

## **Some Reflections on the Repatriation of Trafficked Persons: Case of Myanmar and Thailand**

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### ***Introduction***

It is encouraging to note that despite continued international claims about trafficking being on the rise, analysis of responses to trafficking in the Mekong Sub-region in the past few years indicates that the interventions have become increasingly and noticeably advanced and responsive to the situation. In a number of significant ways, this reflects organizations working on the issue of trafficking as taking lessons learnt into serious consideration, a truly commendable exercise, leading onto a growing understanding of the problem of trafficking. As with other interventions in the trafficking chain, interventions in repatriation are marked by better responsiveness especially in terms of the human rights and gender concerns. Whereas initial interventions had very little concerns with the rights of the “victims<sup>3</sup>” of trafficking, later interventions in repatriation became more victim-centered and rights-based.

In this paper, we focus on *one* intervention in the whole cycle of trafficking interventions, namely the repatriation of trafficked persons. This paper traces the development process of interventions on repatriation from repatriation as being operationally undertaken as summary deportation of illegal migrants, regardless of their possible situation as victims of trafficking, to repatriation as a systematic process whereby victims of exploitation are systematically and voluntarily returned to their places of origin or homes. The return of the victim in the case of the latter can be described as a victim-centered and rights-based approach. While the number of trafficking victims who receive victim-centered care and assistance is perhaps only the tip of the trafficking iceberg, this represents a significant step forward in the action to combat trafficking.

The paper follows the evolution of the victim-centered approach to repatriation through different stages, as trafficking interventions grapple with the reality of trafficking from the early 90s to the present. Through the process of recounting experiences with the repatriation of the Myanmar victims of trafficking, the paper also makes an attempt to share some of the

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lessons learnt. In addition, the paper highlights the importance of collaboration among different players with different comparative advantages and the support they bring to the process.

### ***Information and terms***

Much of the information presented in this paper is based on experiences gained in working on the development of programmatic interventions in Myanmar and Thailand. Thailand has been identified as the sending, transiting and receiving country of trafficked persons. Within the Greater Mekong Sub-region, however, it is a major receiving country. Myanmar, on the other hand has been identified as country of origin sending a large bulk of migrants to Thailand due to various social, economic and political factors. In this view, looking at trafficking in Myanmar and Thailand and beyond is a fundamental entry point in an attempt to understand trafficking in the Mekong Sub-region.

Although trafficking occurs both internally and across national boundaries, the repatriation experience shared in this paper focuses on cross-border cases of trafficking. Also, despite recent findings that both men and women as well as boys and girls can be victims of trafficking, Thai laws and procedures do not currently cover the trafficking of men. Our experience has therefore been confined to handling cases of women and girls victims of trafficking.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper, we used the term “victims of trafficking” more often than “trafficked persons.” We note that “victims” and “survivors” are used with different connotations in milieu of human rights activities. “Survivors” have been used for those who are at the after stage of surviving the victimizing experience indicating that they have “survived” and are at the triumph of overcoming the life threatening experience, and “victims” to indicate the status of emotions, mind, health as well as psychological condition where a victimized person is currently coping with the victimization experience. In discussing repatriation, we witnessed most of them are “victims” in the sense that are in need of special assistance. However, it does not mean that they will not be “survivors.” The choice of the word “victim” is meant as not intended to deny the considerable capacity and prospect to heal from and overcome the traumatic experience that many of women and girls have within.

The following diagram highlights some of the main trafficking routes within the Greater Mekong Sub-region. It should be noted that trafficking is a dynamic phenomenon and new routes are appearing on a regular basis. Flows are complex and ever changing although always away from areas of less development towards relatively more prosperous regions and countries.

