A photograph of four young men gathered around a smartphone. One man on the left, wearing a red and white checkered shirt, is pointing at the screen. The other three men, wearing dark grey t-shirts with a logo, are looking at the phone with interest. They are outdoors under a green metal structure. The text "ISSARA INSTITUTE | 2016 ANNUAL REPORT" is overlaid in white. A decorative circular logo with a padlock is in the bottom right corner.

ISSARA INSTITUTE | 2016 ANNUAL REPORT



COVER: SPREADING THE WORD ON GOLDEN DREAMS. ISSARA OFFICER YE MIN THU (ANDREW) GETS THE GOLDEN DREAMS SMARTPHONE APP ONTO THE PHONES AND INTO THE LIVES OF YOUNG MIGRANT WORKERS IN THAILAND.

THIS PAGE: ISSARA FREEDOM OF CHOICE CLIENTS.



CONTENTS

Welcome from the Founder & Executive Director	2
Welcome from the Chair of the Board	4
8 Key Elements of the Issara Model	6
Issara's 3 Core Program Areas	8
Issara Inclusive Labour Monitoring (ILM) at-a-glance	9
Measuring our impact on systems and people	10
What does human trafficking look like in global supply chains in Southeast Asia?	12
Issara Labs: Research, Technology and Empowered Worker Voice	14
Business & Human Rights: Strategic Partners Program	20
Freedom of Choice: Worker and Victim Empowerment	24
2016 Financials	29

WELCOME FROM THE FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear partners and supporters,



In 2016, Issara Institute celebrated its first full year as a registered 501(c)(3) not-for-profit in the United States and non-profit foundation in Thailand, although Project Issara was launched in January 2014 as an independent project run through the UK charity Anti-Slavery International. With a staff of three and a multi-year grant for \$265,000 from a single donor—Humanity United—we continued the survival of the multi-lingual hotline we had launched while in the United Nations five years prior, and reached out to global brands and retailers to test their appetite for a totally new human rights-centered model of supply chain labour risk monitoring, mitigation, and solutions: we called it Inclusive Labour Monitoring (ILM). Within the first year of our launch, ten global brands, retailers, and importers from the UK and USA were signed on as partners to test

our new model with their Thai shrimp supply chains, and three new private foundations also supported our supply chain and worker empowerment work.

The following two years—2015 and 2016—were full of growth and learning, with our budget growing by over ten times, staff growing by five times, and supply chain work expanding to more food and farming products such as coconut, pineapple, sauces, poultry, and fruit. Over 50,000 workers were connected to Inclusive Labour Monitoring when we started to launch multi-channel communications including Facebook, Line, Viber, and our Burmese-language Android smartphone application, Golden Dreams.

Issara was started by a team of anti-trafficking practitioners, some of whom had been based in the region and running and/or serving in technical positions in the United Nations and leading NGOs for 10-20 years. At Issara, the pace by which we forge partnerships and see concrete improvements in the lives of migrant workers from working with businesses directly in their supply chains has been breathtaking, exciting, motivating, and sometimes terrifying all at the same time—especially as compared to the pace we were used to in our previous working environments. In our second year, we were able to start building out our Business and Human Rights team, with seasoned practitioners from the business consulting, advisory services, and ethical sourcing worlds, while also building out our Burmese and

Cambodian teams in Thailand to manage our outreach, worker voice, and Freedom of Choice activities. The richness and complexity of our data grew, and in 2016 we focused on evolving our data infrastructure, which has been crucial to our scalability. Our team on the ground has grown, as has our fantastic group of committed technical advisors supporting us remotely from the US and Europe (our beloved “nerds”) to ensure that our technology and methodological approaches are always cutting edge and best practice. In my own 20 years of service in international development, I have never been so regularly humbled and inspired by the dedication, creativity, sincerity, and positive energy of my Issara colleagues.

Learning and sharing are important to Issara and to our unique group of stakeholders. I hope this 2016 annual report is the first of many years of our sharing our approaches, outcomes, challenges, and lessons learned that make a meaningful contribution to the anti-human trafficking and responsible sourcing communities, and the lives of thousands of migrant workers. I sincerely thank all of our outstanding, indefatigable staff and fantastic donors and partners for getting us to where we are today.



Dr. Lisa Rende Taylor

WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD



The Issara Institute's founding is extremely timely in the context of growing global efforts both to involve business in human rights and to eradicate forced labour. In recent years, organizations active in both these areas have been strengthening their guidance to the private sector regarding social responsibility and the prevention of labour abuse in their supply chains, most notably with the United Nations Guiding Principles on

Business and Human Rights, also known as the Ruggie Principles. At the same time, however, cases of labour trafficking appeared to continue unabated in regions of the world such as Southeast Asia, despite the investment of many tens of millions of dollars of development aid into the anti-human trafficking response in the region for well over a decade.

