

HUMAN TRAGEDY

occurs on all continents but can be observed in microcosm along the eastern border of India in the state of West Bengal, adjacent to neighboring Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan. Jessore Road, the ancient trade route from Kolkata (Calcutta) serves as a primary trafficking and child exploitation conduit. Along this road, and in the surrounding villages and borderlands, can be found both the causes and effects of this human predation--poverty, unemployment, limited educational opportunities, and government indifference.

The JESSORE ROAD PROJECT is a photographic documentation of human movement and commercial traffic along an international corridor that reveals villagers, their landscapes and market places--emporiums of goods and services, and bazaars of humanity.

Documentary photographer George McLemore artistically captures the spirit of the people of the Jessore Road. His photos reveal the bonds of humanity, motherhood, and ultimately, survival.



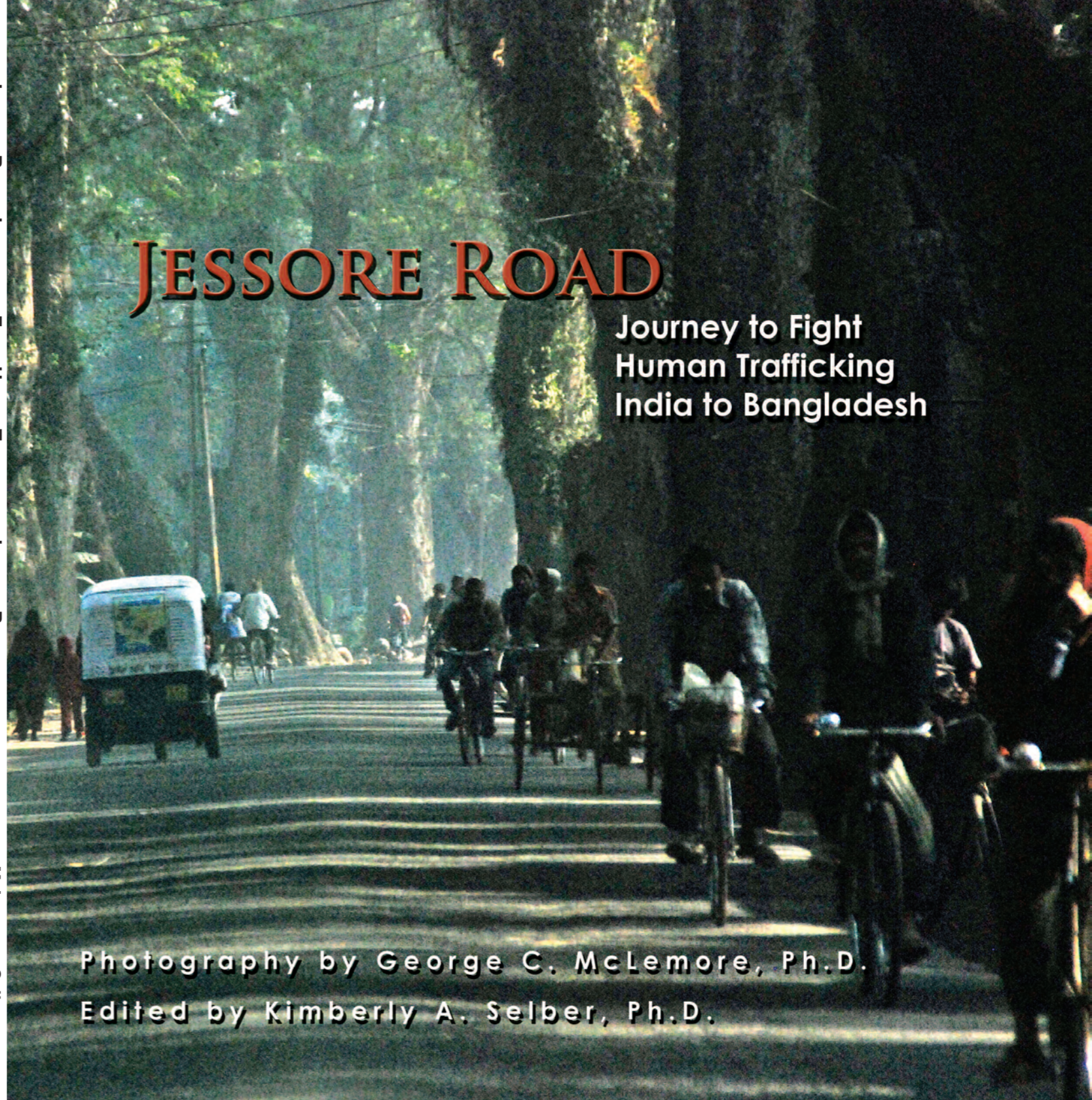
JESSORE ROAD: JOURNEY TO FIGHT HUMAN TRAFFICKING, INDIA TO BANGLADESH

McLemore • Selber

JESSORE ROAD

Journey to Fight
Human Trafficking
India to Bangladesh

Photography by George C. McLemore, Ph.D.
Edited by Kimberly A. Selber, Ph.D.





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George C. McLemore

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Copy Editors:
Gregory M. Selber, Ph.D.
Kimberly A. Selber, Ph.D.

Contributing Writers:
Roop Sen
George C. McLemore

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A P H O T O G R A P H ' S E S S E N C E

resides in its composition, which in turn is determined by the photographer's grasp and understanding of the subject before the lens. While on the road to Jessore the images for this essay were enabled only because I was guided and supported by the penetrating cultural insight, sharp sociological acumen and, most importantly, firm friendship of my Groupe Developpement/Sanjog colleagues, Marine Garnier and Nisha Mehroon.

To them this volume is dedicated.

F O R E W O R D

The journey from Jessore to Calcutta represents the histories and realities of many lives. As a second-generation immigrant from erstwhile East Bengal to Calcutta, I feel connected to hear personal histories of people who have also made those journeys in different contexts and to different consequences.

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This book is neither about trafficking nor about illegal migration. It is not to talk about exploitation. The book is meant to give its audience a taste of lives of people who live in the continuum of Jessore Road—and the images of the terrain, the border, the context therein.

