

**2022**

**Resilience and Reintegration:  
Our Stories as Trafficking  
Survivors**





Winrock International is a recognized leader in U.S. and international development, providing solutions to some of the world's most complex social, agricultural and environmental challenges. Inspired by its namesake Winthrop Rockefeller, Winrock's mission is to empower the disadvantaged, increase economic opportunity and sustain natural resources. Winrock is a nonprofit organization that implements a portfolio of more than 140 agriculture, environment and social development projects in over 46 countries.



Humanity Research Consultancy (HRC) is a social enterprise providing expert supply chain investigation, training, and consultancy services to governments, NGOs, and corporations.

HRC's local evidence-based insights empower policymakers to end forced labour, modern slavery, and human trafficking, globally. Connecting clients to experts from more than 50 countries, HRC specialises in providing local culturally sensitive insights, nuanced field investigation, and research.

## **Resilience and Reintegration: Our Stories as Trafficking Survivors**

Published by Winrock International and Humanity Research Consultancy. Stories edited by Mina Chiang, Eric Kasper, Deeksha Sharma, Jeanne Crump. Designed by Deeksha Sharma.

### **Suggested Citation**

Chiang, M., Kasper, E., Sharma, D., and Crump, J., eds. (2022). Resilience and Reintegration: Our Stories as Trafficking Survivors. Winrock International and Humanity Research Consultancy.

### **Disclaimer**

This report was made possible through the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

### **Copyright**

Copyright ©2021 Winrock International All rights reserved. Winrock International is a recognized leader in U.S. and international development, providing solutions to some of the world's most complex social, agricultural, and environmental challenges. Inspired by its namesake Winthrop Rockefeller, Winrock's mission is to empower the disadvantaged, increase economic opportunity and sustain natural resources. The information appearing in this publication may be freely quoted and reproduced provided the source is acknowledged. No use of this publication may be made for resale or other commercial purposes.

