

Background information

pro filia

- organization for the promotion of health care and education for disadvantaged girls and women

Basic facts about the situation for girls and women

- According to the UN World Population Report from November 2008, poverty and hardship mainly affects the female part of the world's population. The report states that enormous disadvantages for females are widespread and deeply rooted in many cultures.

- To be born a girl in a developing country is often close to a guarantee of poverty, illness, violence, sexual exploitation, humiliation and a general lack of opportunity.

- In Africa and Southeast Asia, in particular, girls are considered mostly a burden. In these places and others, girls are routinely considered worthless because after marriage they work in a new family ('raising girls is like watering flowers in a neighbour's garden').

- More than 70 million girls (according to the International Labour Organization) work under extremely dangerous and exploitative conditions as prostitutes, housemaids, etc., with work days of up to 18 hours. Often these girls are exposed to violence and sexual abuse.

Basic facts about the situation for girls and women in Nepal

- Nepal has a population of 28 million and is one of the poorest countries on earth. About 45% of the population lives below the poverty line. The average annual income is about \$290. Women and girls are particularly prone to poverty, mostly in the country, but also in the urban Katmandu-valley.

- Only a third of Nepalese women can read and write. Most girls never go to school at all. This is due to their general lack of value in Nepalese society, the demand for hard work at home or in domestic service from an early age, arranged marriage, and so forth.

- Nepal is host to massive sexual trafficking: About ten to fifteen thousand girls are trafficked from Nepal into Indian brothels each year. They are sold on average for 800 Euro; and they generally range in age from 12 to 16 years old. (The youngest girl freed from a brothel was seven years old.) Nepalese girls are held to be especially attractive because of their light skin. Broken by gang rape and torture, drugged, they are entirely without rights. They have to have sex with up to thirty men per day. They live in rooms with up to twenty women and girls, so that they are available around the clock. It is completely common for them to die in the process; and there is a high rate of infection with HIV (80%), hepatitis, tuberculosis and the full range of venereal diseases. Of those who do manage to escape from the brothels, or who are freed, 80% are not welcomed back by their Nepalese families. They return ill, without education, income and hence without prospects for a decent life. And they are always brutally traumatized.

"Trafficking" can mean that these girls have been sold by parents or husband, that they have been lured by promises of work or marriage, or that they have simply been kidnapped.

- Kamalari practice (daughter selling) among the Tharu in Western Nepal: Girls aged between 6 and 16 are often sold by their families as a kamalari ('hard working woman'). They end up being exploited in private households or brothels. They are indentured servants or slaves.

- Girls are often abandoned after birth or shortly thereafter.

- Young mothers are cast out by their husbands because they have given birth to a girl.
- Girls are frequently subject to extensive violence inside and outside the home.
- Religious prostitution: Young girls are consecrated to Hindi Gods and serve as sex workers in temples.

Activities in support of girls and women in Nepal

- (mainly through the NGO MAITI Nepal, but also through terre des homes, Plan International, gtz, SOS-Kinderdoerfer, etc)
- Information campaigns for the mostly illiterate population in remote villages, using songs and theatre written by victims of trafficking (Children's Cultural Caravan). The aim is prevention as well as improving and facilitating the re-integration of traumatized girls and women into their families and villages.
 - Shelters and rehabilitation centers: provision of accommodation, food, medical and psychological care.
 - Schools and training centers for vulnerable girls and women and victims.
 - Transit homes, i.e. shelters for girls at the border to India: former victims—most of whom were rescued themselves and have been trained for this task—work together with border police to identify potential victims at the crossing check point. In this way about three to four girls are saved per day. Transit homes also give shelter and care to those who return from Indian brothels.
 - Hospices for terminally ill girls and women returning or being freed from Indian brothels. These women are normally completely on their own.
 - Programs of return for Kamalari-girls - through information and support of their original family and, if necessary, through court order (Plan International).
 - Microcredit programs.
 - Special programs such as the Biogas Program by the KfW Development Bank: Domestic Biogas programs (based on cattle dung) for the supply of energy for cooking, heating and light. These help women and girls in charge of gathering wood (involving walking and carrying bundles of wood up to three hours a day). These women and girls are heavily affected by exposure to harmful smoke in the house. Three hundred thousand biogas facilities are meant to be developed by 2010.

Aid possibilities via pro filia

- Adopt, support and sustain the activities locally developed by MAITI Nepal. Make these sources of support available to an ever greater number of girls. Given the high number of victims--about three hundred thousand Nepalese women and girls in Indian brothels alone--these offers of support (numbering a couple hundred places) are but a drop in the ocean of relevant need.
- Select certain MAITI activities for further development and support: for instance we might build or sustain a further transit home, fund further training opportunities for victims; and so on.

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