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Session I: Identifying practical programming ideas for prevention and awareness raising

Panel Presentation:

House-to-house awareness raising with rural girls and women

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Institute of Gender Applied Policies began working in rural areas in 1998, focusing on gender equality projects and rights of women. The inferior status of women and girls, which occurs more frequently in rural communities, leads to women, as a group, being more affected by general poverty, unemployment and violence. This inevitably leads to the feminization of labor migration and exposes this group to trafficking. Therefore, *a gender perspective* has been taken into account when designing our organization's program of counter-trafficking, whose implementation started in 2002, after a long experience of work in rural areas regarding gender issues.

The house to house information campaign approach, which is the base of the prevention project we are implementing with the support of CAAHT Program in the rural areas of Lushnje, Prrenjas, Devoll, Rreshen and Lezhe is designed to address mostly the girls between the ages of 12-25 years old, presuming the category of girls who have in early age abandoned schools and the ones who have already finished the school, since the existing school curricula do not comprise any counter-trafficking knowledge, especially in rural areas.

Trafficking is a complex equation involving on the one hand economic hardship and pull factors and on the other hand, traffickers and individual perceptions. Information is an important empowerment tool, diminishing the capacity of traffickers to exploit the limited knowledge of potential victims.

This information dissemination program is being carried out in the targeted areas in an effort to acquaint potential victims of trafficking with the risks and the consequences of trafficking as well as to dissuade them from resorting to trafficking.

Objectives of the campaign in brief

- To raise the awareness of the risk group vulnerable to trafficking;
- To make an impact on their realistic perception about what might happen to them;
- To educate them about the consequences of trafficking so they can change their minds and respond in an informed manner;
- To inform them what options they have available if they become victims of trafficking.

The first stage of the project has consisted in an intensive awareness raising campaign in the targeted areas to promote the project, conducting formal and informal meetings with representatives of Regional Police Offices of Anti-trafficking, Local Educational Directorates, Local Government (Gender focal points), Regional Police Offices, Regional

Offices of Employment, State Social Services, Primary Health Care and professional categories which directly provide services to local families such as doctors, teachers, civic education teachers, police and others like parents councils, old men of villages, etc. in communes and villages. The aim of these meetings was not only to make clear to the people the objectives and goals of the project, but also to make them part of the field activities. We have also involved in those activities beneficiaries from former projects implemented by our organization. Through this kind of general awareness raising and with the help of influential people to the local families and young generation, we aimed not only to obtain access to the farm families for our activities, but also to make the target group more cooperative and proactive with the project activities.

The first stage of the information campaign comprised also the research stage. It consisted of a survey based on household questionnaires conducted in the targeted areas of intervention.

Goal of research: Assessment of the knowledge on trafficking of human beings among girls and women in rural areas. Another aim of the survey was that the analysis of data coming out from interviews would determine the design of images and the formulation of the information campaign messages.

Methodology: A total of 228 young women from different rural areas of Albania were interviewed during the research. Each woman was informed about the aim of the research and agreed to participate in the interview. 32% of the respondents were aged between 18-24 years old; 54% were between 12-17 years old and the rest were older than 24 years old.

54% of the respondents had stopped their education or continuing the secondary school; 37% of them had stopped the education with 8 years of school; and 2% with elementary education and 1% illiterate.

It is interesting to see some of outcomes of the interviews:

- 36% (the highest percentage) of the respondents answered *I don't know* to the question "*Who would they go to if they found out that a close friend or relative is forced into trafficking?*"
- Regarding the profile of the trafficker 28.9 % were convinced that a trafficker could be only a foreigner.
- 26.8% (the highest percentage) of the respondent were not sure what to do if an acquaintance or friend offered them a job abroad.

Family influence is still very strong among girls in rural areas. 64.9 % would rely on the advice of the family if they were offered a job in Italy as waitress. And to the other question: *Which type of work offer would you consider reliable and acceptable for you in case of an offer abroad?* 27.6 % answered "Recommended by close relative".

22.4 % of the respondents thought that the incomes of a trafficked woman are huge and 25.4% of them have no idea. 21.9% of the respondents thought that widely disseminated information on trafficking consequences and legal labor opportunities abroad is the major measure that should be taken to combat trafficking in women.

The results of the survey for each area became the base of the field work and the information campaign conducted. The information conveyed to the targeted group mainly consists in:

- Trafficking: how does it occur, the routes, e.g. organization of gangs into
 - a) recruitment group (best-looking men, expensive cars, etc.),
 - b) coercion and conditioning into compliance through continuous physical, sexual and psychological abuse,
 - c) transport
 - d) and exploitation.
- What happens to victims of trafficking?
- How does one protect oneself?
- What are the means of self-protection?
- Are there any assistance structures? What and where are they?

All this information was illustrated by figures and “case studies” and adapted to each district according to the survey results. The meetings where girls are invited to participate are organized in the farm houses in villages with girls and young women living in the same close neighborhood (6-10 girls) and the discourses are developed in friendly and informal atmosphere. The identification of the at-risk group is made in close cooperation with local family services providers such as teachers, nurses/doctors, social administrator of communes and also old men of villages. They compound the category of girls descending from extremely poor families, without male family members, single/divorced parent, young women already trafficked and repatriated, other vulnerable groups. The approaches used in activities are flexible and chosen to be as acceptable to the communities as possible. For example, in northern districts such Lezha and Mirdita, where a large percentage of the population is Catholic and where the Catholic Church is quite influential, religious representatives and “sisters” are also invited in our activities and meetings. The social life in these areas is extremely poor and the girls in most cases appear to be happy to participate and are pro-active with the project activities. Sugar packets, leaflets and posters are useful tools in this information campaign. The house to house information campaign will last until end of November. It is also accompanied by school-based meetings at the secondary schools in communes.

The awareness raising role of NGOs is very efficient, but considering the sustainability of the interventions, the role of the local government entities is indispensable as the holder of state institutional responsibilities for the improvement of counter-trafficking measures at the local level. That is why we consider a very important component of the project to be capacity building of key personnel of the governmental entities, which are considered as crucial personnel to carry out the project activities after its termination. This component will be implemented in the final stage of the project and will last until end of November.