



MUKTI Baseline Report

(Summary)

FXB India Suraksha

D-60, Second Floor, Kalkaji, New Delhi 110019, India

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FXB India Suraksha provides development assistance to children and women from marginalized communities in rural and urban India to reduce their vulnerabilities in respect of poverty, health, education, and security.

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Acknowledgements

Research Team:

Ms Mamta Borgoyary, Chief Executive Officer, FXB India Suraksha
Ms. Swati Chakraborty, Head Monitoring, Evaluation and Research, FXB India Suraksha
Mr. Satya Prakash, Program Manager, FXB India Suraksha
Mr Dinesh Singh, Programme Officer-North East Region, FXB India Suraksha
Ms. Daniela Pollmann, Research Coordinator, FXB India Suraksha
Mr. Khoinaijam Sunil Meitei, Field Coordinator Imphal, FXB India Suraksha
Mr. A Wungreiso Shangh, Field Coordinator Ukhrul, FXB India Suraksha
Ms. Chansophy Angkang Social Worker, FXB India Suraksha
Mr. Apam Horam Social Worker, FXB India Suraksha
Ms. Ngalangam Kasom, Social Worker, FXB India Suraksha

Mr. Ashong

Mr. Ys Fame

Mr. Khareingam S

Mr. Makarmi Shaiza

Mr. Kasomwo Ngathingmi

Mr. H Ngathingshang A Shimray

Mr. Reizat Shithungtan

Mr. Vareiyu Chiphang

ECPAT Luxembourg:

Mr. Thomas Kauffmann, Executive Director
Mr. Ashish Sinha, Country Representative – Nepal
Ms. Amrita Poudyal, Program Manager
Ms. Neeva Shrestha Pradhan, Administrative and Finance Manager

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Human trafficking, the trade in humans and one of the most extreme violations of human rights, is thought to be one of the fastest growing and most profitable transnational crimes in the twenty-first century. Human trafficking, both internal and across borders, is a serious problem in India, much like many other parts of the world. According to the US Department of State's latest report on human trafficking, an estimated 90% of India's trafficking problem is internal and predominantly for the purposes of bonded labour and commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) of women and increasingly children¹. Other forms of exploitation include, but are not limited to, forced marriages, sex slavery, organ trade, domestic servitude and forced begging.

In October 2015, **FXB India Suraksha (FXBIS)**² in cooperation with ECPAT Luxembourg³ launched the large-scale human trafficking intervention programme **MUKTI** in Manipur to reduce the vulnerabilities of women and children towards human trafficking, especially human trafficking for the purpose of CSE. A baseline study was conducted to fill the information gaps about human trafficking in Manipur and offer an in-depth understanding of the scope of the issue, its root causes, current trends in terms of the modus operandi of trafficking networks operating in the region the levels of awareness and sensitisation among the common population and relevant government and non-governmental stakeholders as well as the current capacities and gaps related to the victim support service system.

Regional context

The Northeast region of India shares a significant portion of its borders with Tibetan-China, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh and is linked with the Indian heartland only via the 21 km-narrow Siliguri Corridor. Manipur, in particular, is a melting pot for people of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Its population can be roughly divided into two-thirds non-tribal groups, the largest of them being the Meitei community, and one-third ethnic tribes of which most belong either to the Naga or to the Kuki tribes. Until today, Northeast India in general and Manipur in particular remain among the poorest and most underdeveloped regions of India, suffering from complex socio-economic grievances. The region is widely considered a prominent source point for systematic trafficking, especially of women and children, even though the reported numbers of trafficking cases are not exceptionally high.

Methodology

The MUKTI baseline research study assessed the human trafficking situation in Manipur, with a focus on the two districts of Imphal and Ukhrul, and reviewed the states' and civil society organizations' response to human trafficking on a state, district and block level. In more detail, the baseline research study aimed to assess:

- 1) The root causes of human trafficking in Manipur, or in other words, what makes people vulnerable towards human trafficking.
- 2) The modus operandi of human trafficking in, out and via the Manipur in general and Ukhrul district in particular.

¹ U.S. Department of State, "Trafficking in Person Report," July 2015, 184, accessed May 25, 2016, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/245365.pdf>.

² FXBIS works in 14 states to provide integrated development assistance to disadvantaged children, women and communities in rural and urban India to reduce their vulnerabilities with respect to poverty, health, education and protection.