# About These Stories

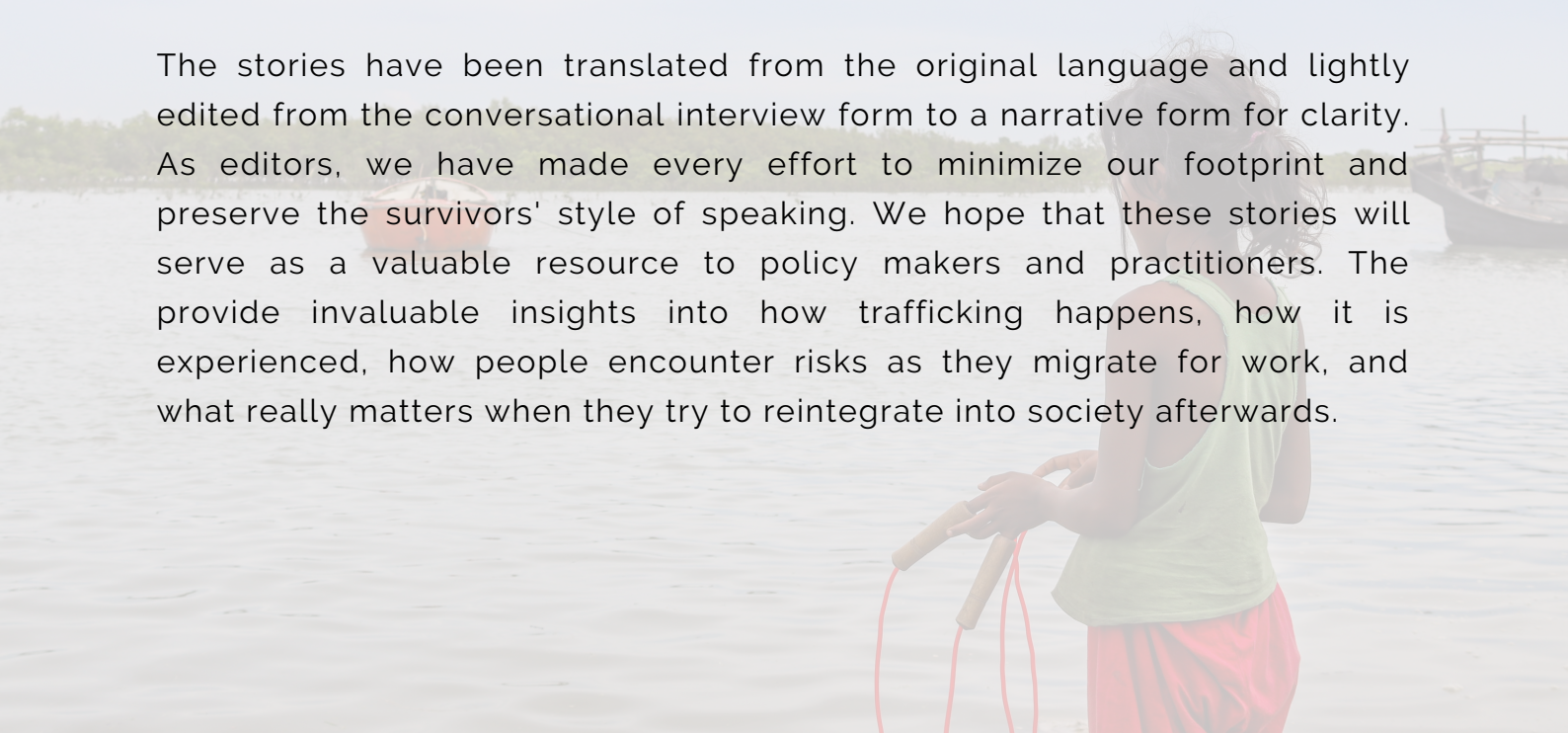
---

This collection of stories was based on a research project to understand the experiences of reintegration among survivors of trafficking, what they think constitutes successful reintegration, and what they feel would best support them in their reintegration journeys. The research was conducted between January and March 2020 by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and the Humanity Research Consultancy (HRC) in Cambodia and Bangladesh.

As part of this research, the team conducted 40 in-depth interviews of both male and female survivors (Combined 22 men and 18 women from Bangladesh and Cambodia). The interviews focused on the details of survivors' personal experiences and perceptions of reintegration.

The full analysis and findings (drawing on these and other interviews along with academic and grey literature sources) of the research project can be found in the report [Survivors' Perspectives on Successful Reintegration After Trafficking](#). However, the stories we heard from survivors in our interviews were immensely powerful. The purpose of the research project was not only to create knowledge, but to amplify the voices of survivors and support their agency in shaping the conditions in which they live. To that end, we offer this selection of stories in which the survivors speak in their own voices and provide us their expert perspectives on the experience of trafficking and the reintegration journey afterwards.

The stories have been translated from the original language and lightly edited from the conversational interview form to a narrative form for clarity. As editors, we have made every effort to minimize our footprint and preserve the survivors' style of speaking. We hope that these stories will serve as a valuable resource to policy makers and practitioners. They provide invaluable insights into how trafficking happens, how it is experienced, how people encounter risks as they migrate for work, and what really matters when they try to reintegrate into society afterwards.



# Acknowledgements

---

This collection of stories is a supplement to the report, [Survivors' Perspectives on Successful Reintegration After Trafficking](#) (December 2020). Both reports were made possible through the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Winrock International.

Special thanks to the country research teams for their hard work carrying out interviews and helping make sense of what was heard.

The Bangladesh team was made up of Zain Mahmood, Jannatul Munia, Muhammad Kamrul Hasan, Hasan James, and Abdul Malek.

The Cambodia team was made up of Meas Sa Im, Map Mao, Ran Sreymoch, Thin Sopheap, Yada Huch, Lim Mony, Hoeurn Vanntin, and Thun Visa.

The authors of the original report (Eric Kasper and Mina Chiang) would especially like to thank all of the survivors, their family and communities, and practitioners who participated in the original research for sharing their perspectives. We are grateful we got to hear your stories, and we hope this report can serve to amplify your voices to change the way people think about and engage with the challenges of trafficking and reintegration.



# List of Terminology

---

## **Anirban**

Anirban is a Bangladesh survivors' voices group which are made up of trafficking survivors. These survivors chose their own group names and decided they would serve as a community resource; as advocates to address survivor protection issues at the community level; and as mentors and participants in developing and providing services to other survivors.

## **ADHOC**

The Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) is Cambodia's oldest human rights organization. It was founded by a group of former political prisoners, led by Thun Saray in December 1991, shortly after the signing of the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements, which put an end to the long-running Cambodian Civil War.