Extensive media coverage of slavery in the Thai seafood supply chain, coupled with new laws in the US and UK mandating corporations to disclose their actions to prevent slavery in their supply chains, were followed by the swift creation of


partnerships between Issara and 10 of the top US and UK retailers and seafood importers, who were ready to do more to Respect and Remedy, to borrow terms from the Ruggie Principles. The first year of work piloting Issara's Inclusive Labour Monitoring system in their Thai shrimp supply chains identified and remedied over 5,000 forced labour victims without them having to leave their jobs – that is, workers kept their jobs and their jobs improved dramatically—with only a core team of 5, thanks to worker voice, sound data analytics systems, and unsurpassed technical expertise. And, as we have seen over the past three years, that was only the beginning.

2016 has been yet another great year for the growing Issara team, which remains staunchly committed to worker empowerment and evolving how business does responsible sourcing. We are immensely grateful to all of the Institute's supporters and partners who have made all this extraordinary work possible.

Thank you for your support and cooperation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roger Plant". The script is cursive and fluid.

Roger Plant



ISSARA OFFICER ZARNI HTUN (BRENDAN), SURROUNDED BY BURMESE FISHERMEN, TOSSES AN ISSARA HOTLINE T-SHIRT TO A WORKER ON A THAI FISHING VESSEL. THEY ARE NOW ALL CONNECTED INTO ISSARA'S EMPOWERED WORKER VOICE SYSTEMS.

8 KEY ELEMENTS OF THE ISSARA MODEL

Tackling human
trafficking and forced
labour through data,
technology, partnership,
and innovation



PARTNERSHIP

Trust, relationships, and partnerships toward solutions - with workers and business. No name and shame.



FOR THE PEOPLE

Tools, voice, choice, and dignity for the people, first and foremost. We are a non-profit organization who works with businesses, development partners, and other innovators ultimately for the greater good of migrant workers and vulnerable populations. We achieve measurable impacts through systems change within business, but our primary motivator will always be the greater good of the people.



EMPOWERED WORKER VOICE

Empowered worker voice is good for workers and good for business. Through workers, we can learn so much not only about labour conditions, but also about work itself, how it is done, and how it can be done more efficiently and sustainably.



DATA, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Data, validation, and verification help us understand and address root causes, and ensure we are on target, balanced, and scalable. Data analytics with large, rich datasets from workers and business help us to track trends and emerging patterns and threats, and understand what is really working.



TECHNICAL EXPERTISE ON THE GROUND

Issara's business and human rights experts as well as research, technology, and worker voice teams have a continuous on-the-ground presence, for the workers and for the businesses. Many of our team members are of the same nationality as the suppliers and the migrant workers. Most problems and challenges related to human rights issues in supply chains need to be solved in the workplaces and with a deep understanding of the culture, business environment, and regulatory environment.



TRANSFORMATIVE SYSTEMS CHANGE

While every voice counts and every person counts, at the end of the day, we can help the most people by working with suppliers on transformation and strengthening of the systems used to recruit and manage labour, and to handle human rights issues. Once systems and capacity are in place, it is unlikely to roll back to a situation where they are not in place.



