010).

As a result of the destruction throughout the country and the new UN liberal, post-Cold War goal of democratisation following the Khmer Rouge rule and civil conflict, a UN transnational team entered the country in the 1990s with the goal of rapidly transforming Cambodia into a democracy (Paris, 2004). It was at this time with the entrance of UN forces into the country that human trafficking first appeared in Cambodia (Aoi et al., 2007). The effects of the substantial period of violent conflict in the country left the general population in an especially vulnerable position. During the period prior to UN intervention, general Cambodian institutional life ceased to exist and many of the services normally provided by a government disappeared. There were few schools, religious organisations, or legitimate economic opportunities that could provide the education and stability necessary for normal lifestyles. This lack of structure and education left many Cambodians without the knowledge or understanding necessary to be aware of the dangers posed by traffickers. The rapid infusion of foreigners with large sums of money that followed the entrance of both UN military forces and civilian officials led to an increased demand in the sex sector across the country (Aoi et al., 2007). It is estimated that the size of the sex sector surrounding UN installations during this period tripled (Aoi et al., 2007). This expansion was largely aided by the absence of other forms of legal employment for women and children. Due to the complete disruption of society that occurred during the decades of conflict there was massive poverty in the country and many girls found themselves without viable employment and little education, which made them particularly susceptible to the lure of traffickers. The supply and demand of the growing sex sector and a vulnerable population led traffickers to take advantage of those who needed employment to provide for their families.

While there is little doubt that the sex industry in Cambodia expanded during the UNTAC period, some scholars note that both married and single Cambodian men have frequently visited brothels both before and after the Khmer Rouge (Takamatsu, 2004). Even following the departure of UN forces from Cambodia, the sex sector has continued to thrive as the Cambodian government continues to promote traditional tourism as a source of much needed economic growth. Among the tourism centres of Southeast Asia, Cambodia is well known as a haven for child sex tourists (Peters, 2007). Significant numbers of Asian and Western men travel to Cambodia for sexual encounters with children (Samarasinghe, 2003). Illustrative of this is that 51 per cent of Cambodian girls in one study had lost their virginity to a tourist or foreign client,
indicating the important role that sex tourism plays in the growth of trafficking (Samarasinghe, 2008). Investigators have discovered girls as young as five years of age working in the sex trade in Cambodia (Blackburn et al., 2010). Brown (2007) has discussed in depth the existence and popularity of what she labels the “virginity trade” in Cambodia. She argues that the trade “clearly shapes the patterns of trafficking within Cambodia, and given the extensive cultural links between virginity loss [...] and the sex industry, it is arguably the largest factor contributing to entry into commercial sex” (Brown, 2007, p. 59). Cambodian families are often facilitators of CST: “Between 30 per cent and 40 per cent of parents sell their children for sex” (Kneebone and Debeljak, 2010, p. 140). Previously considered a source country, the sex trafficking industry in Cambodia is now so large that children from outside the country are trafficked into Cambodia to work in the sex trade.

Many of the issues regarding Cambodia’s economic development remain unresolved and recent economic downturns in the late 1990s and mid 2000s stalled or reversed many of the gains that had been achieved in recent years. With much of the country’s population under 20 years of age and few prospects for economic growth, the Cambodian government is struggling to provide adequate employment for its young population, leaving many young Cambodians susceptible to the grasp of traffickers (Kaida, 2006). Such obstacles have affected the government’s ability to create coherent national anti-trafficking policies. However, with the assistance of domestic and international NGOs, UN agencies and advocacy networks, some progress is being made in terms of developing more comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation. Historically, the first piece of anti-trafficking legislation adopted in Cambodia was the Law on Suppression of Kidnapping, Trafficking, and Exploitation of Human Persons, which was enacted in 1996 (Yasunobu, 2004). This law focused solely on the victimisation of women and children forced into the sex industry. The law led to increased prosecution against those found guilty of trafficking women and children for sex, but failed to set up protection and rehabilitation facilities for the victims of trafficking (Yasunobu, 2004). As a result, victims were poorly treated and Cambodian officials relied heavily on the facilities of domestic or international NGOs to undertake the task of rehabilitation rather than instituting government-run organisations. This legislation remained in effect until the enactment of the 2008 Law on the Suppression of Human Trafficking and Commercial Exploitation. Prior to its adoption, the Cambodian government had been under a great deal of pressure from both the USA and international anti-trafficking organisations to take on a larger role in the combating of human trafficking within the country (Unmacht, 2003). Many critics stated that Cambodian officials were relying on outside organisations to handle the issue of trafficking rather than taking action themselves (Yasunobu, 2004). The new legislation has been useful in that it has clearly defined what trafficking is and it has acknowledged the many forms of human trafficking present in Cambodia. The law has also expanded and increased the powers of police officers investigating and prosecuting trafficking cases (US Department of State, 2008). Traffickers prosecuted under this new legislation are subject to far more severe punishments than previously. Although statistics regarding prosecution of traffickers in Cambodia are often considered unreliable, data released in the 2008 US Trafficking in Persons Report show an increase in the overall level of trafficking prosecution within the country (US Department of State, 2008). A major obstacle in Cambodia to effective anti-trafficking initiatives continues to be that of government corruption. In Cambodia the government continues to prosecute its own police for trafficking-related corruption charges.
For example, in 2006 the former Deputy Director of the Police Anti-Trafficking and Juvenile Protection Department was convicted for complicity in trafficking and sentenced to five years’ imprisonment and two officials under his supervision were also convicted and sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment.

