

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

**EVALUATION OF THE IOM PROJECT FOR THE RETURN AND REINTEGRATION
OF TRAFFICKED AND OTHER VULNERABLE WOMEN AND CHILDREN BETWEEN
SELECTED COUNTRIES IN THE MEKONG REGION**

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IOM International Organization for Migration

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AUSAID	Australia's Agency for International Development
CDC	Coordination and Documentation Centre
CT	Counter Trafficking
DFID	United Kingdom Government's Department for International Development
DSALVY	Department of Social Labour, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation, Cambodia
DSDW	Department of Social Development and Welfare, Thailand
IDC	Immigration Detention Centre, Thailand
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPEC	International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MOSALVY	Ministry of Social Labour, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation, Cambodia
MOU	Memorandum Of Understanding
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
OSALVY	District Social Labour, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation, Cambodia
PDR	People's Democratic Republic
R&R	Return and Reintegration
RKK	Rissho Kosei-Kai
TOT	Training Of Trainers
UN-IAP	United Nations Inter-Agency Project to Combat Trafficking in Women and Children in the Mekong Sub-region
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

FOREWORD

This External Evaluation Report is the result of a joint initiative on the part of the IOM Office in Bangkok and the Office of the Inspector General. The decision to evaluate the programme was taken due to the long experience of IOM Bangkok in managing the various regional projects implemented in the Mekong Region for combating human trafficking since 1996, and for reintegrating victims into their regions of origin. The regional approach was also unique in IOM and merited evaluation in order to draw lessons for future, similar interventions. There was also a strong interest from the main donor, as well as from other IOM constituents and partners, to have more information on the performance and success of IOM programmes in the field of counter-trafficking activities.

An external consultant, M. Christian Bugnion, was recruited to perform the evaluation. M. Bugnion has an extensive background and experience on project/programme evaluations with international organizations and donors, including the World Bank, UNDP, WFP, ECHO, USAID, UNHCR and IFRC. He is the Director of a consulting firm.

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) was responsible for supervising the Consultant's work and for providing technical guidance for implementation of the evaluation, which has been endorsed by the IOM Director General. The IOM Office in Bangkok provided support to the Consultant for the documentation review, the interviews and field visits. The Office in Bangkok closely collaborated with OIG in commenting on the draft reports and in preparing the evaluation's Terms of Reference and written questionnaires.

In addition to evaluating the programme's performance and achievements, the report also draws attention to important issues on counter-trafficking, and attempts to highlight useful elements for a constructive debate on the future of the programme and IOM's overall strategy, both inside IOM and with IOM donor(s).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The regional IOM Project entitled *Return and reintegration of trafficked and other vulnerable women and children among selected countries in the Mekong Region*, which covers the countries of Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar, was formally evaluated during May 2003.

The evaluation's overall objective is 'to evaluate IOM's overall performance and achievements of project implementation and to assess IOM's strategy for delivering assistance in the field of counter-trafficking'.

The evaluation traced the project history back to its initial conceptualisation, back in 1995, through key informant interviews, notably with former IOM staff (1995 staff and the former regional Chief of Mission via e-mail). This has partially bridged the time gap and obtained a historical perspective from inception of the regional approach to counter- trafficking in the region up to the current 2000-2003 project.

The current project is thus the third phase of IOM's counter-trafficking efforts in the region. As a result of a position paper written by IOM for the Beijing Conference, two short projects were designed and implemented in 1996, totalling US\$ 82,000. In 1997 the two were merged and extended to the end of the year for an amount of US\$ 100,000. Phase Two started with the 1998-1999 two-year project, with three components: return and reintegration assistance to 290 victims, capacity building and research. The current project, funded by AUSAID, is therefore the result of four years of IOM experience in counter-trafficking in the Mekong region, from 1996 to 1999.

Three distinct levels of analysis have been identified during the evaluation: the political level, involving awareness by authorities on the work done by IOM (lobbying, normative framework, etc.), the implementation level, including all local partners and local authorities and government counterparts, and the networking/liaison level, involving all partners, both national and regional. An additional level of complexity relates to analysis of the countries covered in the project and the amount of resources and efforts allocated to each.

The evaluation visited three of the five countries covered under the project: Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. Feedback was also obtained from the Vietnamese Embassy in Phnom Penh regarding IOM's activities. At the political level in Thailand, IOM is perceived as performing quite well and even proving instrumental in bringing about policy change within government. However, it is not clear to what extent this can be attributed directly to the project. The evaluation feels that, especially in Thailand, this is an aggregate result of the overall IOM performance rather than a single project result, although the return and reintegration project has no doubt some weight in the positive appreciation by the Thai Government and concrete achievements have been obtained (such as standardized case management). Other countries had positive feedback on the work undertaken by IOM at political level. One exception was Laos, where comments were only made on the actual implementation of the project (i.e. return and reintegration of trafficked victims), since little work has yet been done on a policy/political level, given the absence of an established in-country IOM office (equal limitations apply to Myanmar, and no direct feedback from these authorities was obtained). In Cambodia, the feedback received by the evaluator from Government officials related only to the return and reintegration project, since it is the only IOM project collaborating with the Ministry of Social Labour, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation (MOSALVY). Feedback for Vietnam was obtained from the Vietnamese Embassy in Phnom Penh.