ETHICS

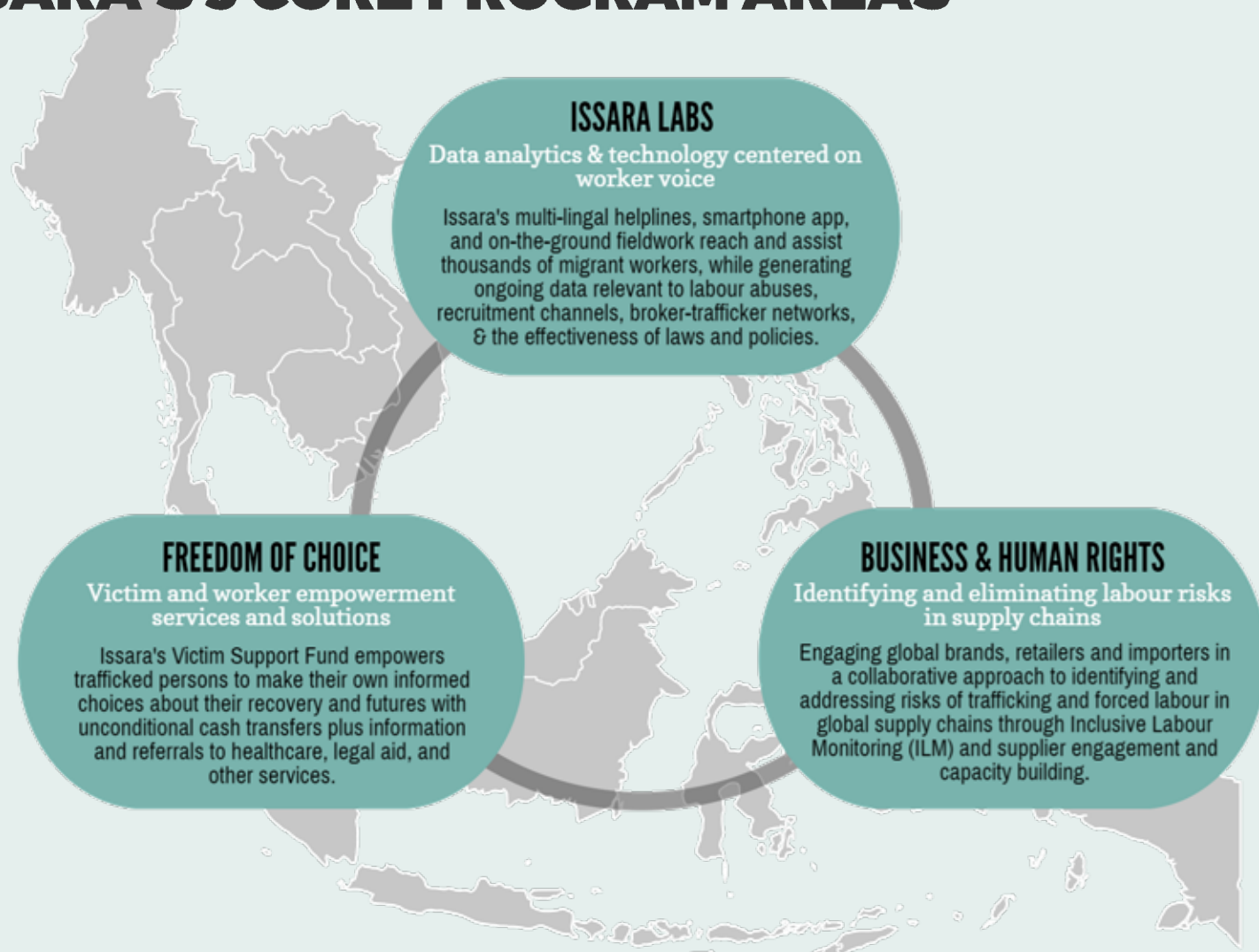
We help ethical sourcing and ethical recruitment to be truly ethical, by understanding how to look at all the dimensions of impacts on communities and workers. Ethics can be tricky when coupled with due diligence and risk mitigation, and we help to build capacity within businesses to navigate complex ethical situations with confidence and integrity.



SCALING WHAT WORKS

Solutions are only scalable if they are affordable at scale, and they are only worth scaling if they are proven to be effective and replicable in different environments. Issara's ground-up and top-down approach ensures that sufficient thought, measurement, and planning go into understanding how to make interventions work in different operating conditions.