**Thailand**

Human trafficking and slavery are not new phenomena in Thailand and slavery, especially bonded slavery, has strong historical roots (Rende Taylor, 2003). In Lanna Thai history, the king owned all farmland and if the people were unable to pay their taxes or owed any other debt they could choose to place themselves, their wives, their children or their junior kin in debt bondage (Rende Taylor, 2003). Debt bondage slaves could be bought out of slavery but often were not and once entered into debt bondage, the slave could be resold (Rende Taylor, 2003). Daughters were often resold as the male corvée labour system demanded a constant supply of female slaves for domestic and sexual services (Rende Taylor, 2003).

There is evidence that as early as the fourteenth century the Siam government licensed and taxed prostitution and there has been recorded government control and intervention into the sex sector since that period (Lim, 1998). While these practices were abolished by King Rama V in 1905, social hierarchy, sexual slavery and the leveraging of children to pay family debts persist in modern Thailand (Rende Taylor, 2003).

The sex industry in Thailand received a substantial boost during the Vietnam War when nearly 40,000 American service members entered the country on rest and recreation periods (Hitchcock, 2008). The increased number of American servicemen in the country occurred at the same time as globalisation was creating new trends in global travel and communication. Globalisation brought an even greater number of foreigners into Thailand looking for sex. Migrating children from poor neighbouring countries such as Laos, Cambodia and Burma, looking to escape poverty and civil conflict in their own countries, were lured into sexual servitude to meet the needs of the growing Thai sex tourism industry (Hitchcock, 2008). Even these regional sources could not meet the needs of the burgeoning tourism sector and young girls were trafficked from as far away as Eastern Europe (US Department of State, 2008). During this period of rapid expansion there was little action taken by the Thai government to curtail it (Hitchcock, 2008). Indeed the Thai government openly promoted the growth of sex tourism until the late 1980s (Hitchcock, 2008).

The reasons for CST in Thailand differ somewhat to those of its neighbours due to the unique status of females in Thai society. Thai family structure is described as matrilocal and matrilineal (Mensendiek, 1997). The family is structured around female members and although the authority rests with the senior male, it is transmitted through the female line (Mensendiek, 1997). The traditional role of women upholding the household has meant that women have needed to seek ways to respond to the changing rural economy. The failure of the traditional subsistence farming economy has driven many women and girls to migrate to Bangkok or neighbouring countries in search of means to support the family. A study by Phongpaichit (1982) found that migrant Thai women and young girls send their earnings back home as remittances, and some females return to their families after a period of time. Phongpaichit concluded that “it is not helplessness but the sense of responsibilities they feel” that drives Thai girls into prostitution, and that the sex trade provides a means of survival for many of the rural poor (Phongpaichit, 1982, p. 68). Thailand’s rapid population growth has meant that there is a surplus of potential slaves while the country’s rapidly changing economy has led to increased poverty and desperation (Bales, 2000).
In Thailand there is often no ethnic difference between the slaveholder and the victim – young Thais are enslaved by Thai brothel owners and the primary distinction is between rural slaves and urban slaveholders (Bales, 2000).

Due to Thailand’s long history of intervention in the sex industry, it is not surprising that the country’s anti-trafficking legislation and policies are more advanced than its neighbours. Thailand first acknowledged the presence of human trafficking in 1928 with the Trafficking in Women and Girls Act. This legislation aimed to reduce the number of women and girls forced into prostitution in the hope of decreasing the occurrence of sexually transmitted diseases (Wongboonsin, 2007). This legislation was replaced in 1997 with the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Women and Children Act. This law greatly expanded the prosecution and severity of penalties associated with human trafficking. As with the previous law, this act was aimed at the reduction of sexually transmitted diseases rather than responding to trafficking as a human rights violation. The law significantly increases the penalties associated with the crime of human trafficking and addresses government corruption, with those within government found to be involved in trafficking schemes susceptible to receiving double or even triple the punishment accorded to a Thai citizen (Wongboonsin, 2007). Under the new policy, prosecution of traffickers in Thailand has increased. According to the 2008 US TIP report, during that year the Thai government reported over 140 cases of sex trafficking that were investigated and prosecuted, up from the 88 of the previous year (US Department of State, 2008).

