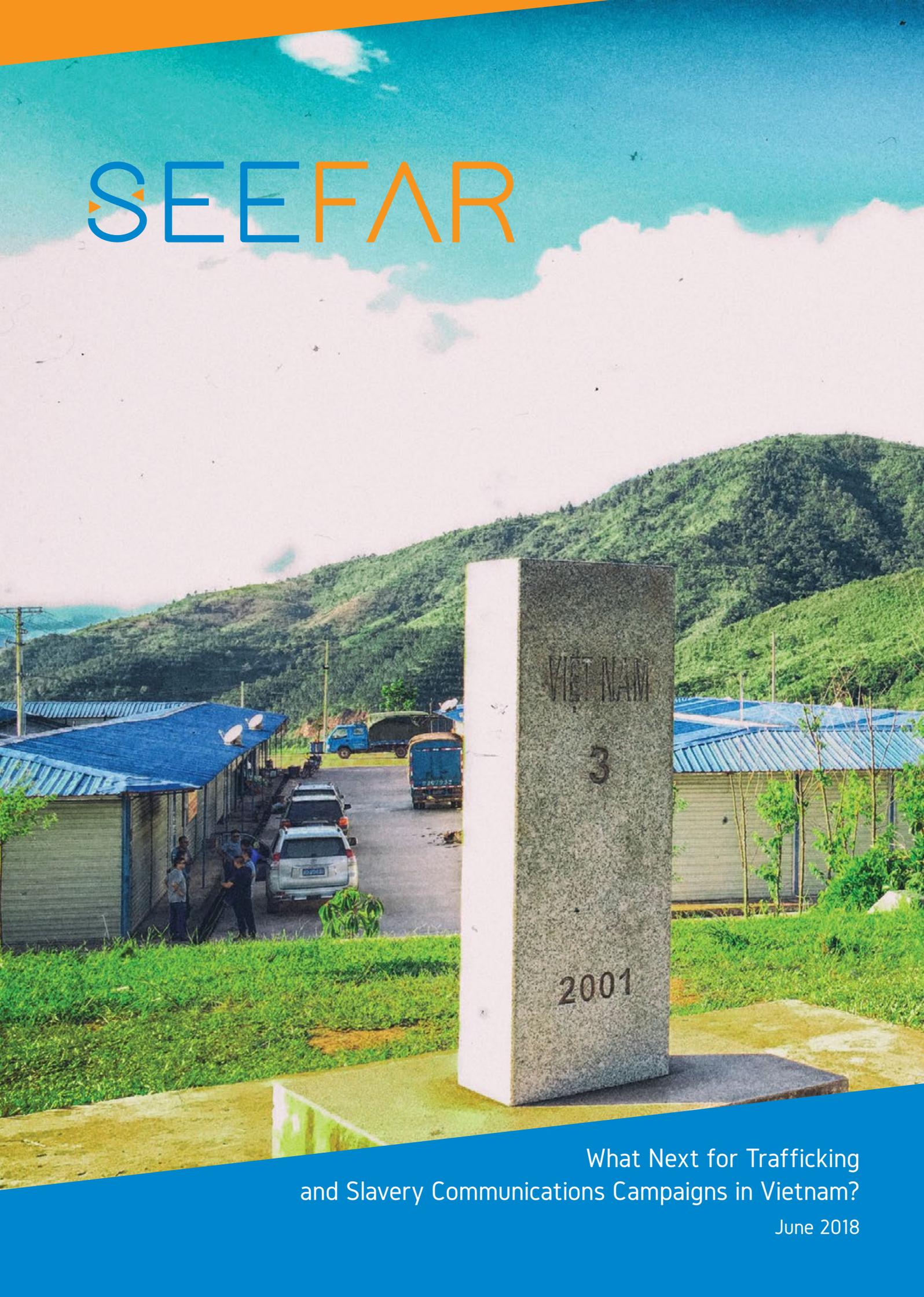


# SEEFAR



What Next for Trafficking  
and Slavery Communications Campaigns in Vietnam?

June 2018

## OUR VISION

is for a world in which vulnerable people have more opportunities to advance themselves.

## THE PURPOSE

of our social enterprise is to work with those people to build a better future.

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## KEY FINDINGS

This report analyses the history of communications projects in Vietnam related to human trafficking and modern slavery problems. It offers practical and strategic recommendations for designing a next generation of communications initiatives.



### The sector is mature - many methods have been tried

Over the last 15 years, there has been sustained support for communications campaigns to influence human trafficking and modern slavery problems in Vietnam. A diverse set of actors have tried a lot of different approaches. There has been enthusiasm for initiating new projects and experimenting with new methods.



### The sector is immature - few projects can demonstrate impact

There is little evidence that communications projects have contributed to positive change in human trafficking and modern slavery problems. Meaningful results are unclear overall and often limited at the project level. This is because the Government, donors and implementers have not designed their projects to generate evidence of impact.



### Lots of lessons, not always learned

So much effort into so many activities over so many years has yielded so many lessons. This includes lessons pointing directly to a need for more focus on impact rather than information-dissemination. There are positive hints of how this can be done, but the same “lessons” are being discovered, which suggests there are barriers to learning.



