Human trafficking, education and migration at NGOs in Cambodia and Thailand

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Human trafficking, education and migration at NGOs in Cambodia and Thailand
• Collaborative research on NGOs between Liberty Asia and myself in Southeast Asia.
  – Comparative research with partner NGOs with education components to their work on human trafficking and related social issues
• Conducted prior research on two Thai NGOs (DEPDC and CPDC) who use education as a prevention strategy and protection strategy for trafficking survivors and at-risk youth
Easel School
Poipet, Cambodia
Poipet, a popular border crossing

- Poipet is known for being a border crossing point for expats living in Thailand needing to renew their visa, and for casinos that attract large numbers of Thai and Chinese tourists each year.
- Special economic zone near border allowing Thais to cross and gamble. Khmer people are not allowed in casinos, except to work. Outside this zone, Poipet is very different.
Poipet is also known for large numbers of child beggars, child laborers and migrant workers from the interior of Cambodia looking to cross into Thailand.
Since the May 2014 Thai Junta (coup) over 200,000 Cambodian migrants have been deported from Thailand and dropped in Poipet.

Despite massive deportations, many migrant day laborers cross each day to work in Thai rice fields.
Outside the special economic zone
Many local Khmer people around Poipet live in slums

• Many are squatters (living on someone’s land without permission)
  – Often removed by authorities or land owners without notice.
  – Although many access electricity, power lines are often illegally spliced and hard-wired into shacks.
  – Water quality in these slums is poor, and access to healthcare is often only through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as World Vision and Save the Children.
Schools in Cambodia

• Government schools are free in Cambodia but students must provide uniforms and pay for books.

• Teachers may charge students fees in school or for tutoring in the evenings or on weekends
  – Some teachers withhold curriculum so that students must attend tutoring.

• Poorest families cannot afford incidental fees, much less tutoring and likely cannot complete secondary school.
Government Schools
Rural Cambodia

• The further from urban centers like Poipet, the fewer resources and opportunities.

• Many parents living near the border (5-10 km) walk daily to Thailand to work as day laborers in rice fields. Sometimes, they are paid less than farm owners promised, or even not paid at all.

• Parents may also move to Thailand without documentation and leave children with family or friends for extended periods of time.
• Poor Nutrition
  • Children often eat rice or rice porridge
  • occasionally supplemented with fish sauce or with salt
These children sleep on floor mats in one space together
Sokleng ‘Leng’ In

• Leng works as a social worker with American Christian NGO XP Missions. Based on surveys he conducted with the families and children in a rural area near the border, he decided to open Easel school and offer free English and Computer Skills tutoring to local children.
Leng

• Decided to use his salary from XP Missions to start the EASEL School after seeing the issues in the villages.
• In addition to Leng, Easel school currently has a part-time volunteer English and Computer teacher.
The building Leng first rented had 2 rooms for computers (laptops) covered by plastic because the roof leaks when it rains.
Since June 2014, Leng decided that he needed a building that didn’t leak and moved EASEL to a new building, as well as began enrolling students in the English and Computer skills courses (as well as what they call Life Skills). He enlisted some friends to help build tables/school desks out of scrap wood he found.
Without any outside donors or funding, Leng has officially established Easel school with the Cambodian government as an NGO and has had positive response from the community.
Due to overwhelming interest from parents with small children in the area, EASEL is having the secondary students teach the small children when the volunteer teachers cannot come to EASEL, especially during rainy season.
Leng travels to the village to teach everyday by motorcycle. During the rainy season, the muddy roads can be a challenge.
Children bicycle to study with EASEL School from various hamlets and villages in the area. It is a challenge for many to get to EASEL School, much less government school located 10 KM away.
The secondary students also ride their bicycles 5-10 km to local slums to do Sunday school with local kids who cannot reach Easel School. They teach the children reading/writing basics, and feed them lunch.
Major issues for EASEL

- Funding
- Access for village children
- Staff
- Support/networking
- Children pressured to work
- Migration of family members
Northern Thailand

• Baan Nana Childlife Center
Baan Nana Childlife Center

• Located near the border in Mae Sai, Chiang Rai Province
• Focused on serving street children, abandoned children, drug addict children
• Many of the school age students are placed in local schools
• Younger students get some academic basics through volunteer teachers on-site
Baan Nana grows rice

Uses land to grow rice and supplements money from donors with money from rice sales
Building used to provide education to younger students by volunteer teachers
Some of the school-age children are placed in 7 different local government schools.

- Local school officials limit the number of undocumented students
- Charge additional fees for undocumented students
- Discrimination/bullying from students and teachers
  - Many students are from Burma/Myanmar and Laos.
  - Some older children/teenagers do not go to school, and live and work at the shelter all day.
Housing for 60-80 children
Received a grant for solar panel system used mostly to power water wells and water towers
Major issues for Baan Nana

• Like most NGOs, funding is an issue.
• Many in the community know Baan Nana, often unaccompanied youth are dropped off at their gate
• Proximity to the border
  – Language issues with children
• Street children issues
  – Glue or Yaba (meth) addiction
  – Children struggle with structure
Ongoing comparative work on NGOs in Thailand and Cambodia

• Issues arising
  – Barriers to education for poor
    • Uniform/book fees
    • Government school corruption
  – Barriers to education for undocumented migrants
    • Government school corruption
Issues Arising

– Migrant workers and day laborers in border region crossing to Thailand for work
  • Language issues,
  • citizenship issues,
  • work conditions,
  • government corruption

– Desire to learn Thai and English
  • Language as access to opportunity
    – Growth of foreign companies in Cambodia
    – Foreign tourists
    – English in service industry
Issues Arising

– Unsupervised children or street children
  • Beggar groups/gangs
    – Special needs children targeted
    – Impoverished villagers ‘rent’ infants to beggars
      » Drugging children

– Opportunistic traffickers- ‘middle men’
  • Children of migrant laborers left in care of distant relatives or friends
  • Some think of children in terms of economic benefit
  • Older children in care of younger children
Issues Arising

• Political dynamics
  – 2014 Thai Junta
    • Over 200,000 Cambodian migrants deported at Poipet border crossing this year.
    • Thai government focus on human trafficking due to international political pressure.

• Environmental Issues
  – Flooding in Thailand impacting immigration
What can you do?

• Connect EASEL and BAAN NANA to donors, local charities and organizations, student clubs.
• Donate
  – See me after presentation for details
• Raise awareness for these organizations on social media
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