

The Importance of Research in Dealing With Trafficking in Children

Indrasari Tjandraningsih

Abstract. While there are so many policies and programs launched with the aim to deal with the problems of child trafficking in Indonesia and elsewhere in Southeast Asian countries, there is still little evidence on the effectiveness of the programs. This reflects a lack of knowledge and accurate data on the phenomenon in order to formulate an effective policy and program. There is a tendency that many implementing agencies are busy with running programs or projects on child trafficking suggested by donors and leaving a little room to question the broader context of the phenomenon or the relevance of the program with the existing local situation. Therefore, there is a need to build research and analytical skills within organizations dealing with program on child trafficking to enable themselves to analyze critically the problems and related programs/projects offered. A systematic knowledge derived from research will provide a strong data as the basis of any action taken. It will provide a more detailed and comprehensive understanding on the magnitude and the nature of the problem and thus will increase the effectiveness of the program. There are various ways to build research skills among others recruiting staffs with research knowledge/research experience that will be in charge in the research division, conducting research training for the existing staffs or providing internship in a research organization.

Keywords: child; child trafficking; research; training.

1. Introduction

The increasing incidents of child trafficking both in numbers of the trafficked children and in its spread throughout the world's continents has motivated various parties to get on their feet to do every efforts to combat it. The growing number of regional and international agencies/non-governmental organizations working hand in hand with governments and local NGOs as well as other community members is a sign that trafficking of children has to be tackled in a collaborative manner. A collaborative effort in combating child trafficking is the outcome of a comprehension that this is a complex phenomenon involving various parties functioning within a highly complicated network and takes

place in different places. It is also acknowledged that trafficking of children is a highly lucrative business based on a highly exploitative and abusive conduct on children.

Leading international (humanitarian) agencies and NGOs such as UNICEF, ILO, Anti-Slavery International (ASI), IOM (International Organization on Migration), ICMC (International Catholic Migration Commission), ECPAT (End Child Prostitution Pornography and Trafficking), Save the Children, World Vision, Human Rights Watch, Terres des Hommes, Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women and many others have mobilized resources to fight against child trafficking together with regional level NGOs like Child Right Asianet, Child Workers in Asia, Child Workers in Nepal, Regional Working Group on Child Labour, Asia Watch, etc. These agencies have developed numerous action programs in dealing with the problem of child trafficking in cooperation with relevant department of local governments and local NGOs which include advocacy, prevention, legal protection, capacity building, policy formulation and research.

This paper will focus on research as one important element in the efforts to combat child trafficking. It is widely known that designing a program needs an understanding on the nature of the problem in order to conduct an appropriate and favorable action. The relevant agencies initiated their programs by doing research to gather an understanding on the problem. The working mechanism of these agencies has to follow a series of method: starting with identifying and analyzing (researching) the nature of the problem comprehensively followed by program formulation, program implementation, program monitoring, program expansion or termination. Therefore, research is essential as the ground for actions in dealing with trafficking of children.

Various reports on child trafficking support the statement. Only to mention a few: ASI report on Human Traffic, Human Rights: Redefining Victim Protection (ASI website), ECPAT's on What The Professionals Know: The trafficking of children into, and through, the UK for sexual purposes (2001), ILO report on Unbearable to the Human Heart: Child Trafficking and Action to Eliminate It (2002), SEAMEO's reports on Combating the Trafficking of Children and their Exploitation in Prostitution and other Intolerable Forms of Child Labour in Mekong Basin Countries (1998), ICMC and ACILS's on Trafficking of Women and Children in Indonesia (2003). These are research-based reports which are utilised as the basis of recommendation for actions.

This paper will discuss further the importance of research in dealing with the problem of child trafficking. Besides referring to the observation on researches that have been done by the above mentioned

international agencies, this topic is based on my own experience in doing research, not particularly on child trafficking, but on child labor in general. In addition, working as a researcher in NGO community, the way many NGOs in Indonesia think about research also colors my view on the subject.

The paper consists of three parts. Following the introduction is the main point of the paper: the argument on the importance of research in dealing with the problem of child trafficking. There are three questions which will be dealt with in this part, namely: *a)* why is it important to do research? *b)* what kind of research should be done? and *c)* how to develop the research skills? An overview on researches on child trafficking in Indonesia will be provided as an illustration to get some empirical grounds of the discussion. The last part of the paper is a conclusion and some points of consideration.