## **Socheton**

Socheton Bangladesh (for the people) was born to help the poor people. It works for social awareness, education for poor students. Socheton tries to support people who have suffered from unexpected circumstances by providing programs and workshops.

## **RDRS**

RDRS Bangladesh is a development organization committed to change through empowering the rural poor. It provides development opportunities and services to underprivileged families and works with the community-based organizations in Bangladesh.

## **Union Parishad**

Union parishad, also known as union council, rural council, rural union and simply union, is the oldest and lowest local govt system in Bangladesh. It has been functioning for more than a hundred year for the rural development of the country. Each union council is made up of nine wards. Usually, one village is designated as a ward. There are more than 4,500 unions in Bangladesh.

## **YPSA**

Young Power in Social Action (YPSA) envisions a society without poverty where everyone's basic needs and rights are ensured. YPSA exists to participate with the poor and vulnerable population with all to bring about their own and society's sustainable development.

# Contents

---

- 01** Reintegration for Me, a Forced Labor Survivor
  - 02** Reborn After Seven Years in Malaysia as a Housemaid
  - 03** Returned from Maldives, I Work to Stop Trafficking
  - 04** I Was Forced to Marry to China
  - 05** Survived from Thailand, I Face Social Pressures
  - 06** Once a Domestic Prisoner, Now an Award-Winning Social Worker
  - 07** I'm a Survivor Leader, After Terror on a Trawler
  - 08** My Secret Reintegration Journey as a Female
- 

# 1. Reintegration for Me, a Forced Labor Survivor

---

My name is Al and I'm a trafficking survivor from Bangladesh. One day, one of my uncles on my mother's side offered to help me get a better job abroad. A few days later, he brought it up again and told me I could sign a contract with him to go abroad. At first, I told him I needed time to think it over. He said I would need 400,000 Takas( \$4,700 USD) to cover the costs of going abroad and that I would earn between 30,000 and 40,000 Takas (\$350-\$450 USD) per month. He said it would be with a good company and that I would be able to choose what kind of work to do.

He sent me to Brunei. Someone picked me up from the airport, and a few hours later, one of my cousins came to me. I stayed at my cousin's home for 12 days, but no one came to me from the company or broker. I finally called my uncle, and he assured me I would get a job. After another 12 days, someone came on behalf of the broker to pick me up from my cousin's home. I started working with the broker as a day labourer. After a few days, when I asked the broker for an update on my real job, he told me that there wouldn't be any other job. I would have to work with him as a day labourer. I worked there for 6 months as a day labourer, but then it became impossible for me to work. I never got any of my salary. I reached out to my uncle back in Bangladesh, and he tried to reassure me that I would get a proper job within 15 days. But I didn't get another job.

Finally, I decided to come back to Bangladesh. I asked the bosses for my passport, but they wouldn't give it to me. After a few weeks, I devised a plan and was able to get my passport back from them. Then I bought a ticket and returned to Bangladesh. I landed in Dhaka from Brunei and came home to my local district.

After a month, some people from the Anirban\* organization came to visit me. They were interested in my story, so I told them all about my experiences. Then they asked me what my plans were for the future, particularly wondering whether or not I was planning to go abroad again. I said that I would never go abroad again. At that time, my mental condition was not good. It was a horrible time.

A few days later, the members of Anirban took me to a training course. The name of the training program was "life-saving training", and it involved support for reintegration and training for running a small business. They gave me financial support to establish my own business, and now I'm running my own small business.

My reintegration process started in 2017. The organization Anirban and other local people helped me in my reintegration. I learned many things from Anirban's training program, such as the 10 step systems for going abroad legally and safely. If anyone can follow the steps, then they won't face any problems. Reintegration means that everything starts new, and one needs to implement the lessons from the training process.

My idea of a good life is earning money and living with family members. As a trafficking survivor, I don't think I am fully successful in my reintegration. Compared to earlier in my life, I am feeling better. Based on my experience, if survivors receive proper training and support, then 70% could successfully reintegrate.

My barrier was financial support. Anirban members counselled me on how to take on the challenge of survival and reintegration. Now I think mental strength is the main thing for successful reintegration.

I didn't want to file a legal case, even with help. I don't have an address or any real information about my traffickers.