ISSARA'S 3 CORE PROGRAM AREAS

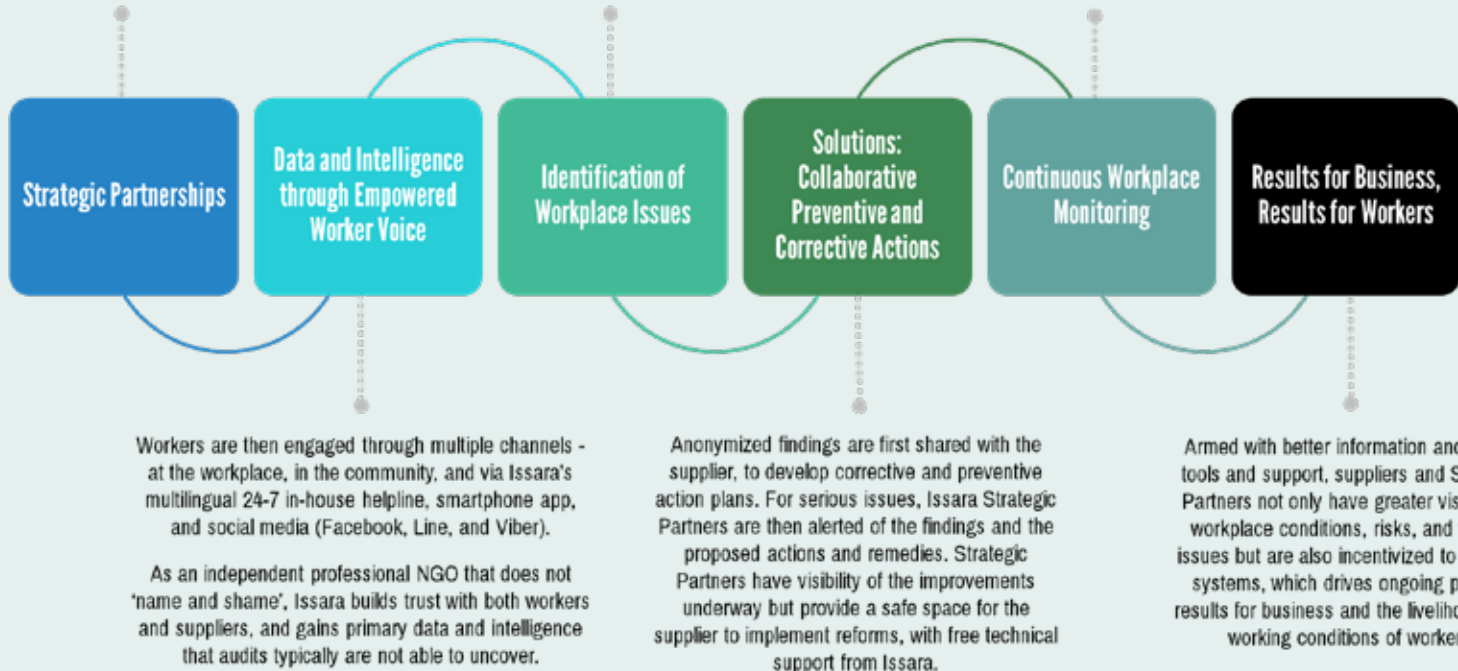


ISSARA INCLUSIVE LABOUR MONITORING (ILM) AT-A-GLANCE

Leading global brands, retailers, and importers join the Issara Strategic Partner Program and provide their supply chain data to roll out Inclusive Labour Monitoring (ILM). Issara works across their entire supply chain, not just Tier 1 sites.

As worker feedback comes in, Issara follows up to validate the information and gathers additional data in support of workers and business solutions.

Solutions are implemented and workers see the direct impact of the ILM model. They also provide further feedback on the effectiveness of supplier-led changes, or on other issues. Supplier sites have ongoing monitoring and utilize an empowered worker voice approach.



MEASURING OUR IMPACT ON SYSTEMS AND PEOPLE

Issara Institute is still a young organization, but is already becoming a recognized innovator in using data-driven and impact-focused approaches to anti-trafficking and supply chain improvements. Using our data and analytics, we can demonstrate how Issara has positively impacted the jobs and lives of thousands of workers to date, from extreme cases of rescuing and assisting trafficked workers, to driving transformational changes in business systems to eliminate risks of worker abuses.

Through our work, we aim for impact through two key pathways:

1. Empowerment of workers, and
2. Strengthening of business systems in global supply chains.

Risk of trafficking and forced labour is tackled simultaneously from top-down and bottom-up, engaging and connecting businesses, workers, and strategic partners to build inclusive solutions.

Our ultimate goal is to change the way businesses interact with workers throughout their supply chain—through improvement of labour recruitment and management systems in partner supply chains, and behaviour changes of employers, managers, and supervisors on the supplier side, and brands, retailers, and importers on the buyer side. At the same time, we aim to empower workers with relevant, up-to-date information to inform their migration and work choices, enabling them to “vote with their feet” and actively avoid exploitation.

Many global buyers have thousands of top-tier suppliers, and up to hundreds of thousands or even more second, third, and higher-tier suppliers. For most, only a fraction of their first-tier suppliers are regularly audited—even less beyond the first tier. We aim to test the scalability of empowered worker voice for providing high-quality and reliable business intelligence across the entire supply chain and all tiers, while also providing high-quality and reliable services and information to workers.

TRANSFORMING GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS



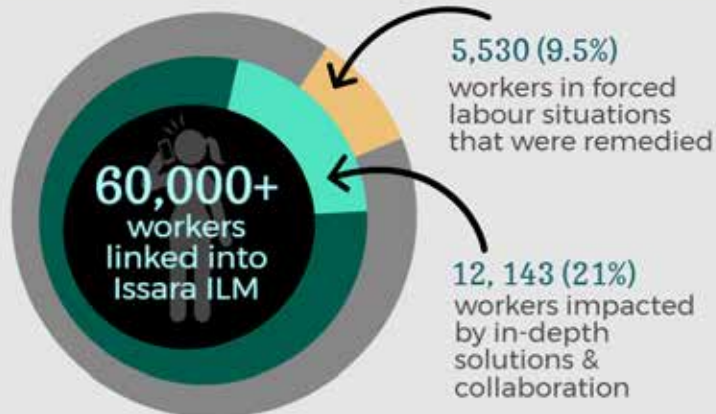
ISSARA STRATEGIC PARTNERS

Global brands, retailers, and importers
from the UK, US, & Europe in 2016



THAI SUPPLIER COMPANIES

Workplaces assessed and engaged,
with workers linked into ILM



WORKER VOICE & COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT



25,000+

WORKERS REACHED DIRECTLY THROUGH
COMMUNITY OUTREACH IN 2016

6,760

Hotline conversations



900+

Workers involved in
the creation of
Golden Dreams

550+

In-depth interviews
with migrant workers

400+

Conversations
through Line, Viber &
Facebook

Over the course of 2016, Issara added four new worker voice channels to meet the needs and comfort level of migrant workers. Month-on-month, conversations with migrant workers on smartphone-based channels such as Facebook chat, Line, and Viber - plus, commenting on Golden Dreams - are on the rise!