However, when one looks at the glimpses of people in movement, in brick kilns, women in prostitution or their children, one cannot ignore the various contradictions that this road holds. It holds tales of hope and despair, glimpses of barriers and connectivity, movement and stagnation. Particularly telling are the glimpses of brothels and the lives of women and children who live there—and the men who visit the places.

The purpose of George's journey along the Jessore Road was to capture the visuals of the journey, and try and visually examine the elements in the context that is so inextricably linked to the phenomenon of trafficking of Bangladeshi girls and women to India, for purposes of sex trade. Their journey is the same as all of the others

who come to India, with or without papers, for health services, tourism, business or trade, or simply to connect with their folks and family living across borders. Yet, their outcome is so different.

Groupe Developpement is an international non-profit organization that supports about 40 community-based organizations who work on both sides of the border, along the road and in adjoining villages. The organizations work in their communities to prevent children and adolescents from being trafficked across the border. They lobby with governments of both countries to remove travel embargoes and restrictions, and make migration easier so that they do not have to rely on agents and touts to smuggle them across the border. They are working with women in prostitution and their children in Jessore and West Bengal's North 24 Parganas District to prevent more girls being trafficked into brothels, and to enable the children to have an alternative to second-generation prostitution. They are engaged in trying to make the journey along Jessore Road safe for all, so that people can realize the dreams and plans they begin with when they travel along the road. To learn more about their work, you can read a report called 'Barefoot Soldiers in the Frontiers,' published by Groupe Developpement.

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Roop Sen,
Director (South Asia Regional Office)
Groupe Developpement



INTRODUCTION

Worldwide human trafficking exists on a larger scale in the early 21st century than at any point in human history. Approximately 600,000 to 800,000 victims annually cross international borders worldwide; up to 18,000 are trafficked into the U.S., according to the U.S. Department of State, including women, men and children. Victims of trafficking are exploited for purposes of commercial sex, including prostitution and the pornography industry. Also, trafficking leads to labor exploitation such as domestic servitude, sweatshop and factory labor, or migrant agricultural work. The International Labor Organization estimates that worldwide there are 246 million exploited children ages 5 to 17 involved in debt bondage, forced recruitment for armed conflict, prostitution, the illegal drug trade, and other illicit activities.

