

## MEMORANDUM

To: IOM Bangkok

From: The Director General

Date: 26 September 2003

Subject: **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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Attached is the completed evaluation of the above Programme, which I have now approved and am forwarding to you.

Also attached to this memorandum you will find a proposal from OIG – Evaluation, outlining responsibility and the timeframe for follow-up on the recommendations made. I am endorsing this proposal and forwarding it to you for action.

Please send me your follow-up reports on the relevant recommendations and proposed actions by the due dates indicated.

<p><b>Coord:</b> DGO <b>Distribution:</b> DGO/File/Chron</p>
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# 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'

## Follow-up on Recommendations

The Department/office listed below has overall responsibility for follow-up on a given Recommendation but may need to involve others

**Recommendations:**

**IOM Bangkok - 31 October 2003**

**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 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 programmatic rather than project approach. 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. 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.**