### ***Repatriation: Beyond simply returning the victim home***

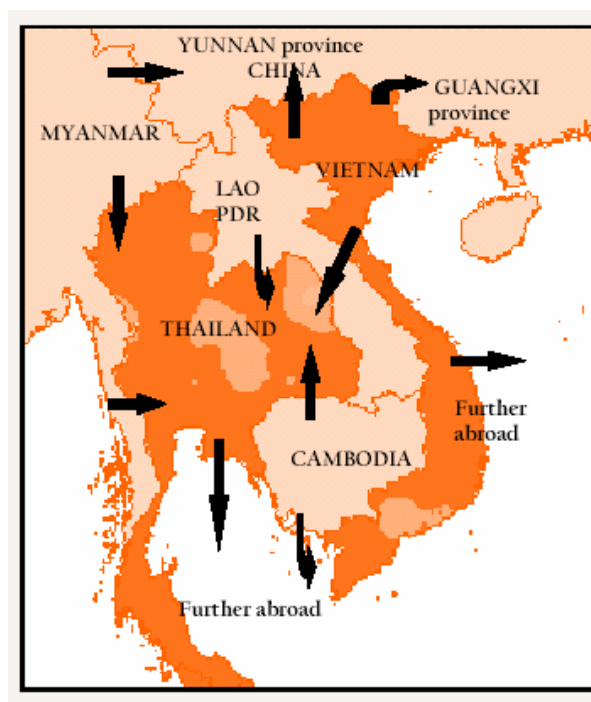
Repatriation is one of the most visible and tangible trafficking interventions because it allows one to put a human face to the process. The conventional wisdom on repatriation is that it is

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<sup>4</sup> In a briefing kit developed by UNIFEM and UNIAP (2001) it is noted that “a gendered perspective on trafficking achieves change by; acknowledging trafficking in both men and women; addressing the similarities and differences in the trafficking experience of women and men in relation to vulnerabilities, violations, and consequences; and addressing the differential impacts of policies on men and women.”

an intervention which occurs at the end of the trafficking chain. This understanding is not incorrect but it fails to capture the much deeper value that successful repatriation has for combating trafficking. Whether it is successful or not, repatriation simply does not mark the end of story. It rather marks a beginning: it is a beginning of new life for the victims of trafficking to start learning or unlearning and more importantly protecting themselves from conventional customs and patterns of life in various economic and social conditions. Being awaited them upon return, much of the home economic and social conditions may be the same as when they left or sometimes even worse as standing obstacles that would interfere with their reintegration process and reestablishment of new life. The risk of second and third time trafficking would be increased in such environment. By incorporating a series of awareness raising and training in a course of repatriation exercise, the repatriation can assist the trafficked victims to reestablish their lives within communities they consider their homes. Also, if handled appropriately, repatriation has the potential to reduce vulnerabilities of trafficking for not only the repatriated victims for second time trafficking but also for younger members of the community who may naively decide to follow the foot step of the victims' path.

### Main Trafficking Routes



UNIFEM and UNIAP *Trafficking in Persons A Gender and Rights Perspective*, 2001.  
N.B. Trafficking also takes place internally.

The UN Inter Agency Project's work on the repatriation issue, undertaken in collaboration with International Organization for Migration (IOM), Save the Children-UK (SC-UK) and the Department of Public Welfare (Thailand) as well as Thai NGOs (Centre for Protection of Children's Rights Foundation and Foundation for Women)<sup>5</sup> clearly confirmed the value of

<sup>5</sup> Among Thai NGOs and the Thai Government, an agreement was made in details for areas of responsibility and collaboration by an Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) signed by the implementing organizations: The

repatriation as beyond returning the trafficked person her home safely and voluntarily. In particular, activities undertaken prior to the trafficked persons' return to their homes as described below are crucial in the prevention of trafficking. Besides economic and political conditions to which victims return, social values and patterns of thinking by which victims are driven into are contributing factors for second and third time trafficking. This includes the environmental factors where illegal or legal border crossing for working abroad is considered a normal practice that is made easily available systematically and conventionally. Social values are created by a "legendary" story being told of a girl who builds a house for her family by bringing money from big city. Young members of community follow the footsteps of the older in order to fill in such social values or to simply increase cash income. The "pre-departure" activities are extremely important since the victims that are returning have the potential to be the strongest anti-trafficking advocates in the communities to which they return. Although we have used the term "victims" for reasons given (see fn. 3), many of those who have been victimized have proven to be strong survivors and are or can be empowered by their experience to become strong advocates of anti-trafficking initiatives.

