Identifying women’s vulnerability to human trafficking in Myanmar

INTRODUCTION

Outflows of individuals trafficked from Myanmar

Myanmar has historically been a hot spot for human trafficking in Asia, as identified by the U.S. State Department’s Trafficking in Persons’ report. Due to a struggling economy and armed conflict, many Burmese are forced or tricked into slavery, primarily in Thailand. Because many people are trafficked while undergoing voluntary migration, various NGOs have focused on raising awareness on “safe migration.” Human trafficking is particularly challenging to map because of the opaque environment in which it operates— it is nearly impossible to identify where victims are from, or even where they are located. In order to combat human trafficking, it is important to identify areas of high vulnerability so that NGOs and government institutions can better allocate their resources and effort.

Since women make up a disproportionate amount of human trafficking victims, this project focuses on exploring the women’s vulnerability to human trafficking in Myanmar.

METHODOLOGY

In order to calculate vulnerability to human trafficking, this project leverages traditional human security indicators, aggregated with indicators for gender equality (see diagram to the right). The analysis was conducted at the township level to identify which ones have higher relative levels of vulnerability to human trafficking for women.

The human security component will be made up of four discrete indexes: information interconnectedness (measured by access to radios and phones), poverty, conflict, and health. Each index is made up of one or two variables, which were classified from 1 (lowest vulnerability) to 5 (most vulnerable) using Jenks Natural Breaks. These were averaged in order to produce each respective index score. Each human security index contributed 15% to the final vulnerability score. The gender index contains indicators of female literacy, education, and participation in government. These three variables are classified from 1 to 5 using Jenks Natural Breaks, and then averaged to produce the Gender Index. The Gender Index contributes 40% to the final score.

Vulnerability = Interconnectedness* 15% + Poverty* 15% + Conflict* 15% + Health* 15% + Gender Index * 40%

RESULTS OF VULNERABILITY ANALYSIS

Outflows of individuals trafficked from Myanmar

Relative vulnerability of women to human trafficking

Profile of the 10 Most Vulnerable Townships

A visual analysis suggest that areas in the Western and Eastern parts of the country, particularly along the Thai, Laotian, Chinese, and Bangladeshi borders, pose the highest vulnerability to human trafficking for women. After identifying the 10 townships with the highest levels of vulnerability, it was found that a total of 466,211 women live in these areas. By looking at a couple of select indicators used in the analysis, the majority of the townships have low levels of access to mobile phones, higher levels of female illiteracy, and tend to be located in Shan State. The analysis is limited by gaps in the data. This is troublesome because most of the townships without information available appear to be located in regions with relatively higher levels of vulnerability. The availability of data also determined the variables chosen to construct the various indexes. Lastly, it is important to consider that the indicators selected, and the weights attributed to them, are by no means standardized, but were rather selected using guidance from literature reviews. The findings from this study should be completed by further quantitative and qualitative analyses. Ideally, this information would be overlaid with existing anti-human trafficking efforts in order to identify under-served areas with high need.

CONCLUSIONS

INDEXES

Interconnectedness Index

Poverty Index

Conflict Index

Health Index

Gender Equality Index