Child trafficking is particularly pernicious, because it has become highly lucrative as women and children are considered commodities that can be "sold" several times over. With permeable borders like the one that exists between India and Bangladesh, child trafficking has expanded around the globe and it is no longer accurate to assume that victims are moved only from poor to wealthier countries. A misconception exists that violence is the only mode for child trafficking, when in fact the victims are often tricked, deceived, forced and sometimes even sold by parents and coerced into situations from which escape is impossible.

The lack of employment in rural environments leads women and children into illegal migration through traffickers who offer "package deals." Deceptive tactics such as false promises of careers in business factories and households are often used to lure women and children into the trafficking network. Women are drawn to foreign countries in the hope of obtaining legitimate work, where they are then paid meager wages; poverty eventually forces them into the prostitution industry. The trafficking of children is usually by way of kidnap-



ping or abduction; violence or threats of violence then keep them in place. Brothel managers sometimes employ agents to collect photos of young schoolgirls that are then used for their selection for eventual kidnapping or coercion. Frequently, agents pose as potential husbands to deceive the family of a young girl into thinking that the "rich husband" will assume responsibility for the family's financial burdens. However, the girl will end up being sold to other traffickers and forced into prostitution.



Jessore Road

THE JESSORE ROAD

This human tragedy occurs on all continents but can be observed in microcosm along the eastern border of India in the state of West Bengal, adjacent to neighboring Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan. Jessore Road, the ancient trade route from Kolkata (Calcutta) serves as a primary trafficking and child exploitation conduit. Along this road, and in the surrounding villages and borderlands, can be found both the causes and effects of this human predation—poverty, unemployment, limited educational opportunities, and government indifference.

The JESSORE ROAD PROJECT is a photographic documentation of human movement and commercial traffic along an international corridor that reveals villagers, their landscapes and market places—emporiums of goods and services, and bazaars of humanity. This photo essay gains meaning and clarity through its revelation of the following four dynamics:

First, many of the poor in Bangladesh aspire to move to India, to pursue hopes for a better life. However this pursuit can make them vulnerable to the predations of the trafficking industry. Jessore Road is the artery connecting the city of Jessore in Bangladesh to the metropolis of Calcutta, which is a nexus point for trafficking into sex work and bonded labor in other large cities on the subcontinent.

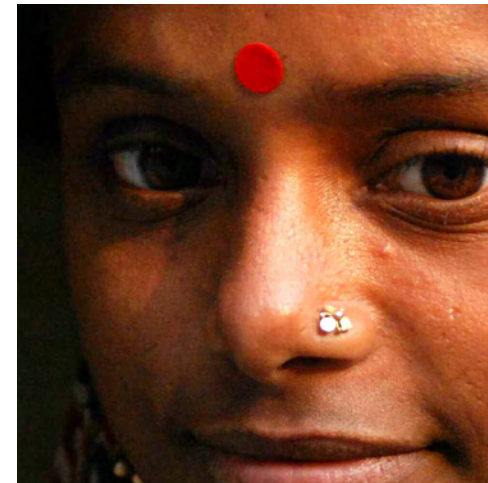
Second, movement of the poor along the border takes many forms, both legal and non-legal, and is exceptionally difficult. Lack of passports, visas, travel embargoes, and discrimination in migration policies often necessitate the use of informal, illegal and often dangerous methods, exposing people to rapacious border security forces of India and Bangladesh.

Third, cultural conservatism does not prevent sex and trafficking markets in Bangladesh. The supply end of the market can be easily explained through the feminization of poverty; however, prevailing social, religious and political ideologies do not inhibit men from buying sex and female companionship.

Fourth, the demand for sex workers is great from men throughout the large and small cities in this border region. Jessore Road passes through 24 North Parganas, an Indian government administrative territory where more than 25 red-light districts contain between 2,000 and 4,000 women and girls in prostitution. The majority of these individuals are victimized into prostitution through coercion, betrayal and abuse.