### To maximise impact, “strategic” lists must become strategic priorities

A long history of diverse initiatives offers valuable opportunities for future communications activities. For the Government, opportunities arise from deliberately scaling up the most effective efforts from the past. This would drive a much more rigorously prioritised strategy for communications, rather than a list of ideas that churns through the sector. The opportunity of prioritisation comes with the challenge of saying no to some ideas in favour of concepts with demonstrated impact. In this quest, it would be valuable to prioritise resources for the most vulnerable. If such a principle is adopted, then it will encourage a stronger focus on demonstrating connections between communications activities and real-world benefits for victims and potential victims.



## KEY FINDINGS



### Track 1: support a prioritised common strategy

If a donor is willing to support communications activities outside of their niche populations of concern, they can orient towards a prioritised strategy coordinated by the Government or by Vietnamese civil society. Such a prioritised strategy does not currently exist and it will take time for local mechanisms to develop it. In the meantime, each donor should subject itself to a serious prioritisation process and contribute that to a locally-steered mechanism.



### Track 2: focus on your priorities and demonstrate value for money

Some donors have specific problems and populations they want to address. There is an opportunity to tighten control over the link between funding and measurable results. In order to do this, donors should avoid funding a “human trafficking program” or a “modern slavery project”. Instead, focus a specific solution on a specific problem, maintain strong management of the activity and make sure it will report demonstrable impacts. This approach will yield a healthy focus on targeting, impact measurement and learning. On this track, donors need to be particularly demanding that a new proposal builds on evidence of impact from the last 15 years of communications activities.



### Avoid combining targeted support with a broad program

An important lesson from the past 15 years is that a single project is unlikely to succeed in combining both of the tracks described above. The first track requires tighter donor monitoring, a focused implementing modality and a donor-centric model of monitoring and evaluation. The second track requires broad coordination, a potential buffet of changing priorities and a joint model of monitoring and evaluation. A communications project that attempts to combine both tracks will likely advance neither.

## Introduction

The Government of Vietnam, Vietnamese civil society and donors to Vietnam have tried a lot of different approaches to communications campaigns on human trafficking and modern slavery. In that sense, it is a mature and experienced sector. Practitioners have tested many tools; donors have tested diverse funding mechanisms; evaluators have had a say. Yet in another sense, this is a sector that needs growth and development. Practitioners would value stronger methods; donors would benefit from stronger prioritisation; monitoring and evaluation needs a stronger focus on impact.

Seefar reviewed 19 communications initiatives over the last 15 years in Vietnam.<sup>1</sup> The bulk of information came from a desk review of public and internal reporting on these initiatives. We also interviewed people involved in some - but not all - activities.

The purpose of the research was to discover recommendations for future communications activities that aim to reduce trafficking and slavery. This is part of our global research program on human trafficking and modern slavery, an effort that supports our strategic communications projects. We focused on lessons coming from Vietnam, although the research heard strong echoes from other places in which Seefar works, such as Indonesia, Myanmar, Nigeria, East Africa, Gambia and Europe.

In this report, we focus on three questions:

1. What has been tried over the last 15 years in terms of communications initiatives that aim to affect human trafficking and modern slavery patterns?
2. What evidence is there for what works and what does not work?
3. What does this suggest for future communications campaigns?

We proceeded with the following principles:

- Our priority is the individual victim and potential victim. Several of the communications projects we explored had ambitions for policy or legislative change. However, these efforts involve additional links and assumptions in the impact chain from communications activity to victim benefit.<sup>2</sup> Our priority biases us towards valuing clear results for victims.
- There is no offence called 'modern slavery' in Vietnam and there are globally accepted distinctions between human trafficking and modern slavery. Our approach was to cast the net wide in considering 'trafficking and slavery'

<sup>1</sup> Wherever possible, we have provided citations for specific publications and project descriptions. A list of further reading is found at the end of this report. We have received restricted reports from organisations that have implemented communications projects. Some of these have come with a request not to name or source documents from the project or organisation.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, a common problem that our interviewees identified was progress in laws, policies and government proclamations, but a lack of tangible progress in making a difference for victims.

problems, broadly defined as coercive or deceptive recruitment into a situation that involves a victim moving away from their home. We are less interested in legislative interpretations and recommendations, but instead focused here on what people actually think and do.

- Good intentions from all participants in this sector are evident. We assume that any inefficiencies or ineffectiveness arise from the toughness of the challenge or a lack of data and knowledge, not a lack of will. This supports our focus on the content and tools of communications initiatives, rather than interrogating any political reasons affecting their design.

## What Has Been Tried?

The short answer is: a bit of everything. The inspiration and implementers of communications initiatives in this sector have included: government, non-profit organisations, unions, media groups, foreign donors, groups of concerned citizens, and businesses. They have delivered diverse designs that have targeted disparate populations. This section provides a sample of the initiatives we examined, described here simply to illustrate diversity.

### What has been tried? A bit of everything

Celebrities	More celebrities	Border officials
In schools	Local authorities	Consumers
More consumers	Migrants	

### Celebrities: MTV EXIT

In 2011, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations joined MTV’s End Exploitation and Trafficking (EXIT) program, which aimed to use MTV’s worldwide media reach to disseminate information about human trafficking and modern slavery. The program worked across the region. It included free concerts in Vietnam that doubled as public service announcements, aired documentaries about human trafficking on MTV, and developed music videos that featured images of modern slavery. MTV EXIT incorporated celebrities and international musicians to increase viewership and concert attendance. Rather than having a trusted member of a community teach potentially vulnerable populations about human trafficking, MTV EXIT employed celebrities and idols to ingrain into youth the definitions of trafficking and slavery as they exist in the modern economy.