2. The Importance of Research

The whole point of doing research is to find out the facts of a situation so that whatever action we undertake will help the children concerned (Maggie Black – ASI)

The above quotation, stresses two important points in doing research on children: that any action needs to be backed up by research and children is the beneficiaries of the action. I will discuss my view on research through three questions.

2.1 What is research?

Graue & Walsh define research is '...about interpreting data records and making those interpretations public' (1998). In order to be able to interpret data, there are four steps in a research process. The steps, as summarized by Jerome Kirk and Marc Miller are: invention (the preparation of the research design), discovery (the step of data collecting), interpretation (data analysis), and explanation (the presentation of the research result) (Riawanti 2004). The goal of the whole research process is '...the human construction of knowledge based on evidence and argument' (Graue & Walsh 1998). More specifically, the knowledge derived from research should be used as a direction for designing and assessing programs as well as mobilizing additional resources (ILO IPEC as quoted in Ennew 1998).

The above mentioned research purpose has several implications. The aim of research as a tool to provide information in developing programs and interventions imply that research is not neutral. It also

implies the perspective of the agencies that funded or carry out research (see also Ennew 1998) towards the problem and how to tackle the problem. In short, research activity in its fullest sense is like a window which allows anybody to 'look into the heart' of those who carry out research. However, there are various degree and characteristics of researches conducted by various agencies, which do not always reflect the ideal stance of research. I will deal with this issue later.

Research has much to do with the effectiveness of any intervention. It means that without research one cannot formulate proper intervention. As a global phenomenon child trafficking takes different forms in different regions, countries and sub-regions. ILO report stated that the different forms of the trafficking of children depend on the coincidence and combinations of causal factors, actors, route and mechanism as well as regional predominance of particular variables (2002).

This situation implies that there is a need to understand the nature of the problem of child trafficking at different level that may need different kind of intervention. It is therefore very important to acquire an understanding on the nature of the problem of child trafficking in a context-based approach. This approach provides a detailed knowledge and essential in dealing with child trafficking particularly in developing intervention programs. A context-based approach is an approach which focus on the local level; it is '...a culturally and historically situated place and time...that need a careful analysis of the relationship between the local and the larger societal contexts' (Graue & Walsh 1998). At the technical level, both writers explain that ' [d]ata records are constructed in and of the local contexts, but those records can not be interpreted without reference to their larger milieu' (1998).

Although this approach originated within a framework of child education research, it is suitable in the process of researching trafficked children. For example, a research on the situation of the trafficked child at her/his village of origin as the local context is needed but requires an analysis within a broader context of the trafficking chain in order to identify accurate intervention. A research on children lured into prostitution of Jakarta, West and East Java cases by Yayasan Kusuma Buana, Pusat Kajian Penelitian Masyarakat Atmajaya and IPEC ILO (1998) is an appropriate example of the kind of research. With the objective to identify preventive measures on child prostitution the research was conducted to gain a comprehensive knowledge on the complexity of the commercial sex industry in Java, started by doing field study at the village level where the prostituted children belong.

Research is not unfamiliar among action-oriented NGOs. In Black's words, many organizations conduct research but never manage to incorporate their findings into actions (1997). On the contrary, some organizations have been running programs without supported by research. This is what I meant in the earlier part of my paper that it is not always the case that research reflects its ideal stance. I will elaborate this with the general characteristic of the action program run by local NGOs. In many cases, (action) programs to deal with the problem of child trafficking at the local and national level in Indonesia were carried-out within a framework of cooperation with international agencies of a same concern. More often than not, the program is 'donor driven' and the framework of cooperation is more like a subcontracting mechanism. This kind of cooperation leaves little room for local NGOs to contribute their own ideas and perspectives on the program. An illustration of my own experience reflects the circumstances.

An international agency offered my organization to carry out a project on the assessment of child trafficking related programs run by NGOs in some six provinces in Indonesia. The 'what' and 'how' of the project was very detailed and when we tried to discuss the scope, time frame and budget since we had some different ideas on how the project should be arranged, it was said that it was not possible. Eventually both sides decided not to enter into cooperation.

Among some NGOs the implementation of program suggested by donor agency is rarely preceded by research to assure the relevance of the program with the local dynamics. Under such circumstances, it is very important to carefully consider whether the donor's perspective and strategy on the problem is suitable with the local situation. Hence, an understanding on the problem of child trafficking at local level is important as a foundation to assess and modify any program proposed to assure its relevance. At some level, some NGOs saw the program as a project following a trend of issue and thus ignoring their critical stance. Some cases show, when they carried out research project, it was merely a duplication of research already done by others.