## 2. Reborn After Seven Years in Malaysia as a Housemaid

---

My name is HS. I am 24 years old. I have 5 siblings, and I am the third child. My parents are farmers living in Preah Vihear Province in Cambodia. I am a Khmer woman who decided to go to Malaysia through a company called TSE. I knew that my family's livelihood was poor, so I wanted to go to Malaysia. It was only when I got to the other country that I realised how nice it had been in my hometown. I used to live with my parents and siblings, and we had fun. When I got to the other country, I was all alone.

I went to Malaysia to work as a housewife's housemaid. The salary was \$250 per month. I worked in a house selling noodle soup, washing dishes and pots, with no time for resting. I worked from 5 am to midnight. I couldn't rest because I was overloaded with work and I was working alone. At the end of the day, I had to knead the dough [for the next day's noodles], sweep and mop up afterwards. Then I would take a shower, and it would be 11 pm. At 12 am I went to sleep. In the morning, I got to work at 5 am, but 5 am in Malaysia is 4 am in Cambodia. It's not the same. I didn't get enough sleep. I wasn't eating enough. I was eating twice a day, only in the afternoon and in the evening. I didn't eat anything in the morning. Regardless of how difficult it was, I kept my thoughts to myself. I didn't let anyone know because this was my real life, having left Cambodia to work in Malaysia, in a house. I didn't know that the salary wasn't very high; I just went.

Regardless of how tired I was, I had to endure. No matter how difficult it was, I had to have the money to help my family to have a better life. When I arrived in Malaysia, I didn't know their language. When I was ordered east, I went west; west, I went east. I didn't understand the boss' orders. I was beaten. I had to endure it to have money to send to Cambodia and help my family.

My boss said that there would only be a salary if I worked. No work, then no payment. If I rested for even one day, the pay would be deducted. If she went outside for one day and I stayed at home alone, the pay would be deducted. She said that only if the shop was open I would get paid.

Since the salary wasn't increasing, I asked my boss twice to let me come back to Cambodia, but she didn't let me go. Eventually, when she let me go, it was instant. She organized everything for my return to Cambodia, including purchasing a flight ticket. I didn't know that she had decided to let me go. In the morning, I was sweeping and mopping the house as usual. In the afternoon around 12, she told me to take a shower and dress nicely. I asked where I was going. She didn't say. After showering and getting dressed, I asked, "Boss, am I going out?". Her child told me, "You are going to Cambodia today." When I came down, she calculated the money I was owed. I was scared and excited. When I got to the airport, I was so scared because I was alone and frantic.

When I got home, I was happy to see my relatives. But they hadn't received any of the support [financially]. The villagers were all happy to see me coming back to Cambodia. It was like being dead and coming back to life. Because I had disappeared for so many years. I went to Malaysia in June 2012 and stayed there for about 7 years. My parents were happy. I felt so sad when I saw my parents because they were so skinny. They had been worrying a lot. They had gone to a number of Khmer fortune-tellers, who had informed them that I was out there alive, but that the boss hadn't allowed me to go back to Cambodia.

When I came back to Cambodia, ADHOC supported me. They provided rice, noodles, canned sardines, soy sauce, fish sauce, laundry detergent, soybean oil, salt, and sugar. I felt excited and happy after coming back to Cambodia. When I got some money, I fixed up the house. I feel happy to be in our beautiful house with my family members. I had been in Malaysia all alone, so I was happy to be back in Cambodia and to see the villagers and relatives coming and asking how I was doing. No more worries.

I haven't found a job. I went to Phnom Penh for 2 or 3 months, but I came back because I didn't know what job to do to sustain the family. I don't know Khmer alphabets; I don't know what type of jobs I can do. I can only work in a house. Factory work will be too physically demanding for me so it's not possible. I'm worried for myself, too. If ADHOC or anyone could support me to open a grocery stall, that would be great.

I would like to tell all Khmer women and the younger generation to not think like me - to migrate to Malaysia for so many years. The salary here can be sufficient for living in Cambodia. Don't go and be miserable like me.

# 3. Returned from Maldives, I Work to Stop Trafficking

---

I am BM and I live in Dinajpur District, Bangladesh. I am 50 years old, and I have two daughters and one son. I'm currently the owner of a small general store in my village. I might view myself as a successfully reintegrated survivor. My financial condition has changed through my hardship. My relatives and neighbours also respect me for being able to get to this position despite a lot of suffering. I know some of my brothers in my community who are successfully reintegrated. They now have their ways of earning a steady income; they are economically sound, and they are able to help others.