The Thai government has also made efforts against CST in other areas. In collaboration with UN agencies and NGOs, the Thai government has undertaken awareness campaigns across the country that have focused on safe migration practices and integrating the importance of human rights into general school education. Sex tourist education has also received increased attention for trafficking prevention purposes. Upon arrival in Thailand, foreign tourists have received information regarding the high traffic sex sector in the country and the penalties that are associated with the criminal act of abusing a child in Thailand (US Department of State, 2008). The new trafficking legislation has also improved the resources provided for rehabilitating and protecting trafficking victims. New programs, which largely focus on preventing the re-trafficking of children, offer various services to increase the victim’s level of education and vocational skills. All female trafficking victims, Thai or foreign, are now offered shelter and rehabilitation services upon their rescue (US Department of State, 2008). There are currently nine trafficking victim shelters that are located regionally and run by the government to assist victims of trafficking (US Department of State, 2008). It is made that the overall number of shelters, run by the state and also NGOs, in the country is approximately 97 (Fein, 2007). The government has also established overseas protection and rehabilitation measures to ensure that Thai citizens identified as trafficking victims abroad are returned home and safely reintegrated into society.

There is some disagreement amongst CST scholars on Thailand’s efforts to combat CST. Shelley (2010) argues that the sex industry in Thailand is still viewed as a form of development capital. Shelley (2010) points to the issue of government corruption and collusion in human trafficking and suggests that trafficking remains a major source of revenue for the police who share the proceeds of this large-scale activity with politicians and political parties. The sex industry in Thailand is not, she argues, the consequence of well organised crime groups as in many other countries but rather the result of networks of criminals working with government officials who assume a key
role in the trafficking of Thai citizens and migrants (Shelley, 2010). Other critics such as Obokata (2006) argue that despite a recent flurry of legislation against human trafficking, the government of Thailand still tolerates the sex industry because of the large amount of profit it generates. Blackburn et al. (2010) suggest that the sex industry contributes more than $22 billion to Thailand’s gross domestic product. This statistic underscores why the sex industry in Thailand is so entrenched in Thai culture (Blackburn et al., 2010). Despite promises to stamp out government corruption the practice continues unabated. In Mae Sai in Northern Thailand, for example, brothels pay a certain amount of bribe money to the police each month for each girl (Obokata, 2006). In 2003, 50 police officers of the Bangkok Metropolitan Police were removed from active duty because of allegations that they had taken bribes from human traffickers (Obokata, 2006).

CST supply and demand factors
A number of “supply” elements of CST complicate and exacerbate the issue. Foremost amongst these is forced migration, poverty and gender inequality. The Asian countries surrounding the Mekong River (the six countries of the GMS – Cambodia, China, Laos PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam) have among the highest incidence of internal and transnational migration in the world. Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children in this region leave their homes to cross borders each year in search of new economic opportunities and a better life. The countries of Cambodia and Thailand are therefore within a region where the ease of cross-border movement coupled with the relative economic prosperity and political stability of some countries has attracted large numbers of would-be economic migrants. Despite the ease of cross-border mobility, political sanctions against would-be migrants in destination countries have created a need for networks of “people-movers” to facilitate cross-border movement. That these facilitators often serve as links to low-paid, exploitative and slave type jobs, including sex work, in the destination countries is hardly surprising. Further impacting the migration of adults and children in the region, the lucrative tourism industry in the GMS has not only created jobs within legitimate sectors but has also stimulated a demand for women and children – both male and female – in the entertainment sector, which generally translates as the sex sector (Dottridge, 2004). Many of the children in this sector are poor and have low education levels (Peters, 2007). The sex sector can offer these poor migrating children higher paid jobs than they would find elsewhere (Peters, 2007).

The trafficking of children in the Southeast Asia region takes place within a rapidly globalising economy. Rende Taylor (2003) has argued that rapid globalisation in Thailand has resulted in massive labour migration streams of rural Thais to Bangkok and abroad. An unfortunate derivative of this phenomenon is the trafficking of Thai women and girls, primarily to work in the sex sector (Rende Taylor, 2003). Archavanitkul (1998) contends that the factors determining child trafficking in Cambodia and Thailand are a combination of poverty and life under a long period of war in the country. Most trafficked children in Cambodia and Thailand come from poor families, often with many children, many of whom are family headed by widowed women (Archavanitkul, 1998). Poverty provides the context in which children are forced, sold, tricked, lured, kidnapped or trafficked into commercial sexual activities (Fraley, 2005).

Gender discrimination also plays an important role in trafficking as women and girls, who remain more excluded from the formal employment sector than their male counterparts, and thus remain the most vulnerable to trafficking. The traditional Thai
proverbs, “to have a daughter is like having a toilet in your front yard”, and “a woman is only worthy when she has a husband” speak volumes regarding the subordination of Thai women in society (Sara, 2009, p. 173). “Good” daughters in Thailand will work as prostitutes for many years to elevate the status of the family (Sara, 2009, p. 176). Patriarchy also plays a role in trafficking with patriarchal attitudes and cupidity allowing men to sell women, turning them into mere commodities (Fein, 2007). Bales (1999) has highlighted the additional problem of consumer culture in Thai society as a cause of trafficking. He points to a recent survey in the northern provinces of Thailand that found that of the families who sold their daughters, two-thirds could afford not to do so but instead preferred to buy colour televisions and video equipment (Bales, 1999).