At implementation level the project has carried out all its stated components and is successfully following the objectives as set out in the logical framework and the other project documents (change frame). The main achievement of the project is to have been able to realize these activities despite an overly optimistic scenario and timeframe for results, and with too little input in terms of human or material resources. **There is only so much that can be done in countries which do not have an established IOM office and with a very limited number of staff, given the spatial coverage and complexities of the project.** The current project structure may not be the most efficient and effective way to run a regional operation under the existing constraints.

Networking and liaison, both national and cross-border, is gradually building up and yielding positive collaboration (e.g. for Myanmar with World Vision and Save the Children). The project has reportedly carried out no less than 86 workshops, conferences, meetings and study tours, both nationally and regionally, which represents quite an accomplishment, with substantial cross-border information dissemination. **However, it is felt that since a functional system is in place for orderly returns, recovery and reintegration from Thailand to Cambodia, IOM's direction should now be geared more towards providing a normative framework on counter-trafficking issues. In particular IOM should possibly take a lead role (as technical assistance to government) in defining the minimum standards for assistance to counter-trafficking victims (either those living in temporary shelters or in long-term homes).** These minimum standards need to be endorsed by as many authorities and partners (NGOs and UN) as possible (especially relevant and necessary in Cambodia, which has a thriving NGO community). This could also eventually become a joint UN-IAP/IOM initiative (United Nations Inter-Agency Project to Combat Trafficking in Women and Children in the Mekong Sub-region), the opportunity of which has yet to be explored by IOM.

The single largest constraint of the project is poor project design. The rationale for each of the components is difficult to ascertain, beyond the fact that the current project (Phase 3) was inherited from the previous project (1998-99 Phase 2), which was itself inherited from the previous project(s) (1996-97, phase 1). Feedback from staff involved also confirmed that projects had to be drafted rapidly in order not to lose financing opportunities (activities were suspended in Poipet, Cambodia, until funding under the project had been secured, which forced UNICEF to take up support to the transit centre again for nine months in 2000), and that strategic and technical issues were not necessarily addressed in much depth, as the priority was to obtain financing for the project, while the project's high quality was a secondary issue. After all, since donor interest in trafficking was gradually rising, a continuation of already-funded past projects was probably felt to be reasonable (Phases 1 and 2 were funded by the Japanese Foundation RKK and the Finnish Government. Phase 2 also raised support from the US and Japanese governments). **Time constraint factors are in contradiction with quality project preparation and may undermine a proper project cycle management elaboration process.**

The one procedure to be avoided for any future expansion of IOM's regional counter-trafficking activities is to take the previous project document, and just change a few figures and numbers to continue with the same activities. The project document lacks a clear overall regional strategy. There are now many more participants than at the beginning of the project, dealing with trafficking issues in the region, a multiplicity of activities and of projects – even within IOM project countries - and greater donor support and awareness. This does not mean that all agendas are necessarily compatible. An essential difficulty is the fact that many partners operate on different project targets (e.g. children in difficult circumstances, street children, prostitutes, etc.) within which the trafficked victim caseload is a small minority. **A major review of the project design is necessary to establish a coherent and strong approach for the next phase of IOM regional counter-trafficking activities.**

In order to ensure quality project preparation, IOM should already start planning for the next step. The current project has been awarded a no-cost extension until February 2004. The time should be used to undertake participatory multi-stakeholder analysis with donors, government counterparts and local authorities, NGOs, UN agencies and targeted groups of beneficiaries from follow up cases, in order to define precisely the fields of activities in which IOM should be involved and exploit the existing opportunities and synergies between the various participants. It should be noted that most of the regional projects (ILO/International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO/IPEC) or UN-IAP or UNICEF) have not undertaken extensive stakeholder participatory analysis. IOM would thus be in a lead and model role by ensuring that primary stakeholders and users are able to identify the needs that need servicing and ensuring these are incorporated into the project. This would also allow IOM to refine its niche in the field of counter-trafficking in the Mekong region and determine better, over and beyond this specific project, the general needs in the region in the field of counter-trafficking which is certainly an important issue for the governments of the project countries, albeit politically sensitive and delicate.

LOOKING BEYOND THE PROJECT: A MESO-ANALYSIS OF COUNTER-TRAFFICKING ACTIVITIES IN THE MEKONG REGION

Recommendations¹

The evaluation clearly supports the extension of IOM's counter-trafficking activities, provided they are built upon a national CT strategy in each of the project countries.