The details of the trafficking experience are very important because they have brought me to where I am now and to a realization of the needs that I have. I was around 50 when I returned, but the experience has given me some lessons, including not to be afraid of hard work, the importance of planning [before starting to work abroad], and that no work is small [nothing you do is without meaning; everything you do matters].

The biggest challenge is making oneself mentally stable after such suffering of trafficking. Besides that, the problem of finances is another issue that leads to crisis. Another main challenge for reintegration is the discouraging attitude from relatives and society.

Family support is the only thing that can really help a person get on the right track to reintegration. Also, after receiving counselling in Rangpur, I recognized what I lacked in my thinking. I started thinking over how to avoid [negative thoughts]. This helped me a lot to move past the sorrow. A person needs to have faith in Allah who will reward him for his honesty in time. When I went to The Maldives, I felt helpless. But now I know how to work and what I need to check before starting a job.

My communication skills have become better over time, and it helped me gain more customers. Also, the support I received from the organization RDRS has changed my life. I feel that the middleman should be brought to trial and a system should be formed to bring them to trial for everything they've done.

The training, especially the counselling, was quite effective for me. The financial support helped me to start my trading again. The support was so impactful that I have become a volunteer for RDRS, helping share information with the village men about how to safely go abroad. I am a member of the anti-trafficking committee of the union, and I've been able to help many people who were at risk of being trafficked.

I did not get any support from family or friends after the trafficking experience. The government has to play a leading role here. They should provide immediate first-hand support to survivors. They can give one time assistance to the person and arrange a loan for people with lower interest. Recognition is another crucial factor. Government should treat survivors with respect, which will encourage other people to respect survivors as well. This would give them recognition. The Union Parishad chairman could also play a leading role here. The support could be provided through him.

The NGOs need to do more follow up with people after providing information. Society has a big role here as well. People in society need to understand that if they are friendly to survivors, it will go a long way to inspire and encourage these people, who have suffered a lot, to properly establish themselves.



## 4. I Was Forced to Marry to China

---

My name is VR and I'm 21 years old. I live in Kratie Province [Cambodia]. I am the second of 8 children. My mother is a rice farmer. I was tricked by a broker into going to China. They tricked me because I didn't know anything. They said that I could get work in China – that I would get 400 to 500 dollars a month working in a shoe factory. My salary in Cambodia was so low, so I grabbed the chance. They told me that I would be going to China for only one year, and then I would come back home. I thought about having such a good salary. I thought about helping my relatives at home.

I also thought about how our house building was left unfinished, how we didn't have enough resources yet. In China, I would get a great salary. So, I wanted to go. I didn't know that I was going to get scammed. My mother was also tricked. The broker took my birth certificate and filled out fake documents. To go to China, I would need a passport, proper documents, and to be at least 22 years old. I wasn't old enough, so fake documents were made. They increased my age.

I travelled with the broker from the village to Phnom Penh and through Vietnam to China. I was scared, but there was a Khmer broker who had been living in China for a long time who came to translate. He told me that I was taken to get a husband. If I didn't take a husband, they would hurt me. Like, they would mistreat and beat me up. It didn't matter if the person was old or whatever, they would sell me to a husband as long as the price was right. They handed me over to my Chinese husband and gave him my fake passport.

I was sad when I realized that I was sold. I wanted to cry, and a part of me wanted to laugh [at how I had ended up in this situation]. In that house, it wasn't too hard. He loved me, but I didn't love him. I was trying to stay, but he restricted my rights. He wouldn't let me go out; wouldn't let me befriend Khmer people. The Chinese neighbors would say things to my husband, and he would restrict my freedoms.

Early on, the broker told me that if I could give my husband a child, I would be allowed to return to Cambodia 3 or 4 months after the baby was born. But it wasn't true.



I gave birth to a child, and afterwards, they didn't let me leave. When I called the embassy, they said that if I wanted to come back to Cambodia, I couldn't bring the child. So, I had to take the illegal way to come back to Cambodia.

For a Chinese person, it would be very expensive to find a Khmer wife from Cambodia legally. To arrange a proper visa and passport for someone would cost around 200,000 CNY (\$30,000 USD). But taking someone like me illegally might only cost 85,000 or 90,000 CNY (\$13,000 or \$14,000 USD).