THE PROJECT

The JESSORE ROAD PROJECT, conceived by Indian human rights activist Roop Sen, regional director for South Asia of the French non-governmental organization GROUPE DEVELOPPEMENT (GD), is part of a campaign against transnational human trafficking and is supported by GD and the European Commission. The project was implemented by George McLemore, an American Fulbright Scholar and documentary photographer, with Marine Garnier, a French communication-liaison officer for GD with extensive development work in Asia, including India and Vietnam. Nisha Mehroon, a Bengali sociologist and project officer for GD, provided the cultural-historical-political backgrounding for the project in addition to all Bengali translation responsibilities.



G R O U P E D E V E L O P P E M E N T

16 GROUPE DEVELOPPEMENT (GD) is an international NGO that works to fight poverty and provide livelihood options for populations trapped in poverty. In addition GD is committed to supporting initiatives that protect children from trafficking, sexual abuse, exploitation and prostitution as part of its commitment to supporting the movement against commercial sexual exploitation of children led by ECPAT International. Its programs are based in Africa, South and Latin America Eastern Europe, plus South and Southeast Asia. GD is supported by Air France, The European Commission and various business corporations.

SANJOG, an agency of GD in South Asia, is an Indo-Bangladeshi regional anti-trafficking project on prevention of trafficking and rehabilitation of children and adolescents who are victims of trafficking and exploitation. This consortium project aims to build linkages between initiatives in sources, transit and destination points of trafficking to establish continuity in care as well as prevention strategies and programs. The project works along the following axes of intervention:

Protection & prevention—To reduce the socio-economic vulnerabilities of children at risk by facilitating education and vocational training; working with families and communities and state agencies to check trafficking in adolescents and women.

Psychosocial rehabilitation—To ensure children's rights to protection and rescue from exploitation, recovery from trauma, repatriation and restoration to their families and reintegration.

Regional cooperation—To ensure that the countries involved in the project (India and Bangladesh) develop stronger communication between state agencies as well as civil society to better deal with the organized crime of trafficking.

Key elements of the project:

1. Education, vocational training, job placement, and micro-finance programs for girls to protect them from being trafficked or married before adulthood.
2. Shelter, educational-vocational training of children and adolescents working in railroad stations and living in the streets.
3. Building capacities of NGOs working to prevent trafficking in transit and border areas.
4. Working with local government, judicial and law enforcement agencies to enforce existing anti-trafficking policies and legislation.
5. Using media to strengthen anti-trafficking public opinion.

JOIN THE JOURNEY TO FIGHT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

C O N T A C T G R O U P E D E V E L O P P E M E N T

www.groupedeveloppementsouthasia.org
sanjog@gdsouthasia.org

G D Regional Office South Asia

50 E. Hazra Road, 700 068 Kolkata, West Bengal, India
+913324682871

Roop Sen: South Asia Regional Office Director,
roop.sen@gdsouthasia.org

Marine Garnier: Communication and Liaison Officer,
marine.garnier@gdsouthasia.org

G D Headquarters (France)

Frederic Boisset: Child Protection Department Director,
fboisset@groupe-developpement.org

C o o r d i n a t o r i n U S

George McLemore:
georgecmclemore@gmail.com
1401 St. Edwards Dr., #105, Austin, TX 78704
786.247.3754



GEORGE C. MCLEMORE, Ph.D.
Documentary Photographer

George McLemore

first discovered the cultures and human complexities of South Asia through a camera lens as an American Peace Corps Volunteer to West Bengal, India in the 1960s. He continues to document—in James Agee's words “the cruel radiance of what is”—the subcontinent that includes India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. Unlike other arts that construct, reveal and comment on the human condition, photography inherently functions by and through the raw physicality before the camera. McLemore believes the photographer should accept a moral imperative to be faithful to what is, composing images that testify to that reality. He argues that the unaltered photograph best communicates Agee's idea of the cruelty of our lives, and that documentary photography's charge and responsibility is to show how our lives are constrained by our bodies, our cultures, our histories. He attempts to create images that avoid the easy, the comfortable, the politically acceptable—instead, making pictures that authentically embrace the pain and ecstasy of life.