Whilst poverty, gender inequality and forced migration constitute the supply side, or the push factors for CST, equally relevant to the problem is the demand side of child trafficking, which clearly involves the buyers of children’s sexual labour as well as the traffickers that organise and profit from children’s sexual exploitation. Demand can also be understood as the global market that demands cheap and abundant child labour in the sex industry. Demand can embrace a broad and divergent range of motivations and interests and refer to employers’ requirements for cheap and vulnerable labour, to requirements for household and subsistence labour, or even to consumer demand for cheap goods and/or services – or any combination of these factors (Anderson and O’Connell Davidson, 2003). Demand can vary from region to region in Southeast Asia as various countries try to deal with their own domestic trafficking problems. For example it is believed that part of what is pushing travelling sex offenders into Cambodia is Thailand’s increased enforcement of child sexual abuse laws (Bramham, 2012). The demand side of trafficking is largely motivated by the incredible profits that CST attracts. Researchers estimate that, globally human trafficking generates profits of USD 32 million dollars (Kaneti, 2011).

The purchasers of children’s sexual labour are predominantly local Asian men (and to a much lesser extent, women) and foreigners. There is a widespread belief among organisations studying the sex sector in the GMS that the domestic and Asian tourist in and to Thailand and Cambodia often has a preference for young virgins (Peters, 2007). While hard data to support this has proved elusive, anecdotal evidence appears to confirm this phenomenon (Peters, 2007). There are documented cases of sex clients paying high prices for virgins (Peters, 2007). More recently it is thought that the HIV/AIDS epidemic is driving sex clients to seek virgins who, they believe, have the ability to cure them from the disease. Many men believe that young girls are less likely to be infected by a sexually transmitted disease and therefore offer safer sex (Hughes, 2005). This, in turn, pushes the age of a virgin back more and more so that younger and younger children are being exploited and many children are thus increasingly being subjected to risk of transmission of the HIV/AIDS virus (Peters, 2007).

CST is therefore an extremely complex problem, exacerbated by the ill effects of globalisation such as poverty and forced migration, and deeply embedded in historical injustice and patriarchal practices. It is not an easy problem to solve, as any response to CST must also tackle the associated issues of poverty, inequality and unemployment, and address the multiple elements of CST supply and demand.

Findings: the internal, external and inter-agency complexities of anti-CST organisations in Thailand and Cambodia
In addition to the complexities of CST in the GMS and challenging supply and demand factors, the organisations that work to combat CST also face their own internal and
inter-agency collaboration complexities. Interviews conducted with anti-trafficking experts for this research demonstrated a number of areas of contention for anti-trafficking organisations. Foremost amongst these was contention over the usefulness of awareness-raising campaigns; disagreement over definitions of the “child”, and children’s agency to work; debate over prostitution as slavery; debate over CST as a law and policy issue; frustration over conflicting messages being sent by anti-trafficking organisations to the public; and frustration at the lack of evaluation of campaign and protection activities. A number of these issues have already been addressed in the literature on CST, particularly the question of consent to prostitution (see Kaneti, 2011). Also thoroughly researched are the repercussions of what can happen when well-intentioned but poorly informed advocates involve themselves in the child labour issue, such as happened when political pressure forced sweat shops in Bangladesh to close and pushed thousands of children into street prostitution (see Rubenfeld, 2011). In addition, one of the key reasons that CST has not been reduced – the lack of legislation and policy on CST – has been addressed by scholars (see Wooditch, 2011). Therefore, this section of the paper will address only a select number of organisational and inter-agency complexities not already addressed in the literature on CST. Several main areas of complexity and contention, highlighted in the interviews with experts, will be discussed – contention over donor funding and mandate; networking vs organisations working independently of each other, and the associated issue of North-South contention in partnerships; debate over the usefulness of awareness-raising campaigns, and the associated issue of monitoring and evaluation of campaigns and program activities.

Contention over donor funding
Interviews conducted with child trafficking experts employed in UN agencies and NGOs for this research revealed that a major cause of contention between anti-trafficking organisations was that of competition over donor funding, and the application of donor funding for anti-trafficking activities. Donor funding for anti-trafficking programs has historically been a sensitive issue amongst NGOs in Southeast Asia. In the early days of significant donor funding from the USA for anti-trafficking programs in the region a core problem was that US money for anti-trafficking campaigning was conditional. In the early years of anti-trafficking funding under the Bush and Clinton administrations the majority of funding from the US government was reserved for NGOs that specifically did not support women and girls working as prostitutes. Therefore, the bulk of US anti-trafficking funds in these early years was given to non-secular NGOs and faith-based groups:

You had to make it clear anti-prostitution work. You couldn’t help sex workers, you had to treat them as victims and save them from their abysmal situation regardless of whether they were there as consenting adults or not.