I didn't meet ADHOC [organization] for a while after getting back home. ADHOC gave me rice two times, as well as fish sauce, soy sauce, noodles, and books and a backpack for my daughter.

I am not sure if my life is better now or successful. I still don't have a proper occupation. I don't have my own house or a motorbike. I don't know what to request from the local authorities. They have never helped me solve my problems.

I appreciate all the help I have gotten from ADHOC, but I'm afraid they have reached their limit and they may cut off support from here on. I am in debt because of hospital fees after coming back. I don't earn a lot, so when I'm sick, I end up in debt.

## 5. Survived from Thailand, I Face Social Pressures

---

I'm UL and I live in Battambang province [Cambodia]. I am 35 years old and a motorbike mechanic. When I came back from Thailand, I asked the organizations to help me with materials, tools for motorbike fixing. I came through the Poi Pet border. Coming from there, the organization brought me back. I don't know which side, can't really remember which organization. They helped [by giving me] a set of motor fixing gears. Sometimes, I still think about my time in Thailand, but only a little bit. What helped me for the reintegration is my own will and persistence.

My parents and my little son helped me during reintegration, as well as my little brother and sister. When I had problems, I thought about quitting or taking a break, but my family gave me courage. And I also think of the organizations that helped me. I never forgot them. Before I went to Thailand, I looked at my family, and they were struggling with food, living, and spending - it was not enough. I can't remember, but when I was leaving, I looked at everything in my house. I took a risk going. My biggest worry was that I might not be able to reunite with my family because I went through the illegal way. I didn't know if I would die or live.

I was working at the ice factory. Pur it in this way, when there they did not force us, it was not that difficult; but when they forced us, it was really difficult. It was very exhausting and I couldn't sleep well. I worked overtime a lot. I got to send remittance, but not much. I decided to come back because I could no longer tolerate it, and the salary wasn't enough. If there was any spending and freedom, I would not have been upset. But I was living there like a pig, and the money was not decent enough for my family to live back home. After I got back for 4 to 5 months, the NGOs gave me tools for fixing motorbikes and such. After a while, maybe a month or two, I moved my shop to the front main road.

I was afraid of people being envious of me [of what I got from the organizations] or trying to defeat me. I can't really trust people anymore because of their words. It was the organizations that helped me for my successful reintegration. They helped me, giving me strength from abroad and from our country Cambodia. I still remember my boss' words. He/she said that even if I made it back to Cambodia, they wouldn't let me be happy.

I am still worried about those words. The boss threatened me. When I face some problems, I often think about those words and whether they are true or not. In short, I only started to feel comfortable as of this month. It took eight months, and now I feel happy, clear of worrying. I only think about my job.

With my family, there isn't any problem regarding my reintegration. The only problem is my job. To be precise, it's with the villagers that I have to face, like, when a person comes and says this and that. I solve it accordingly. If they say things that are untrue about me, I will confront them. I want to advise other survivors to try and make an effort for the reintegration process. Don't always wait for help. You have to help yourself.

I ask the authority, service providers and such to look after those who are struggling and unfortunate. Up until now, they have helped me with equipment, and it's more than enough for me. I know that if I were to do it (reintegration) on my own, it would really be a struggle.

I think it is really important to share my story because in my life I have not met anything that severe. This was my first time. It was difficult until I was free. It was that hard that I didn't think that I could be sitting at home again as I am right now. Because another country is not like our country. I am okay with sharing my story because I want others to know about my misfortune.





## 6. Once a Domestic Prisoner, Now an Award-Winning Social Worker

---

I am HS from Dhaka [Bangladesh]. I work with Anirban [organization]. I work on the issues of human trafficking and child marriage. I even received the Joyeeta Award from Upazila for this. Usually, when I heard about victims in the community, I will invite the victim to my shop and discuss things with them. I do backyard meetings. Through backyard meetings and discussions, I provide support services. When I find a victim of human trafficking, I refer them to Socheton [organization].

