

8. Kolkata Anti-Trafficking Project Pilot Phase

Starting date: October 2005
Implemented by: Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee DMSC
SANLAAP

In November 2003 *Terre des hommes* began with preparations to conduct a qualitative study on trafficked Nepalese girls and women in Mumbai and Kolkata, India. The study itself began on 7th June 2004 and has been completed on 14th January 2005.

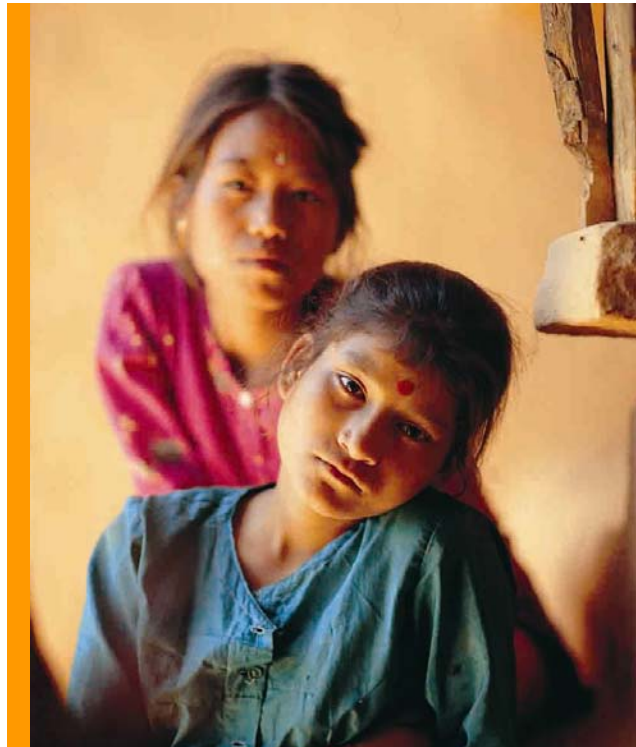
Underlying this study was the assumption that the use of trafficked and coerced persons, the use of children, and the use of enslaved or bonded labour for prostitution is an abuse of human rights and should be ended.

The purpose of the study was to provide information which will assist *Terre des hommes* (Lausanne, Switzerland), governments and other national and international organizations to design and implement activities which will:

- prevent the use of children, trafficked and coerced persons, and enslaved or bonded labourers in the prostitution industry
- withdraw from prostitution all children, enslaved labourers, bonded labourers, and those with an expressed intention to leave prostitution, with all respect for the rights of those adults who choose to conduct prostitution
- facilitate the social reintegration of children, enslaved labourers, bonded labourers, and those who wish to leave prostitution

It was *Terre des hommes*' commitment to begin immediately after the completion of the study with project activities based on the findings of the research.

The study used two strong, globally important, and imprecise words to designate the two alternative situations in which trafficked Nepalese girls and women spend their first three to eight years in the brothel: *slavery* and *debt bondage*. Girls or women who are placed against their will in a situation of forced labour, unremunerated and confined under penalty of severe punishment, are in *slavery*, according to the Slavery Convention of 1926. Girls or women who, or whose families, incur a debt and are



placed in a similar situation in order to repay the debt are in *debt bondage*, according to The Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, 1956, and the Government of India Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 (amended 1985). The overwhelming majority of Nepalese girls who enter brothel-based prostitution in Mumbai and Kolkata enter as trafficked persons, and enter into situations of either slavery or debt bondage.

Key findings of the study:

- Almost all Nepalese who conducted brothel-based prostitution in the study areas had been trafficked under the age of 18 and had entered into a situation of either *slavery* or *debt servitude* (according to international definitions).
- The majority of Nepalese are trafficked by Nepalese and sold to Nepalese brothel owners.
- Nepalese girls enter slavery or debt bondage at an average age of 14-16 years. They are totally confined within the brothel for an average of two years, after which they are allowed to leave the brothel only with guardians. They end their period of bondage at 18-22 years of age.
- The length of time spent in slavery or debt bondage ranges from two to 10 years, averaging three to five years.
- The profit to the brothel owner during this period of time ranges from 10 to 20 times that of the purchase price of the trafficked person.
- Demand on the destination side is two tiered:
 - Very high profits from the use of enslaved or bonded labourers create brothel owner demand for trafficked persons, both adults and children.
 - Client demand for girls who are young (15-20), and their demand for 'new girls', fuel brothel owner demand for girls under 18 and for new labourers.
- There is very low client demand for, and noted client resistance to, the use of pre-pubescent girls for prostitution.
- There is no direct client demand for persons in slavery or debt bondage situations. However, there is little awareness of and no resistance to the use of those persons.
- Very few Nepalese return to Nepal voluntarily after freedom from slavery or debt bondage, primarily due to stigma and discrimination from the family and community in Nepal and to lack of income-generation options.

The "Kolkata Anti-Trafficking Project" is implemented with at least two partner NGOs in Kolkata to reduce the trafficking and use of children for the purpose of debt servitude in Kolkata and West Bengal:

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (or 'Durbar' which in Bengali means un-stoppable or indomitable) <http://www.durbar.org/>

SANLAAP is an NGO in West Bengal, India, focussing on counter trafficking initiatives for the most vulnerable <http://www.sanlaapindia.org>

The project is therefore aimed at ending the slavery system (TSUKRI) in the brothels of Kolkata in order to stop the trafficking of girls and women for sexual exploitation, debt servitude and slavery like practices. The rationale behind is that if brothel owners are not allowed to make money from the use of slaves, they won't purchase them and traffickers won't traffic girls because they can't sell them. (Admittedly, traffickers can sell slaves elsewhere, but this project may be the first step to ending of the slavery system in pan-India.)

The core activity is not to end child prostitution but to end the TSUKRI system. Ending the TSUKRI system ends child prostitution and also ends slavery for adults. Thousands of girls and women presently in slavery must be given their freedom. Reasons for focusing on ending the TSUKRI system and not focusing on ending child prostitution are:

- Brothel owners' demand for indebted servants – not clients' demand for children or for Nepalese – maintains the Nepal-India trafficking industry. Even if there were no children in the sex industry in Mumbai or Kolkata, the high profits that brothel owners make from the exploitation of adult bonded labourers would maintain the trafficking industry.
- If the TSUKRI system is not directly and strongly addressed, and only 'child prostitution' is addressed, 16-17 year-old children will still be trafficked and sold as 'adults' by means of fake identification, etc. (this is common today, as the study has found). Adults will continue to be trafficked. Trafficking will not end. The project will fail.