Given the existing structures, this would currently apply to Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar (and eventually China) should also develop a national CT strategy, as IOM offices are being officially opened in these countries (the Laos project manager should already be in a position to draft an initial strategy paper, based on the CT experience acquired over the past three years).

The national CT strategy should be established by the Head of the IOM Mission, together with the Mekong R&R Country Project Manager. This national strategy should be based on wide stakeholder participation, in particular from governments, both at ministerial (IOM Chief of Mission) and technical (Country Project Manager) levels. In addition, stakeholder analysis should include local and international NGOs, as well as UN agencies. Last but not least, beneficiary direct feedback, based on the project's return and reintegration experience and case management information, should be used to identify unmet needs and possible improvements. A comprehensive documented report on the process should be produced in each country, as a reference for CT activities, allowing both a retrospective analysis and a clear sense of direction as to where IOM CT activities should be going, while identifying country-specific constraints. **This implies two major changes for IOM:**

- 1) **that all CT projects are linked together, each forming a part of the national CT strategy; as a result, greater information sharing and dissemination amongst IOM staff on CT projects is necessary (such as monthly one-day seminars, which could be a part of the regular management review mechanisms), as projects are currently segregated with little or no interaction between the various project staff although they are all working towards the same overall goal,**
- 2) **that IOM offices maintain, regularly update and share a CT information system with the other Mekong countries, covering the range of projects included in each of the country's national CT strategy; at regional level, the national CT strategies should be brought together into a common framework, to ensure consistency and coherence in IOM's activities in the region.**

The design of the regional CT strategy should be the responsibility of the IOM Regional Representative of the IOM Bangkok, together with the Mekong R&R Project

¹ The contents of the initial draft report have been updated to reflect the added knowledge gained by the evaluator regarding the background and constraints of IOM's activities in counter-trafficking. This is the result of a meeting with IOM senior staff in Geneva in mid-June 2003 to discuss the first draft report that provided very valuable insights and information. The current document also incorporates some of the comments and all factual corrections from the IOM project staff, who equally reviewed the first draft report. As a result, the revised analysis leads to the following recommendations and overall conclusions regarding IOM's counter-trafficking activities in the Mekong region, based on a phased approach to developing a regional strategy.

Coordinator, the Chiefs of IOM Missions and Project Managers from the various project countries. Ideally, once the national CT strategies are established, the Regional Representative and Project Coordinator should prepare a strategic planning workshop, which will form the basis of the regional CT strategy.

The evaluator feels that any strategic process has to be participatory and owned by the primary users, in this case the IOM staff in the project countries and regional office. Therefore, despite recognizing the very positive capacity and flexibility of IOM's use of consultants for a range of services, it does not support any strategy, which has not been written by the primary users themselves, in particular in this case by the future Regional Representative and the Project Coordinator. **Strategic planning is part of any senior manager's job description and normal management functions, and not a consultant's responsibility.**

Given the imminent staff change in the post of Regional Representative, the evaluator recommends that incoming Regional Representative (who should be included in this process as soon as possible) be forwarded a copy of the evaluation for information.

The strategy papers should be written:

- a) at national level by the IOM Chief of Mission and Project Manager, in close collaboration with the Regional Representative, and**
- b) at regional level by the Regional Representative and Project Coordinator.**

The evaluator feels that the rationale and recommendations of the strategy paper on CT written by the IOM consultant are unsubstantiated by any relevant facts and that ownership by the key IOM staff cannot be established.

There are many reasons outside the scope of this evaluation that support a programme rather than project approach². **While programmes are technically more difficult and involve larger quantities of funds than individual projects, they are nonetheless a necessity when the level of complexity is similar to that of the project's current working environment.** While the evaluator has carried out five other regional project and programme evaluations, the current regional project is by far the most demanding and challenging, given a fairly small budget for a quite ambitious goal. As a single example, the fact that five different languages are needed to work in the current project countries (without counting the specific ethnic languages of some of the trafficked population, which would increase the numbers if, for example, trafficked victims from Myanmar of Shan, Karen, Mon and Akha ethnicity were included) is an indication of its complexity, while the nature of the project and its political sensitivity make expert personal communication skills a necessity and a clear sense of direction an absolute need. An additional difficulty is the very different types of governments and political systems within the region and the sometimes difficult neighbouring relations of the Mekong countries amongst each other.

² A programme is a coherent set of policies, strategies, activities and investments designed to achieve a specific time-bound national or regional development objective or set of objectives; a 'programme approach' refers to the pursuit of national or regional development goals through cohesive programmes. A project is an individual intervention, often being a component of a programme.