I think I am successfully reintegrated. Let me tell you, I went to Saudi Arabia. I returned in a different state. I was broken physically, and I was broken mentally. They [the traffickers] tortured me a lot; they didn't give me any food. Then they kept me under house arrest for five days. They didn't even let me eat. They also arranged for me to return to Bangladesh. They noticed that I had breathing problems and I could even die. They were really afraid of the police. The reason I went to Saudi Arabia was to raise my children. My dream is to get my children educated. If a girl like me wants to go abroad, there are 10 steps to follow in order to migrate legally. But we didn't receive the training beforehand. We believed what the broker said and didn't follow the government's rules for migration.

I think I'm successfully reintegrated. I'm better than before. Social workers from Socheton helped me. I did a lot of training. My family also really supported me, and now I'm running a shop next to my house. My shop is doing well. I didn't have problems with my family when I got back. They supported me. Neither my husband nor my mother-in-law had any problems with me. But I faced some problems from the rest of society. When my husband went out in public, he would get comments from people. Another thing is I couldn't go out. People used to laugh at me when I went out. I couldn't escape the shame. I stayed at home for two months. Then slowly I started to think, "It cannot go on like this anymore". Then, by God's grace, I got help from Socheton. People do not treat me like they used to. They have changed now. I got the Joyeeta Award, out of 600 to 700 others who were eligible. Chairmen, teachers, the mayors... such eminent people came and gave me the Joyeeta Award. People don't use bad words on me anymore.



As far as I know, everyone gets successfully reintegrated based on the way Anirban works. People can be successfully reintegrated. They want to change themselves. We help them; they help us. There are challenges in counselling people. When I was informed that Socheton provides these counselling services and training for reintegration, my husband didn't believe it. He was worried about where I was going and what might happen. Now, when we go to a victim's house, it is common that they don't believe [that we're really there to help]. They say it's all a lie. They don't believe us. Why would they let their girls go [to the counselling service and training]? Then we have to make them understand. Families can be a big challenge [to reaching survivors with support]. There are also social barriers. When victims come back from abroad, people hate them.

We arrange backyard meetings. I called the people in my whole village. I've had backyard meetings about child marriage and human trafficking to make people aware. Those who have papers, photocopies of passports, photocopies of visas, if they make a case (in the court), many people get their money back. Then the broker is jailed.

I think the government plays a role in supporting survivors for successful reintegration. I keep those who came from abroad like me in my thoughts, I wish that they could get services like me from Socheton. I will pray for Socheton my whole life.

## 7. I'm a Survivor Leader, After Terror on a Trawler

---

My name is MD. My hometown is in Teknaf, Cox's Bazar [Bangladesh]. I came [back to Bangladesh] through the Red Crescent Society from Sri Lanka. One of my friends from the neighboring locality proposed to me to go to Malaysia. I was a student in grade 8 back then. I got on a [fishing] trawler involuntarily. They forced me to get on it. After 8-9 days, we mistakenly entered the Malaysian border. They beat me a lot. They tortured me in such a way that I can't even say properly. They sent me to the border of Thailand. We somehow escaped. We couldn't eat anything for 24 days. Then the Sri Lankan Navy rescued us and took us to Sri Lanka. They provided the needed treatment for us. After three months and 19 days, we came back to Bangladesh with the help of the Red Crescent Society.

I didn't stay in any shelter home. I was in a life skill training program. After coming back to Bangladesh, I returned to my home. I cannot remember much, but my rehabilitation started maybe in 2012. I took training from Winrock's project. I learned to drive. Now I am a driver.

When a victim comes back to Bangladesh, it's usual to have a lot of loans over his head. Depression is common in such moments. According to my perspective, giving a victim his old life back is a successful rehabilitation. Alhamdulillah, at this moment I think I am successful. I have also got married. I have children as well. I bought a car by taking loans. The loan is almost paid. I have also built a house. I am leading a happy life now. I am the president of Anirban [organization]. I have been working since 2013 with Anirban. I know, it's tough to give everyone a life that I am leading, but at least I can help. From 2013, we have provided support to 400-500 victims.

There are so many examples of victims who have overcome hardships like me. The percentage varies from place to place. It varies between 40-70%. When I was a victim, I couldn't even speak properly. They took me to a union council after joining Anirban. The main purpose was to let others know about the pain I suffered from. When I was sharing my experience, I started crying. I wasn't even able to speak. At that time, I had so much problem talking. In 2012, when a new law regarding human trafficking was in the making, we were present there.