Dr. McLemore taught Communication Studies, Photography and Photojournalism before his retirement from The University of Texas-Pan American in 2005. He co-directed several student Study/Travel Abroad programs to Spain, Turkey, Greece, Mexico and India and has received three Fulbright Awards from the Council for International Exchange of Scholars sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. In 2000-2001 as a Fulbright Senior Scholar he taught Media Criticism at Manipal University in Karnataka state in south India and in 2004 was appointed a Fulbright Senior Specialist to the Mudra Institute of Communication in the Indian state of Gujarat. McLemore has lectured at numerous educational institutions throughout India and Nepal. In 2008 he will be a visiting Fulbright Scholar to the Institute of Advanced Communication, Education and Research, an affiliate of Nepal's Pokhara University in Kathmandu.

The French non-governmental agency Groupe Developpement commissioned McLemore in December 2007 to document in *THE JESSORE ROAD PROJECT* images that reveal the evidence of human trafficking between India and Bangladesh.

JESSORE ROAD

Journey to fight human trafficking: India to Bangladesh

**JESSORE ROAD,
ON THE WAY TO BANGLADESH BORDER**

In the early morning, a local school bus rickshaw travels the same busy South Asian corridor as do smugglers and traffickers with their human cargo.



**BOY LABORER IN BRICK KILN,
JESSORE ROAD, INDIA**

Daily hard and heavy labor is often the destiny
of children in South Asia.



**LABORER, BRICK KILN,
BANGLADESH**

Brick kilns dot the landscape along the Jessore Road, where on average, a laborer earns less than 100 Bangladesh Taka (approximately \$2) for making 1,000 bricks, each weighing about 15 pounds.



**YOUNG MAN,
ALONG JESSORE ROAD, INDIA**

Even with the burden of heavy and arduous work, young boys are open and receptive to outsiders.



**MIGRANT CHILD LABORER, BRICK KILN,
INDIA**

Families with children migrate from Bangladesh and the adjoining eastern Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand, returning to their homelands when the annual monsoons terminate opportunity for work. This migratory life cycle prevents most formal education for the children and leads to economic, physical and sexual exploitation, especially of women and girls by labor contractors.



**WOMAN LABORER,
BANGLADESH**

Women who work at brick kilns are subjected to added abuse and exploitation. Sexual services are sometimes demanded by labor contractors or kiln owners.



**PROUD WOMAN WORKER,
ALONG JESSORE ROAD, BANGLADESH**

In India and Bangladesh women and men working in kilns earn equal pay - slightly more than the equivalent of \$2 - to make 1,000 bricks.



**YOUNG VILLAGE WOMAN,
ATTENDING LOCAL COLLEGE,
VILLAGE ALONG THE JESSORE ROAD,
BANGLADESH**

In recent years, Bangladesh has achieved marked success in providing higher education access to rural young people. Government stipends that enable girls' attendance in primary and secondary school also provide an incentive for parents to allow their daughters to receive an education. Ironically, the proportion of boys in schools has dropped.



**BROTHER AND SISTER LABORERS, BRICK KILN,
INDIA**

While earning half the wages of an adult and suffering from neglect and abuse, such children receive little security from their families, who do not prevent their exploitation at the hands of contractors.



**MOTHER AND SON LABORERS, BRICK KILN,
BANGLADESH**

Laborers in brick kilns along the Jessore Road are usually not from the adjacent villages but instead migrate from distant regions of India and Bangladesh. Local villagers are often hostile to their presence because of the abuse and exploitation that occurs among the migrant families.



**VILLAGE SCHOOLGIRLS,
INDIA, NEAR BANGLADESH BORDER**

When village girls acquire primary education they immediately become more resistant to the promises and predations of human traffickers that would lure them into the world of sex work.



