



Repatriated victims of human trafficking talk with workers involved in support efforts at a pagoda in Mandalay, Myanmar.

Working Together to Eradicate Human Trafficking in Myanmar

Globalization and growing economic inequality have transformed human trafficking, or trafficking in persons, into a serious worldwide threat. The US State Department estimates that there are 800,000 victims of human trafficking annually. These are principally poor women and children and other vulnerable members of society; one-third of the victims come from Southeast Asia.

A WORSENING SITUATION IN THE GREATER MEKONG SUB-REGION

Cross-border trafficking has become an especially serious problem in the six Mekong River countries of Cambodia, Viet Nam, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar,

and China. From March 2009 to March 2014, JICA provided support to a multidisciplinary team consisting of governmental and nongovernmental agencies involved in the rescue and social reintegration of victims of trafficking in Thailand.

JICA has also been making concerted efforts toward preventing this trafficking. In Viet Nam, a project from July 2012 to July 2015 launched a hotline system, aiming to prevent human trafficking and support trafficked persons. Victims and family members can call the hotline for consultations. The service also collects information on trafficking and provides it to the concerned agencies.

SUPPORTING VICTIMS IN MYANMAR

Cases of trafficking are on the rise in Myanmar, where victims are often taken to Thailand and China to work in the sex industry and as sources of cheap labor. In 2009, JICA began an anti-trafficking project in Myanmar to help address this situation.

Myanmar has continued efforts to fight this scourge, such as by passing anti-trafficking legislation in 2005, drafting a five-year plan on trafficking, and participating in coordinated anti-trafficking



plans with other countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). While these efforts have helped improve conditions by stepping up preventive measures, support for victims remains inadequate.

For one year starting in March 2009, JICA sent experts to Myanmar to investigate the level of support being provided to victims. The study found that while a support mechanism does exist to assist their reintegration to society, a poor understanding of the situation facing the victims and a lack of shelters for them highlighted the difficulty confronting rehabilitation and reintegration efforts.

To address this, JICA responded to a request from the Myanmar government with a project beginning in June 2012 to increase the aptitude of officers involved in supporting victims. In this project, set to run through June 2015, JICA is dispatching experts to provide training and instruction to social workers from Myanmar's Department of Social Welfare, police officers, and NGO members. The goal is to establish a sustainable support system for victims.

In addition to these JICA activities, the Government of Japan has been providing grant aid via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support construction of shelters for trafficking victims.

HELPING VICTIMS RETURN TO SOCIETY

Upon their return to Myanmar, victims spend the first few days at a shelter. After being interviewed by social workers from the welfare and police departments, they return home to their families. Many staff members, however, lack adequate understanding of how to provide proper assistance for these people.

Kyoko Katsuki, an expert from JICA, helped establish a program to develop skilled trainers who could provide advice and instruction to those involved in rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. Among the many courses held as part of the program, one on victim counseling seemed to resonate



Counselors use role play to learn ways of interacting with trafficking victims (left). JICA expert Kyoko Katsuki speaks to participants in a counseling course.

the most with the participants. The course instructor stressed the importance of victims' deciding their own next steps and described the role of counselors as helping them make the best choices by assisting in identifying problems and providing information. "Until now I have only listened to what victims have to say," says a police officer who took part in the class. "From here on out I want to provide them with information that will help to ease their concerns."

Myanmar also has a need for reintegration programs that promote economic opportunities for trafficking victims. JICA is currently establishing an information center in the city of Yangon that will enable victims to find steady work and support themselves after returning home. Looking farther ahead, JICA will continue addressing human trafficking issues by strengthening cooperation with GMS countries.

Participants at a training course discuss the needs of victims and ways of providing support.