### More Celebrities: Pacific Links Foundation and the English Premier League

This is a budding effort, conceived in the recent past. In 2017, US based charity Pacific Links Foundation partnered with the English Premier League to create an information

campaign about the trafficking of Vietnamese to Britain. Two in three of the Vietnamese trafficked to the UK are male, often minors. The campaign aims to dispel the myth that migrating to Britain will bring fortune for all, and targets young males. Using traditional gender stereotypes to their advantage, Pacific Links hopes that boys and men who idolise the Premier League players will be educated and encouraged to stay home in Vietnam, avoid being trafficked under the guise of prosperity in the UK, and build their futures within Vietnam.

### In Schools: The Asia Foundation and the Vietnam Institute of Educational Sciences

In 2009, The Asia Foundation teamed up with USAID and the Vietnam Institute of Educational Sciences to “build upon and further refine an earlier school-based safe migration program in An Giang and Can Tho provinces - major trafficking hotspots near the Cambodia-Vietnam border - to reach 40,000 students from at-risk communities.”<sup>3</sup> This was part of a longer-term suite of activities aimed at human trafficking.

The goal of this particular project was to disseminate information from teachers to students and families that live on the Cambodian-Vietnam border. The Asia Foundation hoped that this method of communication would be a strong example for other schools, regions and communities in Vietnam. It also aimed to incorporate materials, such as pamphlets and handbooks, that would help guide the students and their families toward safe employment and migrations from rural areas to urban centers.

### Migrants: Department of Overseas Labour (DOLAB) and IOM

Collaboration between the Government and IOM has involved a number of communications-related activities, ranging from training to posters to NGO support. We were particularly interested in Migrant Resource Centres. IOM imported this concept from elsewhere in the world and adapted it to Vietnam’s needs. The basic

purpose of Migrant Resource Centres is to provide labour migrants with information and guidance on procedures related to overseas employment opportunities. The core approach is to train personnel and support a system within Employment Service Centres run by provincial departments of labour.

### Border Officials: UNICEF

In 2004, as one component of a project to reduce trafficking between China and Vietnam, UNICEF established liaison offices in the border towns of border town of Dongxin and Mong Cai, in which they conducted training seminars and six month long Vietnamese language programs for Chinese officers to teach them about human trafficking, what it looks like, and how to prevent it at the border. UNICEF also hoped that with the shared language and communication techniques, there would be a stronger connection between the Chinese officers and the Vietnamese migrants who could potentially be trafficked across the border.

### Local Authorities: Blue Dragon

The Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation in Hanoi received grant funding from the US Department of State spanning the years 2014-2018 to create an information packet that is intended to be distributed to local authorities and community members. The packet was intended to help them identify if someone is at risk of being trafficked, how to prevent trafficking in their community, how to rescue children who have already been trafficked, legal recourse for victims, and steps to take to inform others about what was learned in the pamphlet.

### Consumers: IOM X

Around the region, IOM X produced an online campaign called “Do You Know Who Made It?,” which focused on spreading information about modern slavery. The focus was the garment industry and included reference to workers in Vietnam. This information campaign aims to inform its viewers and participants about their ability

<sup>3</sup> “USAID and The Asia Foundation Expand Counter-Trafficking Program in Vietnam’s Mekong Delta.” *The Asia Foundation* (blog), October 5, 2009.

to purchase ethically made clothing. Various blogs and other alternative news sources focus heavily on ethically made clothing and the ability to change the market demand by not purchasing clothing only because it is cheap. The theory here is that demand for clothing made by workers who have safe and humane working conditions will increase the supply of such products and encourage the spread of better employment practices.

### More Consumers: Unseen

We looked at Unseen as an example of efforts outside of Vietnam that attempt to deal with problems affecting Vietnamese victims. Unseen is an anti-slavery charity that runs a modern slavery hotline in the UK and which created a campaign called “Nail It!”. The focus is on informing customers of nail salons about spotting signs of modern slavery. Unseen is encouraging salon customers to spread the word about modern slavery via social media pages, as well as physically painting their nails neon colors and taking photos with two fingers up. The largest number of survivors of modern slavery addressed with this campaign are from Vietnam. The campaign also hopes to empower consumers to make ethical choices and change the supply and demand model that drives business owners to forced labor.

## What Works? How Do We Know?

Our review identified dozens of lessons at the level of activity design. This section begins with some examples, drawing from our review and in some cases comparing this to experience outside of Vietnam. The section then moves to a higher-level conclusion on what works and how we know what works.

### A Sample of Operational Lessons



#### Targeting and tailoring

In the words of The Asia Foundation: “the more tailored a communication program is to the target population, the more effectively the message is delivered.”<sup>4</sup> Or MTV: “the highest increase in levels of knowledge, attitudes and intended practice (KAP) in audiences was when local language content, filmed in and around the area of the concert location, was screened throughout the event.”<sup>5</sup>

The number of times this lesson is repeated in the initiatives we reviewed suggests there is a problem in learning or applying it. As The Asia Foundation concludes: “most current forms of communication have not been tailored to specific groups or regions.”