### ***Trauma and victim assistance***

Another factor worth taking into consideration is the recognition that trafficking is a crime. Hence while trafficking itself is a comparatively new area of study, it is possible to draw lessons from the rich literature existing on victims of related crime types. Studies on crime victims show the importance of victim assistance and proper care. In addition direct and comprehensive information from the victims assist in better understanding of the crime and hence lead to a future prevention of the crime (Mawby and Walklate, 1994). This is particularly relevant for the victim of trafficking, the prosecution of which is heavily dependent on information obtained by witness.

Many of the trafficking victims, because of the abuse and violence they experience during trafficking, undergo Post Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD). PTSD are recognized medical conditions and are reactions that are immediate and long term, not only physical, but also psychological, sexual, and social requiring professional attention, sensitive care and assistance<sup>6</sup>. The type of support this entails has to be built into the repatriation process. Studies also indicate that very initial response in victim assistance is extremely important because it has significant impact in the later stages of recovery as well as the potential to empower and successfully (re)integrate victims back to societies (Allison and Wrightsman, 1993). The repatriation intervention the UNIAP undertook in collaboration with other actors show professional counseling, health care and support from peer victims and intervening staff have significant impact in empowering the victims of trafficking for their recovery and reintegration. If handled appropriately the victim's recovery process can be much eased. The chart below summarizes abuses and threats generally experienced by victims of trafficking.

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Prime Minister's Office (Office of the National Commission on Women's Affairs), The Royal Thai Police, The Department of Public Welfare, The NGO Committee on Coordination of Foreign Children and NGO Network on Trafficking.

<sup>6</sup> Examples of reactions of PTSD are shock, anger, denial, disbelief, guilt, negative self reflections and esteem, hostility, blame, loss of weight and appetite, feeling of helplessness, dependency, as well as distorted perceptions of life. (Allison and Wrightsman, 1993, Greensburg and Ruback, 1992, Mawby and Walklate, 1994)

<b>Recruited</b>	<b>Transported</b>	<b>Workplace/ Destination</b>
False information about work and working conditions	False passport/ID card	Wages lower than promised or Non-payment of wages
False promise of opportunities	Confiscation of personal documents	Confiscation of personal documents
Family pressure to earn money	Abuse of authority	Threat/Use of violence
Abuse of authority	Fear of arrest	Fear of arrest
Sale	Threat/Use of violence	Sexual harassment
Kidnapping	Sexual harassment	Confinement
Destination unknown	Rape	Debt bondage
	Resold to other agents	Unfamiliar environment
	Destination unknown	Language problem
	Language problem	No social support network
		Highly exploitative working conditions (long hours/ dangerous and unhealthy)

N.B Deception, coercion and threat of force may occur at any of these points. MNCWA and UNIAP “Handbook on Trafficking in Person: Myanmar Initiatives” Annex 2-5 (b)

### *Stateless victims*

Repatriation is never easy, whether it be repatriation of refugees, of displaced or trafficked persons. This is especially so at the beginning when supporting systems and structures necessary to carry this out is not yet in place.

Even as countries moved to a shared understanding of what trafficking was, the layers of negotiations, formalities, standard protocols involved in establishing a formal mechanism for repatriation, meant “*negotiating with governments for the return and reintegration of trafficking victims has been a painstakingly slow process in many instances*” (Caouette 2001). One stumbling block has concerned legal documentation. Often, victims of trafficking travel without travel documents, and there have been cases where some people have been left for months in detention centers or in shelters before being identified because of lack of proper identification papers. The difficulty for identification is higher if the person without papers is of small minority groups and does not speak the major or the national/official language of the country of origin.

