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Communication Leadership & Policy

Technology and Trafficking in Persons
Mekong Sub-Region Trip Report

Overview

From August 6-15, 2010, USC Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership & Policy (CCLP) Research Director Mark Latonero and Research Associate Erin Kamler visited Thailand and Cambodia to conduct initial research for CCLP's *Technology and Trafficking In Persons* (TIP) initiative.

The goal of the trip was to conduct preliminary research for the development and design of a TIP Information Sharing Platform (ISP)—a broadly conceived mobile and web-enabled system to help NGOs, social service providers, law enforcement and victims connect and share information. The CCLP research team also sought to continue building potential partnerships with key players active in combating TIP in the Mekong Sub-Region.

This trip developed out of the enthusiasm generated at a meeting on TIP that CCLP Director Geoffrey Cowan convened on June 3, 2010 in Washington, D.C., in coordination with Alec Ross, Secretary Clinton's Senior Advisor for Innovation. Participants included Ambassador Luis CdeBaca, head of the Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, other U.S. Government representatives, leaders in the technology field, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and academics active on TIP issues. Participants identified several key communication problems and possible technological solutions.

Based on recommendations from the meeting and further research, CCLP focused on the Mekong Sub-Region (Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Yunnan China and Burma), an area of critical needs in combating Trafficking and one in which possible technological solutions are just beginning to emerge. The team centered the initial research trip on Thailand and Cambodia, listed as Tier 2 Watch List and Tier 2, respectively, in the Department of State's 2010 TIP report. Both countries are source, transit and destination countries for men, women and children forced into labor and prostitution.

Findings

The team conducted a needs and assets assessment of a number of NGOs, Government officials, and grassroots organizations working against human trafficking (see addendum for a complete meeting list). CCLP proposes to focus on two interrelated immediate needs where technological solutions could have a significant impact: **A regional cross-border SMS and voicemail enabled hotline; and a standardized victim identification and case management system to serve as an information sharing platform.**

These two proposals would address what the team found to be a chaotic landscape that makes human trafficking and slavery such a vastly complex problem in the region. An informal and ad hoc process of information sharing currently characterizes NGO and service provider communications. The team found a lack of standardized methods for victim identification and discrepancies across the spectrum as to what constitutes trafficking, slavery and exploitation. There is a lack of effective communication and coordination between government ministries, local law enforcement and NGOs to develop effective case-management practices and manage

interrelated activities. Moreover, this lack of information sharing about trafficking cases among organizations makes overlapping data-collection efforts and inefficiencies common. NGOs operate primarily through a close network of personal relationship-based connections with little communication outside these networks. Finally, victims possess limited ways to communicate with service providers.

The application of new technology will not address all of these issues; primary challenges remain in the realm of coordination and cooperation. Nevertheless, CCLP believes that the right technology, applied in a focused, clearly defined way, can make a significant contribution in the fight against trafficking.

Proposal Details

Regional cross-border SMS and voicemail enabled hotline
This system would receive texts and voicemail in multiple languages and forward incoming messages to appropriate organizations. Victims, the concerned public, and NGO staff working in the field would be encouraged to call and text into the hotline.

Opportunities:
- o Texts can be read both by individuals and machine/computer software that identify keywords and filters incoming messages to appropriate organizations.
- o Texts can be sorted by keywords for sex trafficking, labor, marriage, adoption, law enforcement, bribery and other TIP-related language.
- o The UN Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP) has expressed support for this proposal, which could integrate with Regional agreements within the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking (COMMIT) Process.
- o Possibility to integrate the multiple existing hotlines from participating partners.
- o System would allow for voicemail to be left in multiple languages, then translated later by operators. Alternatively, hotlines could connect directly to live operators already staffed by existing NGOs/Governments/service providers.
- o SMS and voicemail message can be converted to texts and emails and sent to appropriate service providers
- o SMS and voicemails can be mapped visually on a common website.