#### Call to action

If you want a behaviour to change, provide the simplest call to action possible. Do not package it with other concerns. Make the call clear in terms the audience understands. Present triggers for the behaviour.

Cost-benefit analysis in favour of awareness-raising rests on shaky assumptions about whether people will actually do anything with their piqued awareness. The sector’s level of experience should support a more focused approach on getting bang for the buck by targeting specific behaviours among specific people.



#### Maximising influence

An activity is likely to be more influential and efficient if it is convened around an organisation, issue or custom that the target population is already supporting. For example, do fewer activities headlined as “human trafficking awareness training” or “women united against trafficking”. Instead, identify forums in which the priority populations are already participating, then send trained people to engage in that event around the specific behaviours you want to change. This is

<sup>4</sup> “Combating Human Trafficking in Vietnam.” The Asia Foundation, September 9, 2008. <https://asiafoundation.org/publication/combating-human-trafficking-in-vietnam/>

<sup>5</sup> MTV EXIT. “An Innovative Multimedia Program To Increase Awareness And Prevention Of Trafficking In Persons To Promote Behavioural Change And Drive Social Action: End of Project Final Report,” June 2014.

particularly important for more marginalised groups, who tend to be less interested or able to visit events or facilities managed by the Government or international organisations.

This aligns with Seefar's experience in places like Afghanistan. It is easy to fill a facility or event if you have convening resources. But the people attracted to official events or buildings are not the most vulnerable.



### Work with market actors

There are very, very few humans who wake up in the morning and say "I'm going to be an exploitative employer today". Factory owners and overseas labour recruiters have practices and prices they feel are aligned with market demands. Broad, emotional communications may make a large group of people feel something about human trafficking. But to achieve specific behaviour changes among employers, you need to work directly with them to help them identify what they can do.

This aligns with Seefar's experience of recruitment agencies in places like Indonesia. A persistent business-minded approach enables employers to take specific actions that reduce exploitation. This is particularly valuable in places where businesses and government have become numb to NGOs because they feel that NGOs are blame machines.



### Start with the problem, not a solution

Where upfront research has been conducted, it does not seem to influence strongly a choice of channels and methods of engagement. Channels and methods are often pre-determined by the implementer's preferences rather than the beneficiaries' needs. Projects have shown an admirable interest in trying new ideas or importing them from elsewhere, but not necessarily because the problem itself demands them.

For example, building a mobile phone app (a solution) and then trying to get a relevant audience for it (the problem) is likely to be wasteful. Better to start with the connections and interests that the priority populations already have. In the case of a mobile phone app, anyone

you can reach with a new app probably already has Facebook installed.



### Government and social acceptance

When you say "human trafficking" or "modern slavery", the listener can hear a lot of different ideas, some of which make them uncomfortable. Instead, focus on the actual behaviour or problem.

For example, some communities may not like discussing sexual abuse or the age of consent. But they will find it easy to engage with suggestions for promoting their children's health or opportunities.

Or, the Government may not like the implication that their country has people in slave-like conditions. But most officials will find it easy to agree that their citizens should be well-informed about jobs they are considering.

This aligns with Seefar's experience in places like Gambia and Nigeria. Most behaviours under the umbrella term of "human trafficking" are already condemned by most people, so you have much more enthusiasm talking about these issues directly, rather than using the higher-level concept.

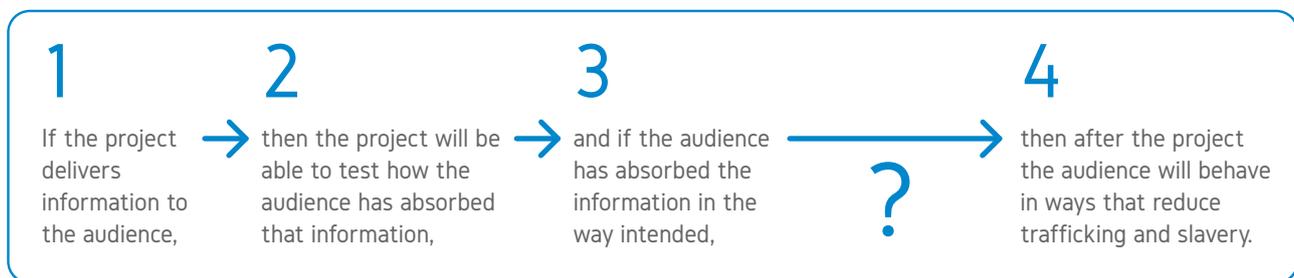
## The Broader Lesson: A Lack of Evidence

The array of methods and audiences in our sample of initiatives should logically involve a wide range of expected results. For example, in UNICEF's 2004 initiative with border control officers, the intended result was for government officials to know more and care more about trafficking. By contrast, IOM X's content was aimed at increasing consumer awareness of ethically-sourced garments. For MTV EXIT, the intent was to achieve behaviour change among a broad swath of society in Vietnam (and other Southeast Asian countries), behaviours such as informing friends that prostitutes may be trafficking victims. For some audiences, the information is more preventive in nature, for example by trying to reduce demand for services involving trafficked people. For other audiences, it is high-level advocacy to support government action,

for example by trying to galvanise interest among relatively affluent members of society.