Lack of legal status is also a causal factor in trafficking. As Feingold<sup>7</sup> notes, “for hill tribe girls in Thailand, lack of citizen is the single risk factor for trafficking or exploitation.” These children or young people due to their vulnerable status are at a greater risk of

<sup>7</sup> Feingold, David. Personal communication with one of the authors. For further information on citizenship and its link to vulnerability, see UNIAP news letter, Step by Step, Issue 5, Fourth Quarter, 2001, "Searching for Identity" by Yindee Lettcharoenchok.

trafficking and when they are trafficked and found or rescued by the authorities, it is difficult to make proper identification because of lack of proper registration. Once identified, due to lack of proper mechanism for safe and orderly repatriation, they are simply sent back to their homes of origin or deported. Under these circumstances, health and psychological care of victims of trafficking cannot be addressed.

In general, all anti-trafficking initiatives whether they are prevention, protection or repatriation go beyond a single country's jurisdiction and must be addressed either bilaterally or multilaterally. It is significantly crucial to form and enhance the regional, bi and multilateral collaboration to cope with statelessness and transnational nature of trafficking.

### *International awareness and UN Trafficking protocol*

In the early days of the international response to trafficking, actions such as, arrest, detention, and deportation were the only options available to get the trafficked persons out of the exploitative situation. It may appear odd to be using the terms “arrest”, “detain” or “deport” a “trafficked person” but this was exactly how trafficking victims were handled in the early days when the trafficking in persons first became an international issue.

That the most common venue taken by authorities as being “arrest”, “detention”, and “deportation”, show how the issue of trafficking was equated with illegal migration and or illegal engagement in the workforce. This status of illegality is based on illegal entry to host or receiving country as well as illegal departure from home country. Engagement in an activity identified as illegal, as in the case of sex work in some countries, lack of proper documents such as work permits, or forged documents were and are often used as the sole determining factor by which arrests, detentions and deportations are made. Reasons behind such factors have often been ignored. Whether the person's engagement in “illicit work” or “illegal migration” was due to coercion or deception are often not taken into consideration.

While the identification of trafficking in persons as a global issue needing immediate attention was unanimous, the understanding of what constituted trafficking was far from being so.<sup>8</sup> There was clearly a mismatch between the urgent need to address the issue on the one hand and on the other the conceptual clarity that is essential to address it effectively. The mismatch was further exacerbated by different mandates and approaches in intervention of trafficking by various implementing agencies. From development perspective, trafficking can be approached by many angles. To name a few, it presents issues of child labor, drugs, economic disparity, gender, HIV/AIDS, migration, transnational crime and more. In early days, various organizations whether it was UN, government or NGO were addressing different approach and emphasis in trafficking as if in the classic story of “three blind men and the elephant<sup>9</sup>” touching different parts of an elephant and describing it as three different animals.

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<sup>8</sup> Boonmongkong et al (2003) reported that in cases of sex work, many trafficking victims move along the continuum, from initially experiencing an extreme form of trafficking to eventually voluntarily migrating to perform sex work. The same thing can be said for other types of trafficking having difficulties of identifying and determining cases of trafficking that many trafficking cases happen more in continuum, going from extremely clear cases on exploitation and deception on one end to more vague and complex situation.

<sup>9</sup> “The Blind Men and the Elephant” author unknown and source unknown.

The UNIAP in its interventions of trafficking experienced that trafficking represents multiple developmental issues; a single organization and approach cannot possibly fight trafficking alone. It is essential for interventions to be fine tuned and orchestrated in a comprehensive manner by holistic and developmental approach. This is also to remind ourselves that trafficking happens to a person who has only one body that cannot be simply intersected by multiple angles.

With the benefit of hind-sight, it is easy to understand how the early days of “repatriation” reflected many actors’ attempt to deal with a situation about which few understood. This lack of understanding about the issue was reflected across the board, not only in repatriation but in all other areas of interventions: prevention, prosecution, protection, repatriation or rehabilitation. The lack of subtlety in which repatriation has been handled in the early 90s often represented incomplete understanding of the issue human trafficking rather than a deliberate attempt to further violate the human rights of trafficked victims.