Another element of research on child trafficking is its moral and ethical issues, besides its practical one. This relates to the research objective of what one is going to do with the information gathered from research and with the research process as well. Included in these issues are the researcher's obligation to inform the respondents about the whole story of the research, its objectives and the respondent's willingness to provide information. As also stated by Black (1998), a researcher has to prevent her/himself to make a false promise that the research will lead to the improvements in their lives, in order to win the respondents' consent. This is very important considering that in many cases the people

researched put much hope that immediately after the research there will be a significant change to their lives. More often than not, the hope becomes the reason for them to involve in a research. As far as possible a researcher has the obligation to explain, what the research is all about in its relation to the situation confronted by the children. A researcher is also required to show regard for the respondents' unwillingness to provide information.

2.2 What kind of research?

In general, there are two approaches in research: the conventional and the participatory approach. Included in the conventional approach are secondary and primary researches. Secondary research that is often also called desk or literature study is a research where a researcher collect information she/he is looking for, relying on already existing reports or documents. The report can be research reports, books, news in the media, statistical data, etc. A secondary research usually followed by the collection of the primary data, since the objective is to have an overview on the problem. More importantly secondary study will provide us with information on what other researchers have done so to avoid any duplication of research. A secondary data study might also enrich our knowledge on various perspectives on the problem of child trafficking.

The primary sources research which also known as field research commonly applies a qualitative and quantitative approach. Quantitative approach constitutes a variant of large-scale survey to the extent that it relies on some form of questionnaire, while the qualitative approach is essentially participatory, 'bottom-up' rather than 'top-down' approaches (Skeldon 2000).

Due to the nature of the problem of child trafficking that is not easily identifiable and approachable; many researches on child trafficking for sexual purpose were done in a qualitative approach. In-depth interview is commonly used as the method of data collection.

Participatory approach, as defined by Selener, is a process through which members of an oppressed group or community identify a problem, collect and analyze information, and act upon the problem in order to find solutions and to promote social and political transformation. Further he stated that the approach combines three principal activities: research, education and action (1997:17). In the field of child labor research the participatory approach has been developed as a consequence of the changing perspective in children's rights that have been endorsed by the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention recognizes that children are strong although vulnerable and provide contribution to

societies in their own right. Therefore children are viewed as active participants, also in research (Boyden & Ennew 1997).

This participatory approach in children-focussed research relies on children's voice to understand their real situation. Participatory approach means that children are put in the center of research process where their voice and action is taken into account rather than rely on adults (parents, teacher, the researchers themselves) perspectives (Boyden & Ennew 1997).

Innovative techniques such as drawings, role play, theatre, are important in the participatory approaches in research with children since it may very well represents the children's perspectives on their situation (Skeldon 2000).

In doing research with children, the researcher must be aware on the power relations between adult (the researcher) and children (the respondents). One has to keep in mind not to use the power relation in the research process since it will break the principle of the research approach.

This has much to do with attitude of the researcher towards children, which becomes a basis for a respectful relationship between researchers and the children. Three basic assumptions underlying this attitude: children are smart, they make sense and they want to have a good life (Walsh 1998).

3. Research on Child Trafficking in Indonesia: An Overview

A reading on research reports on child trafficking in Indonesia (Irwanto et.al 1998 & 2001, Suyanto 2002, Wahyuningsih 2002, ILO IPEC 2004a & b, ICMC-ACILS 2004) shows that most research were still done using conventional approach with qualitative and quantitative methods that relied on surveys, in-depth interviews and observations in data collection. This implies some situations: child trafficking is a new phenomenon and thus the researches on child trafficking were explorative and descriptive in nature in order to obtain the understanding on the scope and characteristics of child trafficking in Indonesia, and that the participatory approach has yet to be further introduced.

There are various methods to build research skill. It can start by developing a research division in the organization as a common practice among action-oriented or advocacy organization. With a specific task to do research this division will need some trained people with research skill.

The skill may be obtained by training after the recruitment or is a requirement in the recruitment process. Research training can be done within the organization by developing an in-house training inviting experienced researcher but it can also be done by on-the-job training or internship in a research institution.

However, as the effort to have a good researcher is a long-term investment and thus it is costly, other strategy to do research is to work in cooperation with an organization with research expertise, in particular that with sufficient knowledge and experience in doing research with children.

