

Theme: From Sex Slave to Empowered Girl

*“It is difficult to think of a crime more hideous and shocking than human trafficking. Yet it is one of the fastest growing and lucrative crimes. And an estimated 80 percent of those trafficked are used and abused as sexual slaves.*

*This human rights violation is driven by the demand for sexual services and the profit they generate; the commodification of human beings as sexual objects, and the poverty, gender inequalities and subordinate position of women and girls that provide fertile ground for human trafficking.”*

**UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet at the UN General Assembly Interactive Dialogue, “Fighting Human Trafficking: Partnership and Innovation to End Violence against Women and Children,” 3 April 2012.**

UN Millennium Development Goals

Goals that are addressed by  
Transitions Global in Cambodia



**Goal 1**  
**Key Target: Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people**

Poverty is a key factor in sex trafficking, and poverty continues to be a significant factor in Cambodia. Progress has been slow. Traffickers can take advantage of girls, particularly by promising good jobs. It is also easier to buy girls from their families.



**Goal 3**  
**Key Targets:**

- **Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2004, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.**

Girls are at near parity with boys in primary education, but lag somewhat in secondary, and especially tertiary education.

The **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** are eight international development goals that all 193 United Nations member states have agreed to achieve by the year 2015. The goals are:

1. Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieving universal primary education,
3. Promoting gender equality and empowering women
4. Reducing child mortality rates,
5. Improving maternal health,
6. Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases,
7. Ensuring environmental sustainability, and
8. Developing a global partnership for development.

Each of the eight goals has specific stated targets and dates for achieving those targets.

- **Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector**  
Cambodia: Women represent 43.5% on the non-agricultural sector, but are clustered in low-wage jobs.
- **Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament**  
Cambodia: Women represent 21.1% of the national parliament.

### Sex Trafficking: Meeting Growing Demand

Sex trafficking--coercing of women and girls (and some boys) into sexual slavery for the financial benefit of the traffickers—has always been in the world. But now, both the demand for services and the number of human beings held in bondage are skyrocketing. To the traffickers, it is a lucrative financial transaction. To the victims, it is living hell.

#### **Supply:**

Traffickers use a variety of techniques to acquire their victims, from abducting them, buying them from family members or an intermediary, or deceiving them into thinking they will have a legitimate job. Using the latter, they especially prey on the vulnerability of women and girls in poverty, of which there is no shortage in the developing world.



Once the victim has been “acquired”, traffickers than use a variety of techniques to instill fear in them and keep them captive. Some traffickers keep their victims physically locked away. However, more frequently, traffickers use less obvious techniques including:

- Debt bondage – the victim is forced to work off her “debt” to the traffickers
- Isolation from the public – limiting contact with outsiders and making sure that any contact is monitored or superficial in nature
- Confiscation of passports, visas and/or identification documents
- Use or threat of violence toward victims and/or families of victims
- The threat of shaming victims by exposing circumstances to family
- Telling victims they will be imprisoned or deported for immigration violations if they contact authorities
- Control of the victims’ money, e.g., holding their money for “safe-keeping”
- Use of drugs to keep them compliant and dependent
- Physical and psychological abuse

**Demand:**

In many cultures, it is common practice for men to seek sexual experiences outside marriage, including patronizing prostitutes. Many women have turned to prostitution in order to feed themselves and their children. Although disturbing as that necessity may be, at least there is some element of self-determination. Sexual slavery is in another category altogether, because there is no element self-determination.

Many factors contribute to the explosion of sex trafficking, including mobility of populations, growing demand, continuing lack of education for girls, cultural practices that severely limit the power of women and girls to make decisions about their own lives and bodies, and poverty. One especially troubling development is a growing gender imbalance, especially in China and India, due to a pronounced preference for boys over girls. Sex-selective abortion and infanticide have led to highly skewed demographics. It is estimated that in the age cohort of 15-34, by 2020, China will have an excess male population of 30 to 50 million, and India by 30 to 35 million. With so many young men without the opportunity to marry and have a normal family life, the demand for sexual services is growing rapidly. China's demand is already being met in part by women and girls trafficked within country and from other Asian countries.

The ready availability of sex, especially with underage girls, in developing countries is an attraction for sex tourism from the developed world. Child sex tourism involves men from countries all over the world. It is illegal for a U.S. citizen to travel abroad to have sex with children under the age of 16, and the penalty can be steep—up to 30 years in prison.