As well as constraints on the understanding of the issue, official repatriation for victims of trafficking was rarely possible until recently. As a comparatively recent issue, in terms of the awareness of the global community, and which many complexities involved, few mechanisms for official repatriation of trafficked victims were in place. Among steps needed to establish an official channel for repatriation, a shared understanding of the issue was essential. However, it was not until December 2000 that a common understanding was established with the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Even then, it was only in July of 2003 that the Convention on the Transnational Organized Crime came into force following the 40<sup>th</sup> ratification.

The chart below summarizes the status of international instruments related to trafficking among the Mekong Sub-region countries.

International Instruments	Mekong Sub-region countries					
	Cambodia	China	Lao PDR	Myanmar	Thailand	Viet Nam
Convention on the Elimination for all forms of Discrimination Against Women	✓ Signed 1980 ✓ Acceded 1992	✓ Signed 1980 ✓ Ratified 1980	✓ Signed 1980 ✓ Ratified 1981	✓ Acceded 1997	✓ Acceded 1985	✓ Signed 1980 ✓ Ratified 1982
Convention on the Rights of the Child	✓ Acceded 1992	✓ Signed 1990 ✓ Ratified 1992	✓ Acceded 1991	✓ Acceded 1991	✓ Acceded 1992	✓ Signed 1990 ✓ Ratified 1990
Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime	In force after the 40 <sup>th</sup> ratification. Signatories: 147 Signatories of Mekong Sub-region countries: Cambodia, China, Thailand and Viet Nam					

MNCWA and UNIAP “Handbook on Trafficking in Person: Myanmar Initiatives”, International Instruments, Annex 6-5  
Information updated by the authors as of September 2003 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and

### ***NGO and Government's approaches to combat trafficking in Thailand***

Many new initiatives have taken place and one worthy advance was the initiative taken by Thailand. Since the mid 90s, Thailand had undergone adoption and amendment of laws related to trafficking.<sup>10</sup> Adjustment and restructuring of sequential laws and regulations were made in series in the late 90s. In 1997 Thailand passed “the Act on the Prevention and Suppression of the Trafficking in Women and Children.”<sup>11</sup> The law sanctions against the trafficking of these vulnerable groups within the country and externally. It introduced the crime of conspiracy in relation to trafficking. Law enforcers are only allowed to detain the victims for up to 24 hours and would need to notify the director general of the police force. According to the trafficking law, the victims may be housed in government or other shelters, including those of NGOs. Complaints from the victims concerning the crimes must be lodged immediately with the courts. (Muntarbhorn, 2000) The related amendment was made in 1999 to develop and strengthen the witness protection mechanism in the criminal procedure to protect victims of trafficking during the process of investigation and testimony.<sup>12</sup>

Thailand not only being a major receiving country, but also plays a leading role in combating trafficking among the Mekong Sub-region countries. The initiatives were taken by the Thai government for development of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Thai government and Thai NGOs<sup>13</sup> and for the development of bilateral MOUs that were first signed by Thailand and Cambodia. The MOU with Cambodia are being currently processed on both sides at each level of administrations in order to take into effect. The Government of Thailand's strategies under this category included: follow-up, monitoring, providing counseling services, providing full scale support services such as shelters, educational and vocational training, job placement, and capital acquisition for women and children who decide to leave prostitution so that they are prepared to lead a normal life.

In the face of constraints to develop prompt and effective official repatriation arrangements, the onus has often fallen on NGOs to find ways to respond to the immediate needs of the situation. In terms of Thailand and Myanmar, at the initial stage, the form of repatriation that took place was simply NGO assisted returns. Trafficking victims rescued by NGOs were given assistance of transportation and support to cross borders to go back to home country.