Even now I see bad dreams about those days. How terrifying those days were and how happy I am now. It took me over a year's time to be rehabilitated. When I share these experiences, I feel both happy and sad. The main obstacle to this reintegration process is that the male victims face the financial problem and female victims face social problems. Society doesn't accept female victims of trafficking. In Cox's Bazar, most people think that the female victims are harmful to the other girls in society. To make them acceptable we have to do counselling with members and many leaders in the society.

After taking the life skill training, I could understand what the right decision for me is and what's wrong. When I went back home, my family helped me a lot. When I came back here, both my mental and physical health was not okay. My elder brother who was studying at Chittagong University used to motivate me to forget all these [problems]. He took me to Chittagong. I stayed there for a month. I have been working since 2012. I have worked on so many projects.

But to be honest, 80% of work is done by NGOs. The government has no concern about us. There is no committee in the union council. The meetings are only held when we go there physically. It's supposed to be their responsibility but they are not doing anything.



## 8. My Secret Reintegration Journey as a Female

---

I am TM and I'm from Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. I'm a trafficking survivor. I am very well and successfully reintegrated now. I realised that I had stepped into the wrong path. The brokers deceived me. I will not trust any outsiders anymore. If I have to do something, I have to do it by myself.

After returning from abroad, I got admitted into YPSA and Anirban [organization]. I am much better than before. Anirban's members were also once trafficked. They came back and formed an organization of their own. These members work to ensure that the victims are not trafficked again.

The brokers took all the money from me. I came back empty-handed. I found out about Anirban and joined the Anirban member meeting. Then I found out that they work with human trafficking survivors. I talked to them, and they brought me to the YPSA Shelter Home. I was there for 5 to 6 months. They gave me training and counselling. Through this, I have freed myself from anxiety. My reintegration started after about 10 to 15 days and after 3 to 4 months I got back to my previous life.

A lot of people like that [victims of trafficking] came when I was at the YPSA Shelter Home. They could not eat or sleep at night. They have also recovered through counselling and training. If they became more mentally ill, they would see a doctor. This is how support was given. I have seen a lot of people who have been helped financially or otherwise. I've seen 10 to 15 cases like that.

When I returned from abroad, my mental state was much worse. I didn't eat properly, I didn't talk to anyone, I cried. Through counselling, I have regained my beautiful life. The biggest problem is the financial problem. If the victim is poor, they are trafficked for money.

Another problem is the lack of education. I was not educated, they would not let me go out of the house, I didn't even know the roads of the village. So, it was easy to deceive me. Poverty and lack of education are the two reasons why people are trafficked.



No one in the family or society knew that I was trafficked. I attended the training secretly. If they knew, they would say a lot of bad things behind my back, because we are girls, it doesn't happen with boys. Everyone sees girls as lesser than boys. It happens more in our rural areas.

If I filed a case, there would be a lot of talk in the society about what I did, why I did it, questions would arise. That's why I did not file any case (in court) to keep my dignity. In my opinion, justice would not have been done, only my values would have been disrespected.

Through training, I learned how to help the people around me. I have learned how to stand by them when needed. I didn't tell my friends about this because just like the people of the society they would talk about me.

It would have been better if the government, YPSA, Anirban had worked better on human trafficking. Then maybe human trafficking will stop in Bangladesh. If the government and these agencies keep working in this way, then those who returned after human trafficking will no longer be in trouble. The law mentions the punishment of those brokers. The law is in place but not enforced.

A seven-year (2016-2023) program, USAID Asia CTIP is a regional activity that focuses on transnational and regional challenges to combat human trafficking. The program aims to reduce the trafficking of persons in Asia through a coordinated and consolidated action by governments, civil society and business that will foster cross-border cooperation, develop opportunities for private-sector leadership and improve the quality of data associated with human trafficking. [Learn more about the project here.](#)

Resource Links:

[Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association \(ADHOC\)](#)

[Young Power in Social Action \(YSPA\)](#)

[Bangladesh Socheton Society Bangladesh](#)

[RDRS Bangladesh](#)

[USAID Bangladesh Counter Trafficking in Persons Project \(BCTIP\)](#)

[USAID Cambodia Counter Trafficking in Persons Project](#)

---

The report is designed by Humanity Research Consultancy.

All images used in this report are copy-right free and are taken from [Unsplash](#) (stock free photos), unless stated otherwise.