³ ECPAT Luxembourg is a not-for-profit organisation whose mission is to combat the (commercial) sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), which primarily comprises child sex trafficking, child sex abuse images and child prostitution, including child sex tourism.

- 3) The levels of awareness and sensitisation, including the issue of stigmatisation, among both village communities and key stakeholders.
- 4) Capacities and gaps related to support service provision.

In order to reach an in-depth understanding of the human trafficking situation in Manipur, a two-folded methodological approach was developed: quantitative surveys with the rural population of Ukhrul district and qualitative key informant interviews (KII) with relevant stakeholders both at district level and state level. The quantitative surveys in the form of closed-ended questionnaires gathered data from two distinct survey groups across 30 villages, namely household respondents representing the general population of the district and village informants occupying positions of authority in the villages. Considering statistical significance, time and resources, the sample size was fixed at 10% of one quarter of the total number of households which amounts to 570 households (75 in Kamjong, 153 in Chingai and 342 in Ukhrul Central). The chosen sample size conforms to a confidence level of 95% with a margin of error of 2.34. Data collection was done digitally using the app-based questionnaire for android phones from Akvo FLOW⁴. Written consent was obtained from all survey participants as per the research guidelines set forth by the New Delhi country research team.

The guided KIIs, on the other hand, included governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in Ukhrul Central and Imphal, thereby provided a more comprehensive overview of the human trafficking situation. 19 KIIs (nine in Ukhrul and 10 in Imphal) and one focus group discussion (FGD) with media correspondents in Ukhrul were conducted. The interviews were semi-structured following an interview grid.

Challenges and limitations

The inaccessible terrain and scattered demographic profile of Ukhrul district, especially Kamjong block, made designing and implementing a large-N baseline study challenging and costly. Limited access to electricity was a problem faced by most enumerators given that the data collection was done digitally using smart phones. Most enumerators also were not able to upload the data until they returned back to Ukhrul Central due to limited internet access in the rural areas.

Major findings

Root causes of human trafficking in Manipur

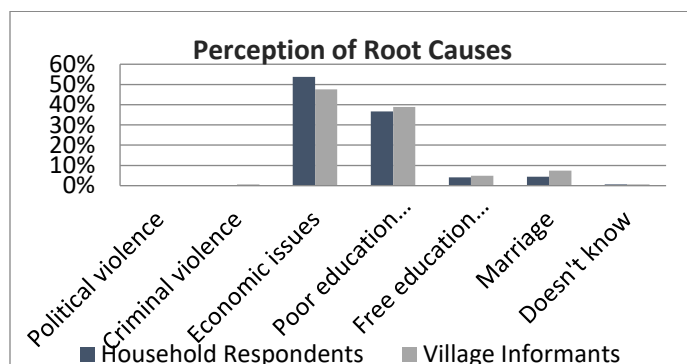
Human trafficking is the product of ‘push and pull’ factors, the interplay between desperate socio-economic grievances on the one hand, compared to zones of economic development and prosperity on the other hand. Poverty and social grievances, such as discrimination and violence against certain parts of the society, make people explore migration as a way to achieve a better quality of life, irrespective of the risks that migration can bear. Generally speaking, the widespread demand for cheap labour combined with the lack of safe migration channels are the main reasons for the prevalence of human trafficking. Key informants agreed that the root causes of migration and human trafficking in Ukhrul

⁴Akvo FLOW is a multi-language tool for collecting, evaluating and displaying any quantity of geographically referenced data. The system makes use of a simple Android smartphone app and an online dashboard. The questionnaire form is accessed via the app and data is entered using the app and subsequently uploaded to the online dashboard. Further digitalisation of data is therefore not required given that the data is immediately accessible remotely after submitting the questionnaire.

Akvo FLOW is specially designed to work in diverse locations that are often remote or lacking reliable basic infrastructure. Since the first version was introduced in 2010 by US NGO Water for People, it has been proven in use around the world by teams tasked with ensuring development activity, infrastructure and services are working.

district are the **poor socio-economic conditions in Manipur** that incentivise people to migrate and the **low levels of awareness regarding safe migration** that render people vulnerable to human trafficking. Figure 1 below illustrates the perceptions of household respondents and village informants, regarding the reasons why people migrate from Ukhrul.