This NGO-led “repatriation” allowed victims to be returned home safely and quickly. Both these factors were important. Many of the “rescued” victims of trafficking feared being put in shelters for a long time and safety was of course the concern for all involved in repatriating these trafficked victims. The informal returns by NGOs were also carried out in a manner that brought a “human touch” to the whole process. This initiative by the NGOs brought an alternative to the dumping or the deportation of trafficked persons and was in many ways a breakthrough for the victims of trafficking. One drawback, however was that the most of the

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<sup>10</sup> “Prostitution Prevention and Suppression Act B.E. 2539 (1996)”, “Plan of Action to Prevent, Protect, Prosecute and Reintegrate (1997-2006)”, and “Criminal Procedure Amendment Act (No. 20) B.E. 2542 (1999)”

<sup>11</sup> “Measures in Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking Women and Children Act B.E. 2540 (1997)”

<sup>12</sup> “Criminal Procedure Amendment Act (No. 20) B.E. 2542 (1999)”

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, fn 5



NGOs involved in repatriation were only operational on one side of the border. As a result, they were not able to undertake monitoring, follow-ups or provide support needed by the victims following their return to the places of origin.

### ***The Changing Environment and the Role of the UN***

While the initial repatriation burden fell predominantly on NGOs, a number of Government initiatives served to provide an enabling environment for the work of NGOs. As mentioned earlier, one significant advance was the initiative taken by Thailand which in 1997 passed the Act on the Prevention and Suppression of the Trafficking in Women and Children<sup>14</sup> fundamentally changed the way victims of trafficking were treated. It changed their status of victims from being viewed as criminals (under various labor and immigration laws) to victims in need of protection. It clearly paved the way for victim support with temporary shelters and other types of support. The law mandates victims of trafficking to be placed under custody of Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (now handled by the new Ministry of Social Development and Human Security) and given health check ups<sup>15</sup> and counseling for emotional well being as well as vocational skills development training as appropriate. The Kred Trakarn Protection and Occupational Development Center, was designated facility, provides such assistance for foreign victims of trafficking.

The experiences by the NGOs and other civil organizations in the initial stages of repatriation were in many ways an impetus to government's moves for a more victim-friendly approach to trafficking in the country of destination. NGOs paved a key role in the development of key MOUs and agreement in Thailand: between various ministries in the government; between Government and NGOs; and between NGOs themselves.

The active role played by the NGO community in the country destination was a necessary but not sufficient to address the transnational nature of the problem. At a time when bilateral mechanisms for repatriation were yet to be negotiated, and with Thai shelters becoming full with rescued victims, ways to had to be devised to enable the victims to be repatriated in a way that still not fully formal, was nonetheless systematic. The UN Inter Agency Project bringing together six countries, thirteen UN agencies and a range of local and international NGOs became a catalyst for the establishment of such a system. With the need to operate on both sides of the border, and be acceptable and trusted by all stakeholders, the UN provided the natural body to provide such support.

While the International Organization (IOM), perhaps the world's most experienced organization on repatriation, had the technical expertise to carry this out, it was not operational in Myanmar. The flexibility provided by the UNIAP's mandate also conducive to the situation. Project was able to establish partnerships with IOM, SC-UK and respective governments at various levels and initiated the first systematic semi-formal repatriation system for victims of trafficking from Myanmar.

### ***The Process***

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, fn 8.

<sup>15</sup> Often victims of trafficking are identified with a wide range of health issues; malaria, diarrhea, tuberculosis, reproductive health issues, HIV/AIDS and STDs (Caouette 2001).

The initial process began with a training for the field workers of partner organizations on skills needed to undertake systematic repatriation. This included training on family tracing, assessments including interviewing skills, reunification, and follow-ups among others. This process evolved into a series of steps as undertaken in practice and according to guidelines given by IOM. Many of the steps and activities involved in repatriation are undertaken simultaneously in both the country of origin and the country of destination by multiple players.

Briefly put, the process of repatriation begins when trafficked persons are identified by NGOs, the police or local public welfare authority. When identified as victims of trafficking the new enacted law in Thailand requires them to be brought to a shelter under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security.