Under current US President Obama these restrictions have eased (Shelley, 2010) and current USAID funding is given to both secular and non-secular anti-trafficking NGOs and networks. Nevertheless, this kind of conditional funding “drove a wedge” (interview quote) between secular and non-secular NGOs in the 1980s and 1990s and forced many NGOs to make a choice over their stance on prostitution. It is perhaps because of this reason that there is still significant agency collaboration between faith-based NGOs, and secular NGOs, but little collaboration between the two groups. An exception to this rule is the collaborative relationship between World Vision International, a Christian NGO, and
Save the Children International (a secular international NGO). These NGOs collaborate on campaigns and programs frequently in Thailand. Interviews revealed intense criticism of small faith-based organisations that were described as “weird” and “wacky” and “do strange secretive things” (interview quotes).

Interviews conducted for this research revealed that organisations must constantly compete amongst each other over valuable donor funds. There was tension not only between UN agencies and NGOs but also between UN agencies themselves over donor dollars. UN agencies often competed over donor funding and had overlapping anti-trafficking mandates. A UN interview participant explained:

They (UN agencies) are all in competition with each other. Each agency has its own network of funders. UNICEF is based in New York but it’s very rich. The UNDP is based in New York, they again are perceived as a coordinating mechanism and therefore it gets more money. UNESCO has its headquarters in Paris and they have their own budget coming from their own member states which is different from the membership dues that go to the UNDP […] So you see there are different budgets already. Each organisation sees itself as being the protector, the supporter, the gatekeeper of particular issues. So UNESCO is education and culture, UNICEF’s mandate is children. ILO is labour. UNDP is good governance at the moment in all the different countries. So the problem is when you try to work together you get people with different mandates. It shouldn’t be that difficult for them to coordinate but some of the mandates are overlapping.

Some anti-trafficking organisations observed and interviewed for this research were attempting to reject the reliance on donors and assume their own direction. A faith-based network in Cambodia described how, in a bid for US government funding, an NGO met with other organisations to discuss possible avenues for collaboration in line with the donor funding. Whilst the funding never eventuated, a partnership nonetheless developed as the previous discussions had provided an arena for preliminary talks and the collective interest for developing a partnership:

It was better this way because the network is not based on finances but is based on this common goal and concern. It’s entirely about sharing resources, about working together on initiatives […] What we’re trying to do now is work on the strategy, decide what we want to do, and then get funding. Some organisations, they often try, they feel like they need to get the funding, so they get the initiative based on the funding. We’re trying to avoid that. In the end it’s not a good strategy it’s just based on where the strategy is. Obviously donors have demands and strings attached and sometimes that’s okay and sometimes it’s not.

Interviews with anti-trafficking experts revealed the interesting development that in recent years donors have been asking anti-trafficking organisations to network more. They have also added some strings to monitoring and evaluation activities and asked for more concrete evidence of progress, especially regarding the people involved in trafficking – namely the victims and the traffickers. However, providing concrete proof of improvements has been the “Achilles’ heel” (interview quote) of advocacy organisations and networks in the region. With few prosecutions and rescues providing quantitative evidence of progress, producing results for donors has been a constant challenge. Donors, especially large government donors such as USAID, have requested proof of either more “lives saved” or more “baddies in jail” (interview quotes), data that are sometimes difficult to produce in the short term.

Diminishing funding has frustrated anti-trafficking organisations that can only take a “band aid approach” (interview quote) to combating child trafficking, rather than focus on addressing the “bigger picture of trafficking” (interview quote). The “bigger picture” was described as the root causes of trafficking including poverty
exacerbated by contemporary globalisation, gender inequality and lack of state support systems for young people:

It’s incredibly frustrating. We know what the causes are (of CST). We understand the complex supply and demand. But at the end of the day we only have so many dollars, and addressing the global economy, it’s too big. We can only stretch ourselves so far.

Networking vs going-it-alone, and North-South contention in partnerships

In the fight against child trafficking in the GMS and internationally there are three major categories of contributors: national governments, the UN (and its various agencies), and NGOs from both the North and the South. These groups have formed partnerships since the 1990s to fight CST, as experts recognised that there were clear benefits to networking and sharing resources to fight this transnational crime. When operating in advocacy networks different agencies frequently perform different, but complementary roles, and provide different resources and skill sets. Many network partners, particularly NGOs, are on the ground, carrying out day-to-day operations such as protecting victims, performing rescues and repatriating victims to their home countries. The UN serves as the important forum where international consensus on human trafficking is built and where the bulk of coordination takes place. National governments, of course, remain important contributors because they have the power to legislate and have access to enforcement mechanisms, intelligence and resources to fight trafficking. Historically these organisations – NGOs, government and UN agencies – have had little experience of coordination, largely due to financial constraints and economic, labour and political concerns and differences.