Many men may choose to buy the services of young girls out of a mistaken belief that they are less likely to carry sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). In fact, quite the opposite is true: Young girls have tender tissues that are easily lacerated, making young girls more vulnerable to STDs of all kinds—including HIV/AIDS.

Particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa—but also parts of south and southern Asia, there is a commonly held belief that sex with a virgin will cure AIDS. This often means sex with very young girls. Of course this puts the girls at risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS. Traffickers and brothels all over the developing world charge high prices for sex with a virgin, making young girls all that more attractive and lucrative. More importantly, it requires a constant supply of new girls to meet demand.

*“The sale of virgin girls continues to be a serious problem in Cambodia, with foreign (mostly Asian) and Cambodian men paying up to \$4,000 to have sex with virgins. A significant number of Asian and other foreign men travel to Cambodia to engage in child sex tourism.”*

**Trafficking in Persons Report**, 10th ed.  
U.S. Dept. of State, June 2010. P. 101

According to UNICEF, as many as two million children are subjected to prostitution in the global commercial sex trade.

In the final analysis, this “commodification of human beings as sexual objects”, as Michelle Bachelet states, means that girls and women who are held hostage in the sex trade are *things*, to be used when they have monetary value, and discarded when they don’t.

Note: It is only fair to note that a number of traffickers and brothel owners are women—some of whom were originally trafficked themselves. The sex trade is truly dehumanizing.

*“Police and judicial officials continue to be both directly and indirectly involved in trafficking. One source reported that some large entertainment establishments involved in sex trafficking were connected to officials. Some local police and government officials extorted money or accepted bribes from brothel owners, sometimes on a daily basis, in order to allow the brothels to continue operating. Police tip-offs of impending anti-trafficking brothel raids continued to cause interference into investigations and planned rescues led by NGOs.”*

*“Country Narrative – Cambodia”,  
**Trafficking in Persons  
Report 2011**, Office To  
Monitor and Combat Trafficking  
in Persons, U.S. Department of  
State.*

**Context:**

In developing countries, women’s status is considerably lower than that of men. Women have lower rates of education, and higher levels of illiteracy. Their participation in the formal economy is much lower than that of men, and they are generally clustered in low-wage and volatile sectors. The lower the level of education of a mother, the less likely it will be that daughters are educated—the generational effect of poverty and illiteracy.

Violence against females is endemic throughout the world. In developing countries, although there may be laws that criminalize physical and sexual violence against women, those laws are seldom enforced. Abuse of women and girls is largely done with impunity.

Police are notoriously corrupt, and sex traffickers can easily bribe their way out of prosecution. Brothels and traffickers may offer “free services” to police, or regularly pay them off. There are countless reports of girls who seek refuge and justice from the police, who are then re-victimized by police officers before being returned to their captors.

Virginity is highly prized, and a girl who is not a virgin may be unmarriageable, and rejected by her family, so those who have been trafficked are deeply ashamed, which makes it less likely that they can return to their families if they escape or are rescued. Without job skills, and no place to go, many resign themselves to their fate. Blaming

the victim is a standard cultural response. Girls are also taught to be subservient to men, making it easier for traffickers to dupe and control them.

The key to significant change is to empower women. This means education, well-paying jobs, and a significant presence in the governing of villages, districts, states, and countries. When women are educated, they will ensure that their daughters are educated. Education, and the subsequent well-paying jobs for which girls will be qualified, is the critical factor.

*“Modern slavery—be it bonded labor, involuntary servitude or sexual slavery—is a crime and cannot be tolerated in any culture, community or country ... [It] is an affront to our values and our commitment to human rights.”*

Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State

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## Discussion Questions

1. Are there aspects of sex trafficking that you had not previously considered? What surprised you, and has it changed how you think about the issue?
2. Most people have strong emotional reactions to learning the facts about sex trafficking. How can we channel that reaction into effective action in the developing world? In the United States?
3. Who in our own government needs to be educated about sex trafficking to ensure that it factors into discussions with the leaders of developing countries? How do we ensure that our leaders know that combating sex trafficking is a high priority for us? What leverage does the U.S. have in other societies?

## Source Materials

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- **Current Status of Cambodian Millennium Development Goals (CMDG) 2011,** Pagnathun THENG, Ministry of Planning, October 2011. Cambodia MDG Report 2011.pdf