The chart below gives a clear indication of the steps involved in the repatriation process. The actual repatriation however, is not as always straight forward or clear cut as implied by the chart. Many times, the victims of trafficking are not able to give the right information about their homes or even about their families. Some are unaware of their dates of birth. In many remote rural places people continue to record birth according to certain outstanding features such as the year of the flood or the year of the great fire or the year when the village initiated an “X” number of novices etc. Some do not know their address, except that “I know... its near a banyan tree, next to a tea shop.” Despite the strong and sometimes almost intuitive efforts of the NGO field workers, this kind of information is not surprisingly not insufficient to undertake family tracing in an effective manner. This is not to mention the information is passed across a few national and ethnic languages by translation. In one case of family tracing for example, the field worker could not locate the home of the returning person since the tree she had referred to had been cut and there were no tea shops near any of the banyan trees found in the village.

Once family has been found, an assessment is undertaken. Should family assessments be negative due to a number of factors such as lack of viable socio-economic means or where the families to be returned to are strongly dysfunctional and considered non-conducive to successful reintegration then other options need to be developed and explored. Should the results of family assessment be positive then such logistics as preparing travel documents, synchronizing the time for repatriation and location of border crossing, travel to the border from the shelter, and meeting the returnee in the country of origin need to be coordinated with all parties involved in both countries. The reunification with the families however, is not the end of the process. Follow-up visits to monitor the situation of the “re” integration<sup>16</sup> process continues for some time depending on how well the process is processing.

Follow-up visits are multi-purpose. While they provide a built-in mechanism for monitoring the success of the reintegration process, they are also an important tool to provide continued support to the victim. As some studies have indicated, “home” is not necessarily a safe place for returnees despite positive family assessment for a number of reasons.

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<sup>16</sup> Here, “re” is used in quotes to indicated voices of concern regarding the process by some who say that experience of trafficking is such that very few victims can claim to be “reintegrated” since the lives they come back to can never “re” capture the lives they left.

*The villagers' attitudes towards me have changed. It's as if they have bore a grudge against me. When I first returned, the villagers all went to see me, but after a few days the gossip really started to spread. They said things like 'Give us money and we'd like to go too.' Or 'your mother and father can't afford to raise you so you go to abroad mix with men.' They're bad to me and say without reason that I sold my body while abroad.*

*A 19 year old Shan female returnee from Thailand (Caouette 2001)*

In the past, some returnees have been noted to have been placed in situations conducive to second or third time trafficking. Whereas most traffickers, i.e., exploiters are found at the destination, a significant number of traffickers continue to be members of the community who are either direct traffickers or are complicit to it. Hence, the importance of follow-up activities in the repatriation process.