**BORDER SECURITY FORCE GUARD,
INDIA-BANGLADESH BORDER CROSSING**

Well-guarded and controlled at major crossing points, the 4,000-km Indian-Bangladesh border is still porous. Women in prostitution say that having sex with border officials can "pay" for their passage when they do not have money or official documents.



**LONG-HAUL TRUCK DRIVERS,
BONGAON, INDIA**

Trucks are the primary vehicles for the transport of commercial goods along the busy and congested Jessore Road. In the border city of Bongaon, often 5,000 trucks are parked waiting to unload and load their cargo. An estimated 500 to 700 women and girls cater to the drivers' demand for prostituted sex. Many of these women are from Bangladesh, divorced, widowed or left with no income security, and thereby compelled into prostitution.



**TRUCK DRIVER,
INDIA**

Truck drivers on the Jessore Road are predominantly from the Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. While providing comparatively good wages, long-haul truck driving necessitates extended absences from families, making the drivers frequent clients for women in prostitution. These men are often targeted by awareness campaigns on HIV/AIDS from local health clinics. Just behind South Africa and Nigeria, India ranks 3rd worldwide with 3.6 million infections.



**BICYCLE RICKSHAW
WALLAH, BORDER TOWN, BANGLADESH**

Rickshaw pullers along the Jessore Road earn around 50 Bangladesh Taka per day. Much of their earnings come from cross-border smuggling activities where their rickshaw becomes a "cover" for those operations. Such men are especially good sources of information for researchers of trafficking.



**BORDER VILLAGE WOMAN,
ALONG THE KOLKATA-JESSORE RAILROAD,
BANGLADESH**

Migration and mobility options for women in the border villages are limited; few know the functions of passports and visas. Nevertheless, many men from this area migrate to Saudi Arabia and Malaysia, their recruitment and travel facilitated by labor agents.



**VILLAGE BOYS,
INDIAN VILLAGE NEAR BANGLADESH BORDER**

Diesel fuel is cheaper in Bangladesh than India. Rice, sugar and cows are less expensive in India than Bangladesh. These commodities, in addition to arms and drugs, are regularly smuggled across the border. This trafficking is controlled by a network of local men of power and influence in collusion with border police from both countries. Village boys are recruited to be human vehicles for this illegal commerce.



**WOMEN WAITING FOR CUSTOMERS,
JESSORE BROTHEL,
BANGLADESH**

The Jessore red-light district includes approximately 200 women engaged in prostitution. Some have come by "choice," fleeing discrimination resulting from their being non-earning, unmarried girls in villages. This arrangement does provide a means of income along with rare independence. In fact, it enables them to contribute to their families' support.



**WOMAN SEX WORKER,
JESSORE BROTHEL, BANGLADESH**

Young women between 14 and 18 are most in demand by clients of prostitution. However, by the time they are 30 they lose their value in the sex-work industry. To survive, they have few options other than pressing their daughters into the profession or trafficking another young girl to work for them.



**JESSORE BROTHEL SEX WORKER,
BANGLADESH**

A distinct "community" and mutual support system often exists among the women who work in this profession, as well as cruel competition where aging means earning less. The conservative civil society of Bangladesh has, thus far, only demanded eviction of these women from brothels as a solution to trafficking.



**WAITING BROTHEL CUSTOMERS,
JESSORE RED LIGHT DISTRICT, BANGLADESH**

Selling sex throughout South Asia is stigmatized, including in Bangladesh. Buying sex, however, is less strongly condemned. Research by Dr. Melissa Farley and Roop Sen on men's motives in buying sex in this geographical area found that such men possessed extremely ambivalent relationships with all women, but were especially hostile to those in prostitution. The men attempt to prolong their commercial exchange, believing that the women are out to cheat them.



**PROFESSIONAL SEXUAL HEALTH COUNSELOR,
BARASAT, INDIA.**

Small-town clinics provide counseling, medical assistance and birth control information to women in prostitution. Here a professional displays a model of Buladi, the avatar of public health information in India. While millions of Rupees are used to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS, sex workers have little recourse to protection from violence by their clients, madams or brothel owners. Many females are introduced to prostitution in their early adolescence and many eventually are trafficked to India from Bangladesh.