This approach also requires very strong leadership from the Regional Representative to support a clear and coherent counter-trafficking strategy for the region, and very good personal relationships between IOM staff across the region. There is much that could be gained from such a situation, provided that very strong leadership is steering the process.

In any case, whether IOM retains a regional project approach or decides on the programme path, some minimum requirements should be met, chief among which are:

1. IOM offices opened in each project country;
2. Additional staff, one international for each new office and one local assistant being the absolute minimum, although a core of five people (four national and one international, including medical staff) would be desirable;
3. Greater interaction among the IOM project staff from the project countries: not only should partners attend cross-border workshops, but the IOM staff should also hold quarterly cross-border meetings, rotating in turn to each project country (both as retroactive feedback mechanism, improvement, awareness and knowledge raising, as well as capacity building for IOM staff and institutional learning);
4. Ensure participation from all stakeholders (governments, partners, UN agencies and trafficked victims) in the development of any intended project extension, by undertaking strategic planning exercises as soon as possible, ideally in each country and separately with each stakeholder – separate Governments from NGOs, UN agencies and trafficked victims, as negotiations are more productive bilaterally than multilaterally - while victim feedback should be obtained from the reintegration case follow-up information;
5. Position IOM towards a more normative role in defining benchmarks, minimum standards and procedures in assistance to the victims of trafficking regarding orderly return and reintegration (e.g. establishing the system and its framework in each country), and continue to increase IOM's role at policy level, while gradually handing over actual implementation to government authorities and NGO partners as much as possible (first and foremost in Thailand and Cambodia);
6. A very careful, critical review of the elements to be included in a further phase of counter-trafficking activities needs to be made by IOM Bangkok; in particular, the capacity building component should be broken down and planned in much greater detail, separating government authorities from NGOs and ensuring an acceptable degree of cost-sharing with governments to ensure sustainability over time;
7. Ensure that all possible stages of the return process are carefully examined to see if there remain any opportunities for improvement, based on a critical review and feedback from reintegration cases, to ensure that return and reintegration are truly being provided in a just and humane way to all victims of trafficking in all countries;
8. IOM needs to ensure that there are no geographical gaps where it is already working, such as in Thailand. Therefore IOM should study the feasibility, together with the Immigration Police, to identify a second point of intervention in Northern Thailand from which identification of trafficked victims could be made. Likewise, IOM should critically review its geographical coverage in Cambodia and Vietnam, with a view to ensuring that there are no spatial gaps;

9. IOM should focus more on reintegration assistance as the primary focus, regard return as a secondary issue and avoid specifying numbers, except for Vietnam, where there is a need to increase the caseload in order not to appear as the lame duck of the project. If Myanmar and Laos are able to undertake 119 and 158 orderly returns respectively without having an IOM office, a cost-effectiveness comparison with the Vietnam IOM office (which has repatriated only 11 orderly returnees and reintegrated 33 persons), certainly indicates that the effort may not be worth the money or that IOM may be doing something wrong, either in Cambodia or in Vietnam, or in both. While trafficked victims are numbered in the tens of thousands for any of the project countries, some degree of success needs to be made in terms of numbers in Vietnam and the hopefully soon-to-be-signed MOU between Cambodia and Vietnam may bring about some positive change.

Overall Conclusions

Overall project results are quite positive and meet the stated project outputs. While a number of improvements are still necessary, the evaluation acknowledges the significant amount of work and headway that IOM has made with this project. It should also be stated that the initial project objectives are certainly much too ambitious in relation to IOM's existing regional capacities and project input, both in material and human resources, as there is simply not enough time to collect, process and analyse the enormous amount of valuable information and data that has been generated by the project, while at the same time ensuring cross-border networks of government authorities and NGOs, working at policy level and having to identify adequately the potential for advancing the counter-trafficking agenda in each of the project countries. While the theory of project design is to carry out an assessment of existing capacities in relation to project objectives, in practice this is never really undertaken and the project naturally assumes that all is in place to reach the objectives ... which of course it never is. A more careful analysis of existing resources avoids over-extending or simply re-adjusting objectives to what can realistically be achieved in the project time frame with the stated inputs. The working environment of each project country and its internal complexities, given its different language, history, culture, political system, degree of permeability and specific sensitivity to an already very conflictive issue – counter-trafficking – renders making a regional project successful extremely difficult and challenging.

The evaluator endorses the need for a continuation of counter-trafficking activities beyond the project end date (extended to February 2004) over a four-year period, to 2008. However the approach should be much more targeted and strategic, reflecting all the learning IOM has acquired to date. At the same time, some project components should be redesigned and project management should not be a project component, although its output can be included in the logical framework or monitoring plan. The largest single challenge is for IOM to define strategically its involvement at national level and, more critically, to build a coherent regional strategy able to combine the different project countries' individual, national strategies into a meaningful whole, despite the wide variations and levels in the field of CT from one country to another.