FREEDOM of CHOICE

Receiving healthcare,
legal assistance, safe
relocation, employment,
psychosocial care, and
assistance obtaining
documentation

468



Victims of trafficking
supported through
the victim support
fund

174



Of those, victims
who also received
unconditional cash
transfers

WHAT DOES HUMAN TRAFFICKING REALLY LOOK LIKE IN GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA?

Investigative journalists and NGOs convey work in Thailand—on fishing vessels, in factories, and in farms—as often fraught with extreme working conditions and threats to life. However, it is also widely acknowledged that migration in Southeast Asia is generally a positive strategy for individuals and families looking to improve their lives—and certainly this is a key finding when talking to current and former migrants and their families in migrant communities or their home villages. What, then, is the true prevalence and risk factors for a migrant to become exploited, whether or not he/she recognizes the situation as exploitation?

In 2016, with funding from Walmart Foundation through International Justice Mission, Issara conducted

surveys with 260 Burmese and Cambodian fisherman across 20 key Thai fishing localities. Adding to our in-depth understanding of working conditions in the Thai fishing industry, the research revealed that exploitation was much more likely to be found on trawlers, as compared with other types of vessels. It also identified “net supervisors” as a new form of non-Thai middleman that allow the Thai captain and boat owner to distance themselves from abuse and exploitation of fishing workers.

From Issara’s extensive fieldwork, casework, and research, it is clear that illegal overwork, underpay, and debt bondage—key elements of human trafficking—are widespread in Thailand. However, rates of physical violence—one of the

primary indicators of human trafficking in the eyes of many government authorities and anti-trafficking NGOs—are significantly less prevalent. These relatively low (but nevertheless egregious) rates of physical abuse actually make sense from an economic perspective, particularly for trafficking into the production of commodities for global export. Political restrictions on migrant labour recruitment have produced a dearth of workers at the bottom of the world’s supply chains that incentivizes control over worker movement, while simultaneously disincentivizing physical abuse.

Anti-trafficking interventions would likely dramatically improve their success rates by not looking for antiquated notions of trafficking

and 'slavery' such as physical abuse, but instead the subtler, productivity-enhancing, 'invisible' abuses of power, discrimination, and threats common to the labour trafficking found in global supply chains. In the meantime, supply chain approaches such as Issara's are highly effective at addressing illegal overwork, underpay, and debt bondage with committed business partners, properly structured incentives, and technical assistance.



*Top: Issara research consultant Kan Zar Htet (Jonas / Tartee) conducts a structured in-depth interview with a fisherman.
Bottom: Burmese fishermen, clad in Issara hotline t-shirts, cluster around Issara staff to get Golden Dreams on their phones before going back to sea.*

ISSARA LABS

Research, technology, and empowered worker voice

People are at the center of all Issara's data and intelligence work. Issara Labs conducts in-depth research into labour conditions and business dynamics within partner supply chains, as well as on migration and human trafficking issues more broadly. Issara Labs develops technologies which tap into one of the most potent and under-utilized resources of all: worker voice.

Global supply chains are often multi-tiered and complex, leading to a situation in which workers in all workplaces and tiers are scattered across wide geographic expanses, in factories, farms, plantations, and fishing boats. Fortunately, in Southeast Asia, the majority of migrants working within global supply chains own and use smartphones. For example, over 90% of the estimated 3+ million Burmese migrant workers in Thailand own smartphones with data packages—and over 90% of Burmese people in Myanmar who own phones (including prospective migrants) own smartphones. Mobile phone usage is similarly saturated in Cambodian and Lao migrant populations in Thailand.

The Issara Institute has created and runs a range of empowering worker voice tools and channels to revolutionize safe migration, ethical sourcing, and anti-human trafficking. These include Golden Dreams, a Burmese-language smartphone app developed in 2016, a 24-hour multi-lingual helpline in four languages (Burmese running since 2009), and Line, Viber, and Facebook channels for current and prospective migrant workers and their loved ones, to communicate with Issara staff in their own language. We also capitalize on our in-house research and analytics capacity and conduct rigorous, structured research as well, including a ground-breaking study of the risk factors and prevalence to trafficking in the Thai fishing industry in 2016.

Through research, technology and worker voice, Issara has a constant pulse on the voice of thousands of workers, who have the capacity to uncover risks in complex global supply chains and make structural changes to the way business is done.