**PALASH MONDOL: LOCAL ACTIVIST,
FOUNDER MEMBER OF A COMMUNITY-BASED
ORGANISATION,
*SUNDERBANS UNNAYAN BHAVAN***

In a rural area prone to trafficking, the non-governmental organization Sunderbans Unnayan Bhavan runs a vocational tailoring training program for adolescents. Tailoring is not the complete answer to poverty, but the girls who learn this craft are less likely to be exploited. This NGO also lobbies with the local government agents who monitor migration of children.



**"FLYING" SEX WORKERS,
RURAL BORDER AREA, INDIA**

These impoverished women live in border villages. They are called "flying sex workers" because they practice their trade in nearby hotels and lodges, often servicing the border defense soldiers and police that patrol the area.



YOUNG PEER EDUCATOR IN AN NGO HEALTH CLINIC DISCUSSING HIV/ AIDS PREVENTION, MATIA RED LIGHT DISTRICT, INDIA

HIV/AIDS counseling centers in red-light areas seek to promote safe sex. Often these peer educators are women who have a link with the sex-worker profession and the local community. Such peer educators usually have to declare their support for the legalization of prostitution in order to retain their jobs, a demand that is generated by madams, pimps and brothel owners.



**INDIAN VILLAGE MOTHERS TELLING STORIES
ABOUT THEIR DAUGHTERS WHO "DISAPPEARED"
AFTER MARRIAGE OR JOB PROMISES WERE MADE**

Often, village girls are lured by promises of domestic jobs in Kolkata (Calcutta) or distant Mumbai (Bombay) and Delhi. The parents' income needs inhibit their suspicions until they lose contact and finally conclude the daughter has disappeared. Fearful of their own complicity, the parents are hesitant to file official grievances with authorities. In addition, the police are reluctant to pursue cases because it would mean an investigation for which there are no available funds.



**VILLAGE MOTHER,
SUNDERBANS DELTA, INDIA**

The prospect of a life of hard, daily labor hauling water and firewood makes village girls susceptible to enticements by traffickers who promise them jobs in the cities where they will earn "good money."