Interviews with child trafficking experts revealed the reasons that a number of anti-trafficking organisations desire to work collaboratively rather than work independently of each other. A vast number of anti-trafficking organisations had emerged in the GMS region in the 1990s, largely as a result of a significant donation from the Turner Foundation (one billion US dollars) and increased pressure from the US to fight human trafficking in the Southeast Asia region. The growth in anti-trafficking organisations in the region has expanded so much in recent years that, as one expert explained, the organisations are “literally tripping over each other” (interview quote). Interview participants explained that individual anti-trafficking organisations, particularly NGOs, proliferated not only because of US funding for anti-trafficking activities but also because Thailand and Cambodia have been easy countries for NGOs to operate in:

Thailand is the great land of NGOs. You get 4 Thais, you get 5 NGOs. It’s also a relatively easy country for foreign NGOs to work. Certainly easy compared to China or Vietnam or Laos. Cambodia is also full of NGOs.

Interview participants explained that anti-trafficking organisations had two key reasons for wanting to form inter-agency partnerships against trafficking. First, the organisations wanted to work together in the best interests of the victim. Through collaboration, individual organisations were able to share knowledge, resources and expertise for the improvement of victim services, and had a stronger political voice with governments for developing anti-trafficking legislation. Second, organisations wanted to avoid a situation of producing confusing and conflicting messages for the public:

At the end of the day we only have this much money and resources. The assumption is if you have a billion dollars, the problem will go away. Much of what we’re trying to do is say, “guys,
what can we do to get it down to the closest thing to three or four silver bullet things where we can work together collectively, to make sure we address the needs of the victim”. We also want to make sure we don’t have 15,000 messages to give people.

As the number of anti-trafficking organisations in the GMS had grown exponentially in the 1990s and 2000s, conflicting migration messages had been sent to the public. As the above quotes demonstrates, confusion of key messages such as “don’t migrate at all” or “migrate, but be careful” meant that both children and adults alike became confused about the simple migration message. Migrating children were unaware of where they could access reliable information about safe migration, and, when exploited, often did not know who they could turn to for assistance, whether they could trust the police and other government representatives, or whether they would be welcomed back into their community.

Interviews with experts highlighted the key benefits for anti-trafficking organisations working in partnerships, for both the UN agencies, and international and domestic NGOs. The UN often represented NGOs in national and regional fora, therefore by partnering with the UN, NGOs were ensuring that their “voice” (interview quote) was heard at a higher political level. This was particularly important for domestic NGOs that frequently lacked a voice with their own governments and in international fora. Partnering with UN agencies also sometimes enabled NGOs to source new avenues of funding. Alternately, partnering with NGOs enabled UN agencies to maintain a direct link with those affected by trafficking. This has also been particularly important for government agencies such as the police. In Thailand, for example, street children often do not trust the police, therefore, for the police to locate and access abused children they rely on the intervention and assistance of established child protection NGOs, particularly in sex tourism hot spots such as Pattaya in Thailand.

However, this kind of networking is not without its flaws. Some networking relationships with grassroots NGOs were considered forced partnerships by a number of interview participants and a necessity rather than a truly voluntary decision. The attitude expressed by some Northern experts of networking with Southern organisations as “just getting on with it” (interview quote) suggested that collaborative North-South relationships in partnerships did not always progress smoothly. Some advocacy networks, particularly larger international networks, appeared to maintain a customer-client attitude to networking with Southern NGOs. Southern NGOs enabled Northern NGOs to access child victims of trafficking while Northern NGOs provided Southern partners with important resources and funding. A core problem in equalising the power balance between the Northern and Southern network members lay in the unequal resources between the two groups. Northern NGOs were significantly better funded and resourced than their Southern counterparts. Instances of negative networking between Northern and Southern network members due to resource related tensions sometimes led grassroots NGOs to leave networks.

**Awareness raising and monitoring and evaluation of activities**

An unfortunate derivative of the rush to solve the CST problem has been that a number of organisations have implemented programs and campaign activities without collecting sufficient consideration and understanding of the CST issue. Anti-trafficking programs and projects have often been designed by those running the organisations without baseline data and little research has initially gone into the planning and implementation of a significant number of projects. Many of the projects observed for this research had no
reported outcomes that were directly related to reducing the number of victims trafficked. In reporting on their work anti-trafficking organisations often referred to activities that took place and the number of participants involved, but there was no attached measurement of how these activities had been beneficial and to whom. Without measures of attitude change or changes in the public’s knowledge of trafficking it was unknown whether the programs were having any effect and were an efficient use of donor funds. When interventions were developed without sound methods for assessing their effects it was possible that they were ineffective or, worse, had unintended negative effects.