ISSARA LABS REACH AMONG MIGRANTS IN 2016

Over 60,000 migrant workers in the supply chains of Issara Strategic Partners were linked into Issara's various worker voice as of December 2016. Nearly 50,000 current and prospective migrant workers, and their loved ones, follow Issara's Facebook page, which—like Golden Dreams—provides regular news and policy updates to workers as well as offering private chat channels. Issara is able to successfully reach remote and hard-to-reach populations, including migrant workers at sea. Field teams establish rapport with workers and communities to ensure that we are addressing their real needs and priorities. Issara data collection, management, and storage systems were upgraded in 2016, allowing for unsurpassed data analytics and statistical modeling, done by Issara's in-house experts, who have specialized expertise in predictive analytics, GIS mapping, supply chain mapping and analysis, and multi-scalar ethnography.

In 2017, we aim to focus on expanding our reach to workers in remote areas, including at sea.

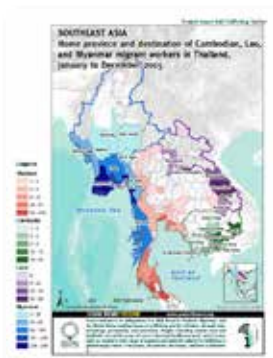
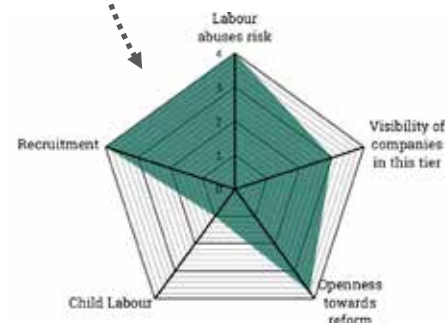
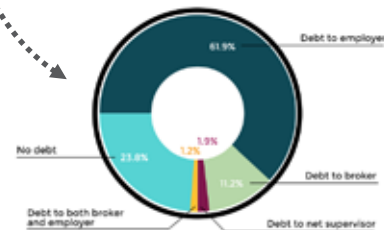