Figure 1: Reasons for Migration



Household respondents and village informants both stressed that economic hardships and poor or lacking education facilities are the main reasons incentivising people to emigrate from Ukhrul district, while offers of free education outside Manipur and marriage were perceived as playing a marginal role in incentivising people to migrate. According to the perceptions of all interviewed village respondents from Ukhrul district, **female children below the age of 18 years appear to be the most vulnerable to go missing or be trafficked.**

Modus operandi of human trafficking in and out of Manipur

In the context of South Asia, human trafficking typically takes place in the shadow of migration, both across borders or within a country. Trafficking syndicates make use of the desperate socio-economic situation of their victims and lure them in with false promises of work or education. Some trafficking networks operate disguised as labour recruitment agencies; however, in the majority of the cases, the traffickers are well-known to the victims or their care takers as neighbours, friends and even family members.

With respect to the traffickers, key stakeholders described the **trafficking syndicates as extremely organised** with strong networks at source and destination and **highly adaptable to changes in the legal or policy framework.** Traffickers appear to spend a lot of time on preparing their victims (even teaching them English in some cases), buying them new clothes and providing proper documentation, including passports and visas.

Interviewed key stakeholders confirmed that Ukhrul has the highest number of reported human trafficking cases and is a major source area for human trafficking in Manipur. Within Ukhrul district, stakeholders emphasized that the northern part of the district and, to some extent, the western and eastern parts are affected by human trafficking. Also mentioned as well-known source areas within Manipur were Chhurachanpur, Chandel and Senapati and Tamenglong.

Generally speaking, the majority of the interviewed informants agreed that remote villages in hilly areas are more likely to be targeted by traffickers than the better connected settlements in the valley around Imphal, the state's capital. Interviewed shelter home staff also confirmed that more children

from hilly areas are under their care compared to children from the plain areas. In the valley, Bishnupur was identified as one place that has a particularly high record of human trafficking cases.

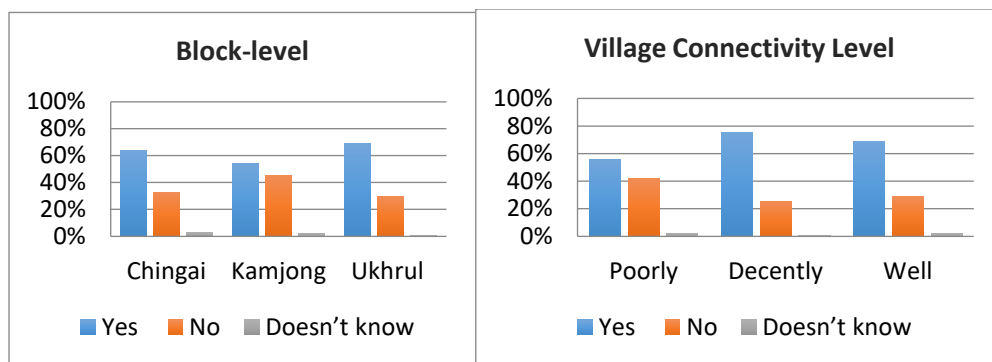
As shared by interviewed key informants, human trafficking victims from Manipur are moved using all available modes of transportation from taxis to busses, trains and airplanes, Victims are either directly flown out from Imphal airport or moved along the NH-39 via Dimapur to Guwahati for further travel arrangements. Imphal and especially Guwahati, the capital of Assam, are well connected via land and air and therefore important transit points for human trafficking from the region. Both village informants and key informants reported that the main destination points for human trafficking victims from Manipur are the Indian metro cities such as New Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai as well as other big cities in India and the popular tourist location of Goa. This makes human trafficking from Manipur a predominantly India-internal issue. However, Imphal itself appears to be progressively emerging as a destination place for human trafficking from remote areas in Manipur, as reported by village and key informants. Victims are trafficked to Imphal to satisfy the growing demand for cheap domestic help and sexual exploitation in the growing red light areas of the city.

Level of awareness and sensitization

A majority of the interviewed key stakeholders suggested that the common population, especially the lower educated segments of society, is greatly unaware about the issue of human trafficking as well as relevant state policies and national laws. The findings from the household and the village informant surveys, however, suggest that awareness levels are high, with a majority of both survey groups being conscious about the issue of human trafficking. Out of all respondents who knew about human trafficking, almost 100% of both survey groups were also aware that human trafficking is illegal and therefore a crime.