There is a tendency in the lessons learned literature to offer lessons without having a lot of evidence that applying the lesson would achieve impact. Rather, lessons tend to be drawn from a combination of (a) assertions that are not based on strong impact evidence or (b) findings about what makes communications activities seem to run more easily, which is not the same as demonstrating impact.

We suspect this arises from a deeper commonality among project theories and foundations for evaluation over the last 15 years. The overwhelmingly dominant theory behind these programs tends to follow this logic:



Assuming that Steps 1, 2, 3 occur and are verified to occur, the key risk is that Step 4 does not follow from Step 3. In other words, even in cases where the audience gains information from the communication campaign, this knowledge may not translate into changed behaviour. Furthermore, even if behaviour change occurs, projects will not know because such impacts will happen after the project. In other words, most evaluation efforts have lacked a demonstration of impact.

There appears to be acceptance that the impacts we most care about will not be measurable from within the project. Theories of change stop at information and reported attitudes among audiences, so projects cannot determine actual behaviour change among the audience. Moreover, they will not be able to determine whether the project itself contributed to change.

## Hints of Impact from The Asia Foundation

The Asia Foundation prepared an excellent report on lessons learned from six years of programming to address human trafficking in Vietnam.<sup>6</sup> This has included communications activities, “designed to raise awareness about the risks of trafficking among vulnerable populations and communities”. The program learned “that

<sup>6</sup> “Combating Human Trafficking in Vietnam.” The Asia Foundation, September 9, 2008. <https://asiafoundation.org/publication/combating-human-trafficking-in-vietnam/>.

migrant workers required special targeted information to better understand the dangers they might face when migrating". So the program:

began to provide education on safe migration practices to potential migrants, their families, and the community as a whole. The safe migration component provided information to prospective migrant workers before they departed their communities about life skills that would assist in a safe and successful migration, along with discussion of the risks of becoming victims of human trafficking in labor migration, and strategies to mitigate that risk. At the end of 2006, the Foundation, in partnership with the Centre for Education Technology (CET) within the Ministry of Education and Training, expanded this initiative by introducing a pilot program on safe migration education into the formal school curriculum.

Notably and with admirable honesty, the programming logic shifts from a broad ambition of reducing human trafficking to a limited communications ambition of providing information. For example, results highlights include:

- 30 awareness-raising sessions in the villages and five in the communes, reaching a total of 2,170 people. Sessions focused on issues related to human trafficking in women and children, gender equality, laws related to human trafficking, life skills, and other social issues. The project management committee also delivered 2,420 leaflets and hung 13 large educational posters in offices, schools, and living quarters.
- Local authorities, schools, and students enthusiastically and actively participated in the project.

We are not disputing that these could be useful. We are suggesting that they do not demonstrate impact on human trafficking and modern slavery patterns. A much

better indicator - in fact the best indicator we have seen across all the initiatives we reviewed - was suggested by this snippet:

pilot activities did lead to a drop in incidents of trafficking, with cases of women actually avoiding potentially suspected foreign marriage and job offers due to their enhanced knowledge and awareness.

However, this was apparently derived from anecdotal reporting, rather than being part of a more consistent measurement of impact.

## International Partnerships with a Weak Evaluation Framework

In another example, we reviewed reports of partnerships between an international organisation and Vietnamese civil society.<sup>7</sup> One stated objective of the partnership was to educate parents, children and communities about trafficking. A report on results explained:

We have been raising awareness in the most affected areas of what actually is happening to the kids that get trafficked. This has included workshops for parents and communities, taking local officials with us on the trips, as well as obtaining coverage in national newspapers.

Within this monitoring and evaluation model, there is a clear gap: there is no effort to measure whether workshops and newspaper coverage lead to educated parents, children and communities. More broadly, even if this evidence existed, it is not clear we should fund more of it, because we do not know whether this matters in terms of real-life behaviour.

Similarly, another ambition in the partnership was to use communications activities to increase awareness

<sup>7</sup> The reports described in this example were internal and unpublished documents shared with Seefar on the condition that the partnerships remained anonymous.

by vulnerable groups of human trafficking, human rights and anti-trafficking services, then to support the targeted groups to use existing services. The review of results included:

All activities scheduled for this period were completed, except for the monitoring component. There doesn't seem to be any evidence of monitoring outcomes... Given the targets in the original proposal were broad, we cannot conclude that any activities were not completed or carried out.

To paraphrase, it appears there was a broad ambition to increase awareness and increase service usage, but no useful targets set. Indeed, it would be almost impossible to set useful targets if there has not been careful definition of priority populations and the specific measurements that will be used to know if activities have the desired effect.

## MTV EXIT: The Exception that Proves the Rule

MTV EXIT was an exceptional campaign in terms of its scope, budget and objectives. It generated a lot of energy and engagement from audiences. The program also had an ambition focused explicitly on behavioural change. It therefore provides a great case study to explore how a well-resourced, high-profile communications initiative has been designed for - and demonstrated - impact on human trafficking and modern slavery issues.

Between 2006 and 2014, MTV EXIT reported \$18.4 million in donor funding and \$133 million in non-donor contributions for its work around Asia. This enabled live attendance of 1.85 million, TV viewership of 83 million and a "potential overall online reach" of 547 million.<sup>8</sup> The project invested a lot in developing its

monitoring and evaluation framework. This included a set of key metrics feeding into a KAP Score<sup>9</sup>, "based on the premise that behavioural change must be supported by knowledge as well as support positive attitudes. Behavioural change without the right mind-set may be short lived and without a sustainable outcome". The monitoring and evaluation team then spent a lot time, thought and money on implementing its framework. Its 42 evaluations and baseline surveys in 20 countries included 17 provinces in Vietnam.