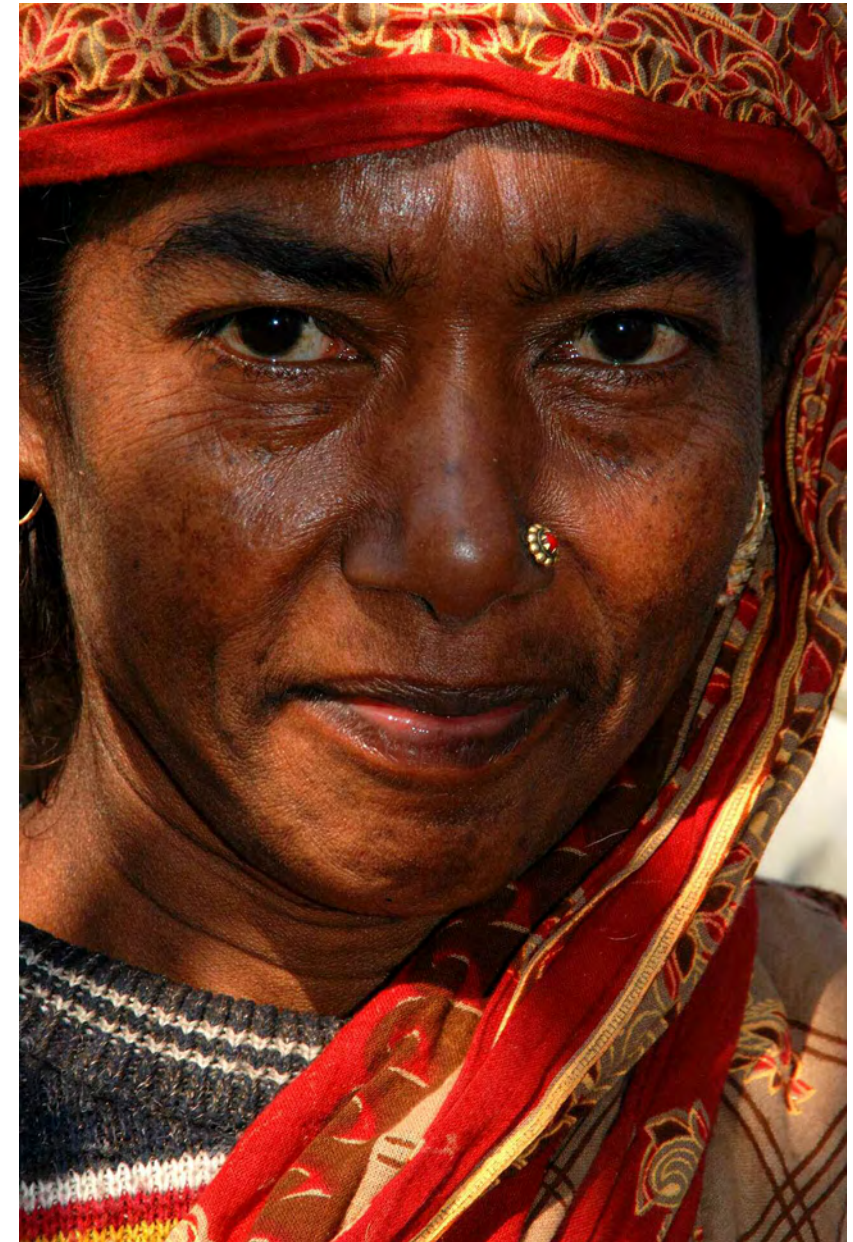
**YOUNG BRIDE, VILLAGE POND, SUNDERBANS,
INDIA-BANGLADESH BORDER**

Early marriage is a common feature of village life. Parents often will allow a young daughter to marry a man who requires no dowry, thereby enabling traffickers to draw girls into commercial sex or exploitative labor.



**WORKER, FISH HATCHERY,
JESSORE ROAD, BANGLADESH**

Many saltwater and freshwater fish hatcheries are situated in the coastal regions of the India-Bangladesh border, providing seasonal work for migrants and locals. Women and children can work 10 to 12 hours each day, often in neck-deep water, catching tiger prawns and fish. For this labor they earn the equivalent of approximately 50 cents.



**JESSORE ROAD TRAVEL**

Means of personal transport along the Jessore Road to border crossings can be crowded, strenuous and sometimes dangerous.



Groupe Developpement is an international agency that works towards empowerment of those in poverty, with a commitment to protect children and adolescents from abuse and exploitation. Its

Child Protection Department supports local NGOs across 20 countries of the world, through consortiums and networks on alternative livelihood and/or child protection programmes, working in partnership toward sustainability of those actions. In South Asia, the organisation supports over 85 NGOs and community-based organisations in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Financial support for sponsored projects is drawn from European and international public co-financing agencies, including the European Commission. In addition to public funding, 50 per cent of the funds is raised by the organisation foundations, corporate partners and individuals – to ensure civil society leverage needed to make a greater difference with their participation.



SANJOG, an agency of GD in South Asia, is an Indo-Bangladeshi programme that aims to prevent trafficking and exploitation of

children and adolescents. The programme includes projects that aim to prevent trafficking in children from rural areas of Bangladesh, Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, empower children of women in prostitution to prevent second-generation prostitution, and ensure protection of child-survivors rescued from exploitative labour and prostitution. It also aims to help facilitate survivor reintegration, support prosecution of traffickers, help build partnerships between organisations working in source transit and destination points of trafficking, work to prevent cross-border trafficking between Bangladesh and India, and repatriate victims of transnational trafficking. It also supports programmes that address vulnerability of children in other situations of sexual abuse and exploitation – including children who live on streets and railway stations, single migrant children, and transgender adolescents, who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exploitation.

The programme aims to strengthen coordination between NGOs working in source, transit and destination points of trafficking, facilitate inter-organisational flow of learning and knowledge, and build a South Asian movement in synergy and alignment with others, against violence against children.