From a block perspective, Kamjong's population appears to be significantly less sensitized than residents from Chingai block or Ukhrul block. 50% of the covered villages in Ukhrul reported a majority of at least half of the interviewed households not being aware about human trafficking, compared to 36% of the villages in Ukhrul and 29% in Chingai. Pihang village (Kamjong block) even recorded 100% unawareness among interviewed household respondents. On a village-level, 70% of the covered villages reveal that a minimum of one third of the household respondents are unaware of human trafficking and, in 40% of the villages, more than half of the household respondents stated to have no knowledge about human trafficking. Generally speaking, as shown in the second graph in Figure 2, respondents from villages that are 'poorly connected' also happen to be significantly less conscious about human trafficking.

Figure 2: Geographical Breakdown of Awareness Levels



Key informants criticised that **the greatest challenge towards an effective law and order response to human trafficking in Manipur is lacking qualification on the part of law enforcement personal.** The latter are insufficiently trained about the techniques employed by perpetrators to lure in their victims and transport them and, therefore, often fail to identify cases of trafficking appropriately.

The **media, too, was criticized as poorly sensitized.** Some key informants mentioned that it is not uncommon that articles reveal the victim's identity and insofar show complete disregard toward his/her right of privacy and the need to protect victims of human trafficking. Accordingly, key informants stressed the need for increased awareness and training campaigns for official stakeholders.

Practices

Key informants pointed out that low awareness levels among the common population are not the only problem, citing bad practices and attitudes in context to migration and human trafficking as a further concern. On the one hand, potential migrants are often so desperate that they are still willing to take their chances and explore unsafe migration channels despite knowing the risks. On the other hand, informants also pointed out that cooperation on the part of the local communities in context to human trafficking and missing person cases is extremely low. Communities either do not want to disclose the victimisation of family members or they are simply not aware about the appropriate steps they have to take to seek government help.

Poor practices and attitudes are, according to interviewed key informants, also a major source of problems among official stakeholders with many choosing to turn a blind eye on the issue of human trafficking. During the baseline study, it was highlighted that one major problem in terms of prosecution of human traffickers is that the **police displays poor practices in submitting charge sheets** in a proper and timely manner, which allows the perpetrators to be bailed out easily. The fact that this was pointed out by several key informants independently from each other indicates that this is a common shortcoming among law enforcement personnel in Manipur. NGO interventions and campaigns, too, were assessed as flawed by the interviewed key informants.

Capacities and gaps related to support service provision

Human trafficking is a complex issue which requires a wide range of counter measures to effectively eradicate it and help the victims. In particular, the victims of human trafficking need to be adequately taken care of through efficient service provision, otherwise there is little hope for full recovery. While the issues of rescue and repatriation essentially fall in the remit of the destination area, prevention and social reintegration are the responsibility of the source area.

The key informants' assessment regarding the common population's access of support services varied starkly. While some believed that national and state schemes for children and poverty alleviation are plenty and the problem lies in the common population's ignorance of the same, others considered the service provision system in Manipur as rather underdeveloped with only a few activities having been implemented at a state and district level.

The survey findings reveal that medical support is the most commonly accessed support service in the covered villages. All other support services, however, were accessed by less than 50% of both survey groups with only awareness campaigns, educational support and to some extent livelihood support demonstrating significant numbers of villagers having access to them.

Key informants emphasised the role of the government in context to victim protection and rescue, legal assistance and rehabilitation. It was highlighted that especially from a law and order response perspective, progress has been achieved in recent years with the establishment of Child Welfare Committees, the Juvenile Police Unit, and Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTU) in Manipur. Overall however, respondents criticized poor rehabilitation and reintegration services pointed to the poor implementation of support service delivery in Manipur.

Manifold reasons were given for **poor support service provision**, with the main ones being a general failure to put national policies and systems into place and a lack of resources which severely limits the stakeholders' scope of action. Out of all nine districts, only the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) in Imphal East is completely manned. Same applies to the Manipur Commission for Child Rights, which was not operational during survey period due to the failure to assign a chairperson as well as the six members that are needed. AHTUs, too, are affected by resource constrains and lack, for instance, separate vehicles to carry out their assigned responsibilities.

The current support service provision system in Manipur reveals **substantial gaps** in terms of preventive mechanisms, perpetrator prosecution as well as victim rehabilitation and legal support and addressing these gaps is the main recommendation deriving out of the field study. Additionally, there is a need to improve inter-agency cooperation and stakeholder accountability, of both official and non-governmental actors, in order to ensure a proactive and efficient response to cases of human trafficking in the state.