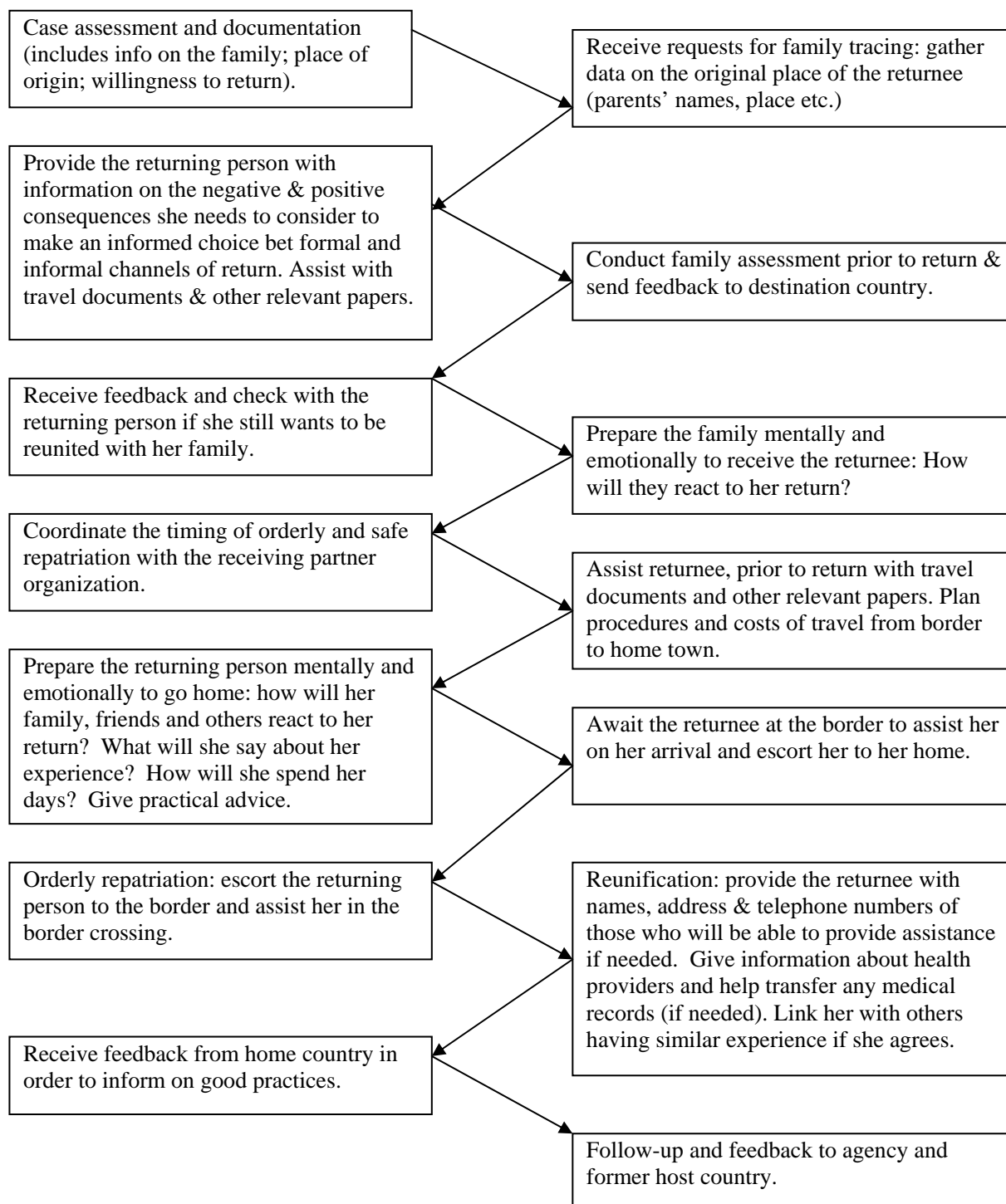
### ***Conclusion***

Although not comprehensive, this paper has presented an example of the evolution of victim-centered repatriation processes in the Greater Mekong Sub-region, focusing on Thailand and Myanmar. This is presented as resulting from a better conceptual understanding of trafficking. Measures undertaken in the initial stages showed gaps between the urgency to address the need of trafficked persons on the one hand and lack of conceptual clarity on the other, resulted in some actions which are now understood to potentially “revictimizes” the victims of trafficking. The paper has also touched upon the intrinsic value of repatriation as a possible tool for the reduction of various vulnerabilities to trafficking. In short, it encourages those actors involved in repatriation to look beyond repatriation to prevention. Experience from the repatriation between Myanmar and Thailand also highlighted a number of intricacies involved in the different stages of the repatriation process. The paper brings forth the importance of a partnership approach to repatriation and indirectly advocates for this approach in combating human trafficking in the region and elsewhere in the world.

More than two hundred women and children were repatriated to Myanmar by the assistance provided by UNIAP in collaboration with other actors. Although the number is not large and far too few to even represent the tip of the trafficking iceberg, within this number of repatriated women and children, so far no case of second and third time trafficking has been reported. There is no guarantee, however, for second and third time trafficking besides there is fundamental freedom of mobility. As it intrinsically relates to multiple social, political and economic issues, combating trafficking is in a long enduring search for ways of operating effective actions. Whereas repatriation does not mark the end of story but it rather marks the beginning, repatriation exercise cannot eradicate or fight trafficking alone. It takes all actors of governments, NGOs, communities and UN agencies at regional and local levels of collaboration to combat trafficking.

## Destination

## Source



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