A core problem for anti-trafficking organisations and networks in measuring campaign effectiveness was that a significant amount of campaigning consisted of awareness raising, which was extremely difficult to evaluate in terms of reach and impact. Awareness-raising activities had historically avoided monitoring and evaluation analysis by anti-trafficking organisations due to the difficulties in quantifying their impact on the public. Research interviews highlighted the fact that after two decades of awareness raising of human trafficking in Western countries a fatigue had developed amongst the anti-trafficking community regarding the usefulness of these awareness-raising campaigns. Some anti-trafficking experts were very critical of trying to enhance the Western world’s “awareness” of human trafficking, and believed that the world was now, as an expert stated, “well aware” of the trafficking problem. In referring to the recent Body Shop-Child Wise anti-sex trafficking campaign, an interview participant had the following criticism of awareness-raising campaigns:

I’m not completely sure that rubbing yourself with ginger after you’ve taken a shower is really going to help too much but the Body Shop wants that. But it’s hard then to move to “what has actually happened?” No one is ever held responsible for programs. We ask – “what are you doing?” The answer is “oh we’re raising awareness”. Maybe twenty years ago you were raising awareness. I’m not sure there is much of an impact.

Interviewed experts also criticised other awareness-raising activities such as the targeting of middle range and higher end hotels in anti-sex tourism and anti-sex trafficking campaigns in the GMS:

The Accor group of hotels has taken a strong stance on child sex trafficking. But how many paedophiles were taking children to the Accor hotels to begin with? Generally they go to 2 star hotels. It’s nice that they did this but there is little impact.

These examples highlight the importance of strategic planning when developing anti-trafficking campaigns. As the examples suggest, it is important for anti-trafficking organisations to consider who anti-trafficking awareness-raising campaigns are designed to target or assist. Misguided campaigns such as in the examples provided mean that organisations waste valuable donor funds and miss reaching important target audiences. These examples also highlight the challenges for anti-trafficking organisations in measuring the effectiveness of campaigns that cannot truly be quantified. The fact that experts in the GMS were already critical of the validity of the campaigns suggests that an evaluation of their effectiveness may result in rather dismal findings.

**Discussion and conclusion**

In discussing the obstacles and complexities associated with an effective response to child trafficking it is important to remember that NGOs and UN agencies are not monolithic structures with perfectly aligned goals. The NGOs and UN agencies studied for this research were, in fact, very diverse. They had varied agendas, structures and sizes, divergent goals, at times overlapping mandates, and different levels and sources
of funding. The NGOs studied for this research, particularly large international NGOs, were often managed in a similar fashion to businesses – they possessed secretariats, administrators, boards and budgets. They had an inherent need to be transparent, for the benefit not just of donors but also stakeholders, network partners and their beneficiaries. The NGOs observed for this research did not and could not know everything about international development and aid related issues, nor did they know everything and work on every aspect of anti-human trafficking advocacy, legislation, protection of victims and rehabilitation. One interview participant likened NGOs trying to do everything to “a person doing neurosurgery on weekends for fun”. Another interview participant suggested that NGOs getting involved in areas they did not fully understand was potentially “dangerous”. However, faced with responding to the complex CST issue, both NGOs and UN agencies both expressed the desire to better understand the CST issue, and move beyond the “band aid” approach to CST to addressing the “bigger picture” of CST, in other words, combating the complex supply and demand factors such as poverty and gender inequality that create and exacerbate CST.

Despite the effort required to build and sustain valuable inter-agency partnerships in order to effectively combat child trafficking, interviewed experts suggested that inter-agency collaboration is the only way forward. Anti-trafficking organisations that did not form partnerships with other anti-trafficking groups would “wither and die” as one expert explained. Interviewed experts were very open in their discussions of the numerous areas of contention associated with inter-agency collaboration: North-south contention, contention over voice, donor funding, mandates and branding; “death by meetings”; dissent over ideological stance, and so on. However these same experts suggested that to work in silos was not an option for organisations engaged in combating child trafficking. An effective response to child trafficking involved an engaged, collaborative response across all sectors.

In addition to discussing the complexities of working collaboratively against CST, experts cited a number of areas of positive collaboration. These included cross-cultural learning – being able to access and work with domestic NGOs or international NGOs and UN agencies was seen as an enormous benefit to staff whose knowledge of the sector was frequently limited to their geographic corner of the globe or specific expertise, for example, the management of trafficking victim shelters. Other benefits of inter-agency collaboration against CST included the obvious benefit of having more reach and impact for less money or more “bang for less buck” (interview quote). Managing multiple global campaigns cost individual organisations significant amounts of money and required considerable manpower. Collaborating with other organisations meant that organisations could develop joint campaigns to further their public outreach or organisations could “piggy back” (interview quote) on already existing campaigns, lending their funds, resources and knowledge to existing programs and activities.