Although advocacy NGOs are aware on the need for doing research and have the enthusiasm to do research, it is in fact not easy to put into practice. There are some basic differences between research and advocacy work. The difference lies in the collecting and documenting data. Other difference is the time allocation. Research is a time-consuming activity and many advocacy NGOs are not too patient in doing it. Some even consider research as delaying action. My experience shows that research work is overwhelming for many NGO activists in particular when they have to collect and document the data in a systematic way and in writing the research report.

Considering the complex and sensitive nature of the problem of child trafficking and more particularly when the research employs the child centeredness approach, there is an additional skill needed to research the problem. It is the familiarity and empathy of the researcher to work with trafficked children in order to win the children's trust to be involved in the research process on their consent. The awareness to view children as equal to adult that also needs a respectful behavior is the precondition to have empathy with the children.

4. Conclusion

As a complex phenomenon, child trafficking for sexual purpose certainly needs a multi approach method that complement each other and allowing us to get a comprehensive as well as detailed picture of the problem. Although, as far as I understand, there is not yet a research on child trafficking for sexual purpose, which apply the child centered and participatory approach, it is suggested here to consider the approach in particular to gain the children's view and hope to overcome the problem they encounter. As an alternative to the conventional research, this approach may not be easily accepted especially since it involves values and assumptions both on the position of adults towards children and on the obligation of adults to protect children. At the practical level, to exercise

the approach will need a set of requirements of the researcher's attitude in dealing with children.

Considering the collaborative efforts that include local NGOs and government and regional/international organizations as the most suitable working mechanism in dealing with the problem of child trafficking, it is more appropriate to develop an arena where there is an opportunity to exchange perspectives and ideas and mutual learning in the collaboration, rather than doing the work merely as a project that comes from one side to the other. An equal and critical collaboration will be most effective in combating the problem of child trafficking.

It is clear that to be able to deal with the problem of child trafficking, research is one essential element in particular to get detailed information to produce effective action programs and policy. However, in general research is still a marginal activity in this area. Many organizations are more concern on formulating programs, policies or advocacy rather than on research. Because research is costly and time-consuming and considered as a separate program from action, not many organizations are interested to fund or to do research.

Many steps have still to be taken to put research as a core activity in the attempts to deal with the problem of child trafficking. Other task to do is to 'create synergies among existing initiatives' (quoted by Ennew from Grumsrud & Miljeteig, 1998). In order to do that, a strategy to confront a number of problems in research on child trafficking is needed. Ennew's list of the problems with research on child labors that fits to the problems of research in child trafficking is worth to consider: (1) too many interested parties but little integration of efforts and much duplication, with consequent gaps in information; (2) poor research design, which can include reliance on a small range of data collection techniques; small scale surveys and rapid assessment approaches that are neither comparable nor followed up by further and in-depth approach; lack of attention to the need for comparability and lack of integration with other information; and (3) relatively low levels of analysis among some researchers of the requirements of data collection for the development of routine monitoring system (1998).

Given the existing condition of research on child trafficking that is still to be improved, there are several recommendations, adapted from Judith Ennew, which need consideration: (1) find scientifically viable ways of reconciling local and global understandings of child trafficking; (2) avoid duplication, repetition and competition in the production and management of information about child trafficking; (3) build on existing expertise, experience and information; (4) promote, develop and share methods of data collection and analysis that go beyond questionnaire

surveys, interview and purely statistical research, as well as being culturally appropriate and child appropriate; (5) promote scientific protocol design, with particular emphasis on transparency and triangulation, including development of appropriate analytical skills; (6) develop sustainable systems for measuring and monitoring child trafficking through mutual learning, sharing and comparative studies; (7) promote objective, documentation and evaluation of existing and innovative approaches to research on child trafficking, especially with respect to the children's participation; (8) develop sustainable and cumulative capacity building system based on local expertise; and (9) involve the media locally and globally.

Those recommendations clearly go to the direction that dealing with child trafficking is a continuous effort that needs an overall strategy involving numerous organizations with their specific capacity. Sharing and mutual learning is the keywords in any attempt to deal with child trafficking problem successfully.

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Indrasari Tjandrningsih, researcher at AKATIGA Foundation – Center for Social Analysis Bandung, Indonesia, Email: akatiga@indosat.net.id; indrasariasih@yahoo.com