In travelling from ambition to impact, it appears to have been challenging to stay on a clear and coherent path in MTV EXIT's evaluation framework. As a review<sup>10</sup> commissioned by the Australian Government concluded, the project's design

is very difficult to assess in terms of clearly defining the program's higher-level goals and objectives. There is no concise summary of the goals, objectives and outcomes, or the indicators against which they will be assessed. There is no clearly stated theory of change (TOC) that demonstrates the process and inputs that lead to social and behavioural change.

For example, the project clearly had an ambition to address multiple impacts, as suggested by the full title: "An innovative multimedia program to increase awareness and prevention of trafficking in persons to promote behavioural change and drive social action". In taking this framework to the field, the MTV team intended to demonstrate behavioural change impacts through various data collection activities. However, on the basis of publicly reported information, it is difficult to unpack and interrogate linkages between program data sources, the individual KAP Score measurements and overall impacts claimed. The review mentioned above concluded:

<sup>8</sup> MTV EXIT. "An Innovative Multimedia Program To Increase Awareness And Prevention Of Trafficking In Persons To Promote Behavioural Change And Drive Social Action: End of Project Final Report," June 2014.

<sup>9</sup> KAP stands for Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices. MTV uses a bespoke set of indicators in its campaigns and then combines these into a single KAP Score metric.

<sup>10</sup> Skuse, Andrew, and Scott Downman. "MTV EXIT ASIA III: A Campaign to Increase Awareness and Prevention of Trafficking in Persons." The University of Adelaide, Griffith University, January 15, 2012.

The approach... makes unrealistic claims to behaviour change based on the KAP barometer model and associated scores. A focus on behaviour change is admirable and a necessity for such an intervention, yet the evaluation model employed has no real ability to measure behaviour change...

Moreover, there is great diversity in the types of behaviours that MTV set out to change and measure:

- Reporting suspect human trafficking activities
- Find out information about human trafficking
- Educating friends about human trafficking
- Educate friends that some prostitutes are forced trafficked persons
- Seek independent advice about an overseas job<sup>11</sup>

Each of these is a worthy target for influence through a communications initiative. However, to achieve them requires careful audience segmentation, aligned with different messages and channel selection, along with data collection tools tailored to those features. Broad messaging, an aggregated KAP Score and a collection of indicators are not terribly useful in understanding who was influenced towards which behaviour change by which activities.

If we look to a much more advanced sector, public health communicators have learned that it is useless to exhort people to “be healthy”. It is also unlikely to help if you broadcast a list of behaviours to change in order to be healthy. Instead, you need to pick an audience, then prioritise a specific healthy behaviour you want to promote, then target and verify a communications activity narrowly around that.

## So How Do We Know?

The positive conclusions are that MTV EXIT created a lot of energy and was able to demonstrate that some people exposed to its activities declared that they intended to change their behaviour. These are good results and there was a lot of effort invested in collecting data.

The difficult conclusion is that there is no basis for assessing whether the project was worth it when assessed on its stated ambitions to prevent trafficking, promote behavioural change and drive social action. An approach that would be more likely to achieve and demonstrate these results would be disaggregated around audiences, messages, channels and evaluation methods. Messages and intended behaviour changes would be tightly linked, then evaluation would have a longitudinal element to verify them.

More broadly, the common pattern in projects we reviewed is that they limit themselves to information-dissemination objectives explicitly, or implicitly do so by only measuring information-dissemination results. The exception of MTV proved the rule that it requires focus and careful design in order to maximise impacts and validate change in people’s behaviour in relation to human trafficking and modern slavery issues.

These fundamental constraints arising from theories of change in communications campaigns are not unique to Vietnam. We are not the first to point out the major risks of waste if there are no mechanisms to match ambitions with measurement. Nevertheless, the long and diverse history of communications campaigns in Vietnam offers an opportunity to learn and to take impact up a gear.

<sup>11</sup> MTV EXIT. “An Innovative Multimedia Program To Increase Awareness And Prevention Of Trafficking In Persons To Promote Behavioural Change And Drive Social Action: End of Project Final Report,” June 2014.

## The Next Generation of Communications in Vietnam

As we reviewed past initiatives, one of the most striking features that emerged was the diversity of communications ambitions, audiences and applications. This reflects three deep challenges in designing the next generation of communications campaigns:

1. The problems are diverse. For example, one problem is forced marriages of young women to people in China. Another problem is young men taking complicated trips across Europe to work in the UK cannabis industry. Still another problem is illegal labour conditions in Vietnamese factories.
2. The priority populations are diverse. For example, some priority populations have been relatively affluent consumers. Other priority populations are poorly-educated villagers.
3. The sector still tends to plan for “an anti-slavery program” or “a human trafficking awareness initiative”. But Vietnam and its challenges are more mature than that. Priorities, methods and funding need to be built up from a specific problem, among specific people, identifying specific intended changes.

In this conclusion, we turn to recommendations on how to structure resourcing for communications initiatives. For the next generation of activities to produce disproportionately positive benefit for victims of human trafficking and modern slavery, the sector needs to evolve along two paths. Track 1 is a prioritised multilateral strategy. Track 2 is a donor-centric approach to targeting and verifying results.