Challenges:
- o In Cambodia, many (mobile phone) handsets have English-only characters, thus texting in general is not as common as in Thailand.
- o It seems Cambodians are not as familiar with the practice of leaving voice messages.
- o Illiteracy is a widespread issue.
- o Cambodia alone has 11 mobile carriers, which might present a barrier to negotiate a common SMS hotline number.
- o Some level of Thai/Cambodian government support will likely be necessary to negotiate a common SMS hotline number.
- o Sustainability of hotline and reliance that messages will be acted upon.
- o Thailand, as a transit country for TIP victims, hosts ethnic minority communities speaking multiple languages and dialects.
- o Migrants deemed "illegal" by the Thai government are prohibited from accessing technology, including mobile devices.

Standardized victim identification format and case management/monitoring system
A goal of this case management system would be to achieve real time monitoring and tracking of victim as they are identified and move through the process of social reintegration. Organizations using the common system would share information to alert partnering service providers about victims' immediate and future needs.

Opportunities
- o Common need for a standard and confidential form/format for identifying victims and survivors.
- o Need for organizations to track and monitor victims as they move from rescue to shelters to judicial system, back to shelters, to repatriation or reintegration into society.
- o Rather than sharing historical data/databases, a dramatic alternative would be a platform that collects data and shares information in real time. Players in the TIP space can then act on the most immediate information and assess current trends.

Challenges:
- o Many competing definitions of trafficking in persons.
- o Identifying victims while keeping certain information confidential (names, etc).
- o Identifying victims in instances when basic information such as date of birth/age is not certain (even to the victim).
- o Coordinating sustained activity (and trust) across multiple service providers.

Next steps

As a start, the team suggests developing a three-year pilot project, implemented in partnership with a small group of NGOs, IGOs and service providers in Thailand and Cambodia, and supported by technology experts and social scientists coordinated by CCLP in the United States. Throughout the pilot, the system will be refined and revised to maximize both usability by anti-trafficking organizations in the field and the benefit to victims.

CCLP will be drafting a concept paper, and pursuing government and philanthropic grant support, for this project during fall 2010. The team anticipates an additional trip to the region.

Contact

Dr. Jeremy Curtin
Senior Fellow
jeremy.curtin@usc.edu

Dr. Mark Latonero
Research Director
latonero@usc.edu

Center on Communication Leadership & Policy
Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism
University of Southern California
734 West Adams Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90089, USA
Tel: 213 821 0060 | Fax: 213 743 1901
http://communicationleadership.usc.edu

Addendum

<u>Meeting Schedule</u>

Monday, August 9
Bangkok
- o U.S. Agency for International Development (Michael Stievater, Michael Bak)
- o International Organization for Migration (Monique Filsnoel, Varapor Naisanguaransi)

Tuesday, August 10
Bangkok
- o End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPACT) International (Patchareeboon Sakupitakphon (Mam))
- o Human Rights Watch (Phil Robertson)
- o UN Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP) (Matt Friedman)

Wednesday, August 11
Phnom Penh
- o World Hope International (Esther Pastores)
- o Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) (Chan Krisna Sawada)
- o World Vision (Abid Gulzar, Luke Bearup)

Thursday, August 12
Phnom Penh
- o Healthcare Center for Children (Ly Sotheary)
- o International Justice Mission (Patrick Stayton)
- o U.S. Embassy, Phnom Penh (Jenae Johnson)

Friday, August 13
Phnom Penh
- o Local Technology NGO (anonymity requested)
- o Transitions Global (James Pond)
- o South East Asia Investigations into Social and Humanitarian Activities (SISHA)

Saturday, August 14
Phnom Penh
- o Legal Support for Children and Women (LSCW) (Ly Vichuta)

Other organizations contacted:

Thailand
- o Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- o American Center for International Labor Solidarity
- o Fight Against Child Exploitation (FACE)
- o Women's Rights Development Centre (WORD)
- o International Labor Organization (Allan Dow, Max Tunon)
- o Embassy of the United States in Thailand (Lawrence Petroni)

Cambodia
- o Acting for Women in Distressing Situations (AFESIP)
- o Action pour les Enfants (APLE)
- o Banteay Srei
- o Chab Dai Coalition