FIGURE 4. DEBT BONDAGE OF FISHERMEN RESPONDENTS

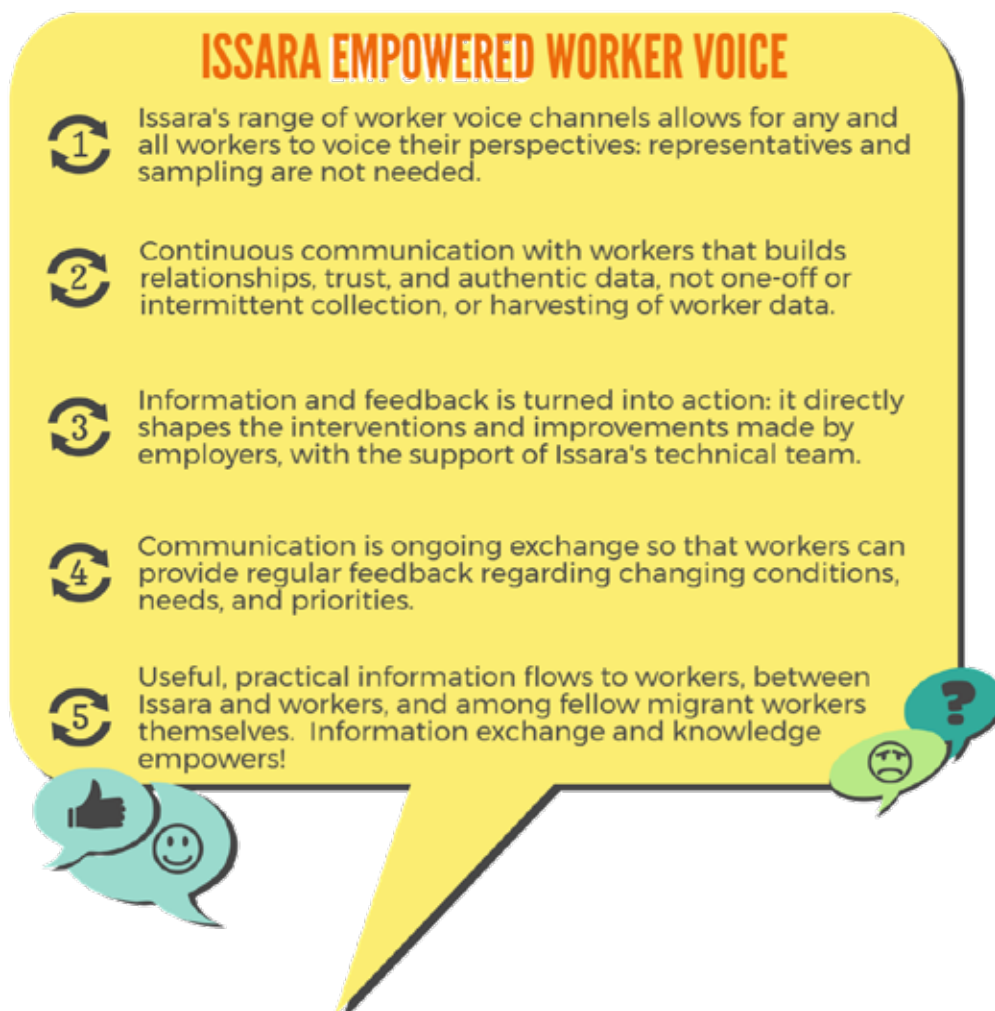


Modeling patterns and risk of labour abuse from various forms of worker voice data.

What is Issara Institute's Empowered Worker Voice model?

As the discussions deepen regarding the shortfalls of audits in identifying and remedying social and labour issues in supply chains, the term 'worker voice' has increased in prominence to describe alternatives to audits that engage workers directly and collect primary data from them. However, over the course of the past few years, it has become apparent that not all 'worker voice' solutions are the same, and there are clear distinctions between them that businesses and community partners should understand when organizations enter communities and workplaces and request sometimes sensitive information from workers who may be vulnerable to abuse or reprisal.

Key elements of the Issara Empowered Worker Voice model are outlined below to illustrate some of the factors that need to be understood by workers, communities, and businesses when implementing 'worker voice' solutions. No model is perfect, and each is reflective of the strengths and mandate of the service provider presenting them, whether they are for-profit or non-profit, and locally-based or global (or both).



CURRENT AND PROSPECTIVE MIGRANTS ARE ENGAGED BY ISSARA AT BOTH SOURCE AND DESTINATION, IN ORDER TO HELP MAKE THE JOURNEY SAFE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NOT YET MIGRATED, AND TO PROVIDE INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE TO THOSE WHO HAVE.

Top left: Issara officer Ohnmar Ei Ei Chaw (Chaw Chaw) disseminates hotline posters to women on the move.



Top right: Issara officer Sengky Chheun speaks with Cambodian fishermen on Thai vessels in Issara Strategic Partner supply chains.



Middle left: A Burmese fisherman and his friend check out Golden Dreams.

Middle right: Chaw Chaw gets Golden Dreams onto the phones of 200+ MOU workers who are about to be sent to work in a factory in Issara Strategic Partner supply chains.



Bottom left: The team meets with workers in their dorm at night to review and explain confusing payslips and work-related documents.

Bottom right: Zarni Htun (Brendan) and team conducting outreach with workers in the port/pier area, including fishermen and on-shore workers.



Building technology to scale up empowered worker voice and drive responsible business

Golden Dreams is a Burmese-language smartphone app targeting current and prospective migrant workers. It is a platform for learning and exchanging information, reviews, ratings, comments, and advice about employers, recruitment agencies, and service providers, in both home and destination countries. The platform is in Burmese language, and the key topics are those that are most relevant to migrant workers.

Users may be in Myanmar, or in migration destination countries such as Thailand or Malaysia—there are no geographic boundaries or limitations with apps. The app's form and function was developed based on months of user studies and beta testing with nearly one thousand of Burmese men, women, and youth in both Myanmar and Thailand in 2016. As such, the app's content is relevant to the daily lives of a wide range of Burmese-speaking people, and both current and prospective migrants have a smooth and enjoyable user experience.

Golden Dreams is, first and foremost, a tool for the people, and will be expanded to empower more worker populations in other languages in the coming years. However, for businesses, the data coming in from the app

also provides an unsurpassed view of the labour and recruitment conditions faced by migrant workers across their complex supply chains. Issara Institute's strategic business partners receive translated and analysed reports on suppliers across all supply chain tiers based on the worker feedback, so that they can strengthen their ethical sourcing decision-making based on data that vastly surpasses, in quality and quantity, that which could be gained from audits. For supplier companies in Issara partner supply chains, the nuanced information about the experiences of their workers relating to recruitment and labour conditions will help pinpoint areas for improvement. Issara Institute's technical team can assist with improvements directly, given Issara's position on the ground and resources from global brands and retailers to help strengthen supply chains through empowered worker voice plus data analytics.



Welcome screen and one of the rating screens on Golden Dreams.

Information is power, and Golden Dreams—and empowered worker voice more generally—has the power to drive real behaviour change at a scale required to make a measurable reduction in human trafficking:

- ✓ **Migrant workers** will be able to educate themselves fully about their rights in destination countries and find safe, well-paying jobs without the need to rely on brokers—even before Day 1 of the migration journey begins.
- ✓ **Supplier businesses** will be able to root out hidden exploitation that may exist in their recruitment or management systems (or in those of their upstream suppliers).
- ✓ **Global brands, retailers, and importers** will be able to reward the most ethical suppliers with their continued business, and ensure that their supply chains are “powered” by empowered worker voice.
- ✓ **Recruitment agencies and recruitment agency federations** will be able to identify and address exploitative elements within their business and industry.
- ✓ **Relevant government ministries in source and destination countries** will be able strengthen bilateral recruitment channels based on real data on the structural weaknesses and failures of current systems.