### Track 1: Shared Problem, Shared Priorities

This Track basically demands a coordinated strategy. Writing “coordinated strategy” is such a cliché because it has been suggested so often, but if a problem is often repeated then there must be a deeper issue. The problem is not a lack of strategies - the Government, civil society actors and various donors have written strategies and plans. The problem is that strategies are not prioritised. They contain lists of potentially good ideas. In total, those ideas require more resources than what is available to implement them. It is like drawing up a shopping list that costs more money than you have - reality requires you narrow the list down based on the combination of items you want most.

Lists have not been prioritised in the past because impact-level evidence is lacking that could inform debates about which approaches should receive support. Imagine, for example, that someone suggested anti-trafficking funding for Migrant Resource Centres should be redirected towards Vietnamese civil society centres and outreach activities. What evidence could they use for this suggestion? If someone else disagreed, what evidence would they use to show that money spent on Migrant Resource Centres is more efficient at reducing human trafficking than money spent

on civil society activities? It may be difficult to estimate answers, but it is simply impossible to do so if such questions are not asked. Nevertheless, the need for this is critical: there is just not enough money, people and effort available in the sector to do everything that could be tried.

In principle, the most obvious leader to narrow down a list is the Government or a local civil society forum. However, prioritisation is difficult for these actors to achieve when a major chunk of resources comes from external donors and the leading coordination mechanism is steered by IOM, which is itself reliant on external donors. As one long-term project manager in this area explained to Seefar: “you can justify anything under a wide national action plan, so it comes back to what IOM or the big NGOs prioritise for themselves”.

Seefar’s experience in low-income and middle-income countries suggests that Vietnam will continue to struggle to facilitate group decisions that stop funding for some approaches in favour of diverting those resources to another method or organisation. Instead, the more hopeful approach for now is for each donor to subject itself to a serious prioritisation process and contribute this to a locally-steered mechanism, perhaps also funding that mechanism to monitor impacts explicitly. The purpose would be to support assessments of need and feasibility without reference to the donor’s own priority populations. The result would likely be a narrower, less diverse set of ambitions and audiences. It is highly likely that this track would evolve into a smaller number of more scalable methods that are more locally sustainable.

## Track 2: Specific Problem, Specific Solution

Track 1 above focused on supporting a locally-owned, prioritised strategy. Track 2 is the opposite - this is where donors prioritise their specific populations of concern. In line with the evidence that specific problems need specific solutions, there is an opportunity for foreign donors to learn from the past and focus resources more. Focus would almost always mean geographic focus, population focus, methodological focus, monitoring focus and contracting focus. In other words, if you have

a priority problem, do not fund a broad program to achieve it.

In some cases, this may lead to divergence between what donors fund and what the greatest needs are in terms of pure humanitarian concern. This track also creates the explicit possibility of divergence between local aid harmonisation and individual donor prioritisation. For example, a donor such as the UK may focus on a small number of villages or provinces because that is where the most UK-oriented modern slavery victims come from, whereas a prioritised national strategy may not want to invest much in these places.

Nevertheless, we have seen in Vietnam that victims suffer because donors attempt to herd too many different beasts through the one gate, hoping to address their priority populations and issues of concern while funding a broad, diffuse program. The result is that the priority population is underserved and the broad ambitions are undercooked. The last 15 years of communications initiatives suggest a better default would be to focus some funding on a narrow, targeted method with the impact monitoring to verify it. With this, a donor is much more likely to have the evidence required to justify funding choices and to feel good about the benefits to people in need.

## Running the Two Tracks

Some interviewees in our research raised a concern that the two-track approach creates risks for donors. For example, funding a broad program and sneaking a donor priority into that program can look appealing because the broad program provides political cover for the narrow donor-centric interest. Perhaps the Government would not agree to a narrow project that was separated from a broad program, where the latter at least pretends to put them in the driver’s seat. Let’s call this the ‘political cover’ concern. Or, perhaps it seems like a hassle to manage relations with a broad program and to monitor a separate, narrower project. Let’s call this the ‘management hassle’ concern.

A major problem with the political cover concern is the assumption that the Government is not smart enough to identify and resist a specific component of a broad program if it wants to. Besides being patronising,

history shows the assumption is false. There are many examples of donor-funded programs in which the Government facilitates components it most appreciates and somehow the other components make much less progress. Beneficiaries and the program donor would have been much better off if those components had not been in there in the first place - it would save money, save effort, save relationships and save management focus.

The concern for management hassle boils down to cost-benefit analysis: does the management requirement produce impacts that are worth it? Broadly, the answer is yes if the donor has a defined priority and wants to demonstrate impact on that priority. Broadly, the answer is no if the donor is not focused on impacts, or the donor is not prioritising a specific problem.<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusion: Options for Optimists

Làm người phải đắn phải đo, phải cân nặng nhẹ phải dò sông sâu  
Vietnamese proverb: Being human, one must consider carefully before acting



Although not easy to translate directly, the proverb above essentially advises us to carefully consider what we are trying to achieve before we proceed. Years of effort in Vietnam give us a lot of valuable experience to consider. This is not a new field lacking lessons. Instead, it contains hard-won evidence. Fortunately, that evidence generates hope. In other words, this sector could be a rare breed in the development sector: an experienced optimist.