This paper supports Tarrow’s (2005) argument that within an increasingly internationalised and globalised world, a fluid, cosmopolitan, but rooted layer of advocates is developing that uses domestic resources, expertise and opportunities to advance the collective goals of the people it claims to represent. The paper also supports Magis’ (2009) view that, with the exception of a few, the world’s many thousands of NGO groups, when acting in isolation, have no power in the international system. In addition to their insignificant size and voice, the groups can be narrowly focused on specific policy areas and highly ideological, both of which limit their comprehension of larger and related issues and diminish the capacity for the negotiations so critical in political environments (Magis, 2009). However, these theorisations,
whilst useful in that they call for an inter-agency response to global social problems, do not sufficiently describe the complex processes that occur within inter-agency groups that, by virtue of their different mandates and structures, possess complex goals, internal processes, and external influences. More formative work is needed to identify how internal complexities and external factors influence inter-agency characteristics. Scholars of human trafficking in other regions of the world have already highlighted the importance of inter-agency collaboration, the importance of the external environment, and the need for a new research agenda on inter-agency collaboration. For example, Relwende Sawadogo (2012) has argued that the only viable option for eradicating human trafficking in the foreseeable future is to fully cooperate and pool West African human and material resources in order to expand regional capacity and to form robust strategic alliances against trafficking. In a similar vein Todres (2010) has called for new coordinated efforts to combat child trafficking globally and has highlighted several steps that are necessary to begin to address coordination issues, including the development of national plans of action as well as regional and subregional plans, integration of all sectors into programs to combat trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children, and correspondingly the incorporation of anti-child exploitation initiatives into the work of organisations operating in each sector, and, finally, the strengthening of inter-jurisdictional cooperation.

Despite the numerous complexities associated with the child trafficking issue, and complexities and dissent amongst anti-trafficking organisations, there have been some recent success stories. In a similar vein to the women's rights and other social justice movements, anti-trafficking organisations in the GMS are promoting the cosmopolitan notion of global justice and supporting the creation of global fora to fight child trafficking. Examples include the Global Forum on Human Trafficking, the Asian Taskforce, and also international legislation such as that provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Palermo protocol, and extraterritorial legislation to intercept and punish perpetrators. A number of anti-trafficking inter-agency collaborations have emerged in Southeast Asia, particularly in the last decade, and examples of transnational networks include ECPAT, Chab Dai and TRAFCORD in Northern Thailand. Another important recent example is UN.GIFT, which was launched in March 2007 by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, in cooperation with the International Labour Organisation, the International Organisation for Migration, the UN Children's Fund, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe with the aim of eradicating human trafficking by reducing both the vulnerability of potential victims and the demand for exploitation in all its forms; ensuring adequate protection and support to those who do fall victim; and supporting the efficient prosecution of the criminals involved, while respecting the fundamental human rights of all persons.

In the GMS the UN Inter-Agency Project on Trafficking (UNIAP) is also another success story. UNIAP was established in 2000 with a mandate to strengthen the coordination of organisations in the fight against trafficking in the region and to implement a wide range of protection, rehabilitation and reintegration programs. In 2004, UNIAP brought together the governments of Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, China and Vietnam, 13 UN agencies and many local and international NGOs to establish the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking (COMMIT). COMMIT was the first regional instrument to make a serious effort to institutionalise a multi-sectoral approach to make certain that the responsibilities and commitments made in the memoranda of understanding between GMS governments
were implemented in accordance with international norms and standards. The paper within the Subregional Plan of Action specifically referred to the need for governments to work together with international organisations and NGOs to close all avenues of exploitation (Jayagupta, 2009). UNIAP has proved to be a highly effective body for the coordination of a significant number of the diverse anti-trafficking organisations and networks in the region. UNIAP not only hosts COMMIT but also acts as a coordinating office for the GMS governments, many Northern and Southern NGOs, and UN agencies, providing them with platforms for discussion, coordinating workshops and seminars, and acting as a central resource and information hub.

This paper has highlighted some of the challenges and complexities of combating child trafficking in Thailand and Cambodia. The paper has not set out to provide solutions to the problems experienced by anti-trafficking organisations but, rather, to highlight the complexities faced by anti-trafficking organisations operating in the region. As the analysis of interview data demonstrates, there are a number of areas of complexity and contention in anti-trafficking inter-agency collaboration. However, there have also been a number of recent success stories, and experts laud the efforts made by anti-trafficking organisations to engage, across sectors, in the region in order to provide effective, coherent and coordinated responses to child trafficking. Recent successes highlight the critical importance of sustained collaborative practice that engages with global political, legal and economic arenas in the struggle to keep a global focus on children’s rights issues at a macro level. Anti-child trafficking advocacy success has been important, however, there is much more that needs to be done. Child trafficking is likely to increase under conditions of poverty, unemployment and social and economic transition, especially in regions where there are limited legal migration opportunities. Therefore, any attempt to combat CST must also endeavour to combat the underlying forces that exacerbate the problem – poverty and gender inequality. A successful fight against CST will also require a collaborative policy and advocacy approach from anti-child trafficking organisations operating in the GMS.

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Further reading


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