

‘Why NGOS Fail at Preventing Sex Trafficking in Mainland Southeast Asia’

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Myanmar is designated a Tier2+ country for trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation; Cambodia is classified Tier2. The issue of trafficking, therefore, receives a great deal of attention from regional and international non-governmental organisations in terms of advocacy for victims and awareness campaigns to prevent further abuses. Yet the numbers of men, women and children moving from Burma and Cambodia into neighbouring “destination” and “staging” countries increases each year, despite the best efforts of campaigners and project managers. In this paper I examine a long-standing cultural category of debt bondage, and the implications that ethnicity and gender have for persons entering into a debtor contract, with a view to explaining how the agendas and programming of the development milieu do not take these cultural particularities into consideration – and why they must.