Designing the next generation of communications activities, an experienced optimist in Vietnam would take tough decisions to focus. The last 15 years have included a lot of goodwill and a lot of innovation, but not enough focus on impact. In future, we can best protect potential victims by measuring whether what we do actually helps them. We can take long lists of ideas and focus on prioritising them. Then we can focus on figuring out what, whether and how to scale up initiatives achieving disproportionate impact.

The best options available to an experienced and focused optimist are in behaviour change communications and, for donors, in adopting a twin-track approach. That means focusing on specific problems and specific intended changes, going beyond information-dissemination and emotional engagement. It also means balancing support for a locally-prioritised strategy with some tightly directed activities following donor-centric priorities. This is a combination most likely to serve the greatest number with the most important services and the best evidence of impact.

<sup>12</sup> In practice, such a cost-benefit analysis usually focuses just on the management requirement (costs), which ignores two enormous factors. First, the benefits. Second, 15 years of experience that broad programs with multiple implicit theories of change, challenging internal management requirements and difficult evaluation challenges are unlikely to produce much that benefits a donor's narrow priority population. If there is management required to focus on that population and achieve impact for that population, the burden exists whether it is kept within the donor or buried in a broad program. The latter approach does not just outsource some paperwork; it also outsources control, focus and motivation. The losers are the intended beneficiaries and the donor's ability to justify spending.

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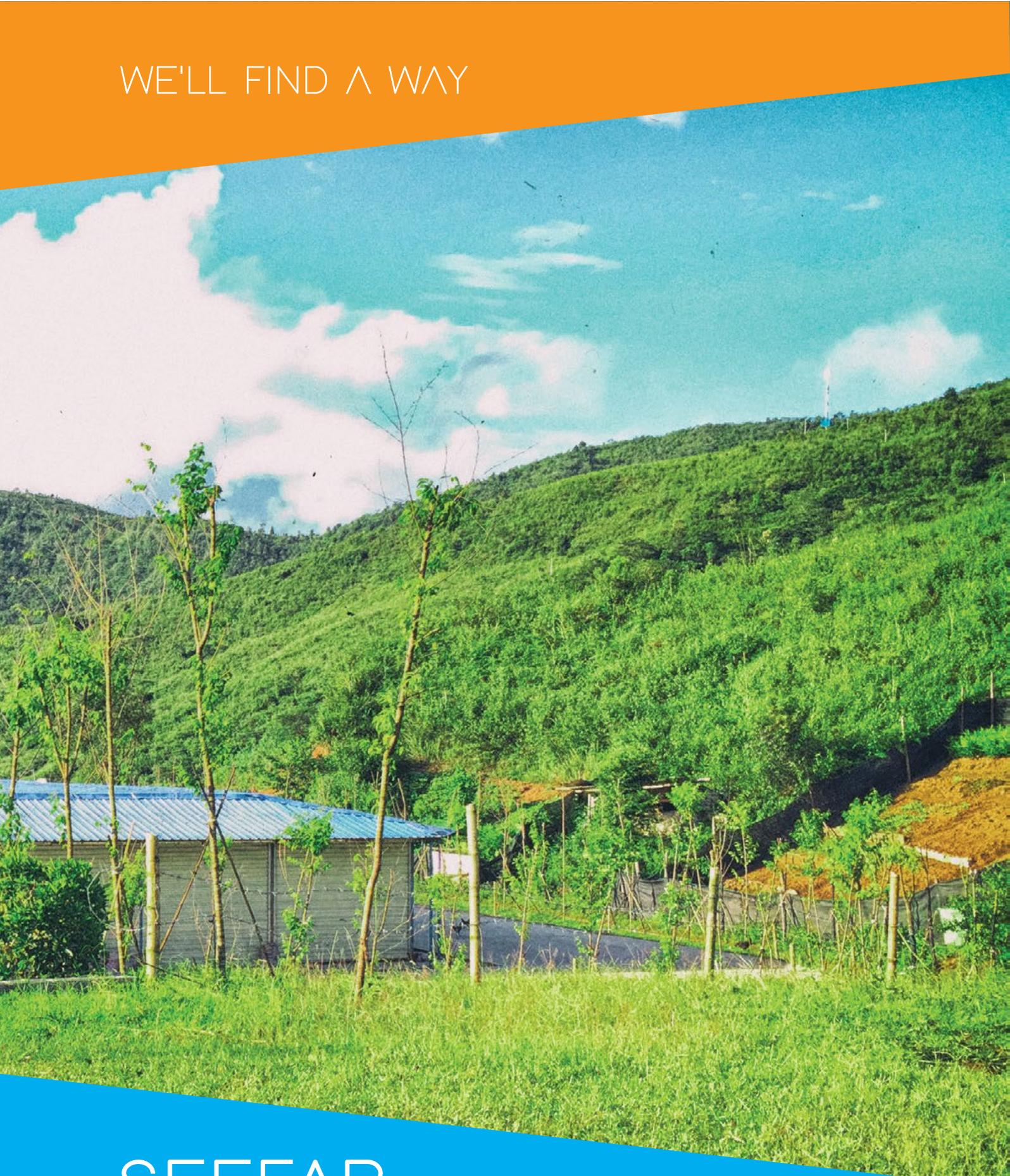
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