BUSINESS & HUMAN RIGHTS

Issara Strategic Partners Program

The Issara Business and Human Rights team was busy in the 2016 year advancing the Inclusive Labour Monitoring (ILM) model, collaborating with local suppliers, building capacity, and seeking to bring systems change and technical improvements to business.

Our engagement with suppliers spans all tiers, from major Tier 1 processors and exporters down to fishing vessels and smallholder farmers, and thus the range of tools and support varied depending on the firm-level formality or informality of business practices, existence of policies and procedures, and overall human resource capabilities. Yet, regardless of the size of the supplier, its location in the value chain, or its geographic location, there were issues that are common to most supplier sites:

- Forced labour presenting at many different levels, from systemic issues of exploitative labour recruitment down to abuses by isolated line supervisors or brokers;
- The challenge of bridging communication gaps and trust deficits between workers and employers, and related to that a lack of professional trained interpreters in human resource departments;
- A changing business enabling environment that is demanding greater attention to transparency and sustainability; and
- New legislation. Thailand's 2016 Royal Ordinance on zero recruitment fees, for example, has the potential to alter recruitment agency business models and reduce risk of informal fees and exploitation, if enforced. However, it also raises the potential to drive additional fees and risk to the source side countries and vulnerable populations pre-departure, if business is not aware of its recruitment agency's practices or seeking genuine feedback from its workers.

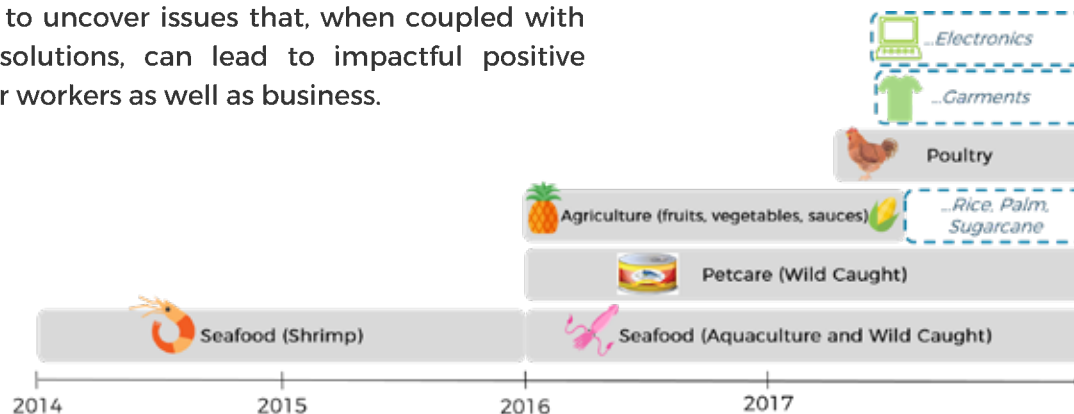
The single key success factor to addressing these shared risks appears to come down to a company's openness to reform and willingness to adapt business practices that reflect the changing business environment.

Issara Strategic Partners are providing space for their supplier base to implement reforms and to strengthen responsible sourcing practices. The model is working. Transparency and good empirical data is fundamental to drive change. ILM, backed by empowered worker voice, is providing the evidence base for suppliers and their customers (responsible sourcing and CSR departments), to see where change is needed and to implement clear action (both granular and at industry level) to address issues and mitigate future risk.

Throughout our business and human rights work in 2016, three key areas became clear, and provide focus for our growth plans in 2017 and onwards:

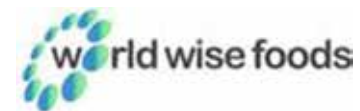
1. The validation of the empowered worker voice model as means to uncover issues that, when coupled with business solutions, can lead to impactful positive change for workers as well as business.

2. The issues that are surfacing through the different Issara worker voice channels have a strong degree of commonality, across business locations, supplier size, and industries. The Issara ILM approach is now successfully being replicated across industries and is scaling for greater impact, aided in particular by the Myanmar language Golden Dreams smart phone app and expanded social media channels.
3. The need and importance to be working on the source side of the equation, not just in the destination country, to support workers and to effectively address business and human rights supply chain risks from the point in which workers leave their home villages to when they are employed in Thailand. In 2016 Issara has been expanding its work with prospective migrant workers and recruitment agencies in Myanmar and Cambodia, and is building out its operations in Myanmar.



Issara ILM product expansion, 2014 to present.

TRANSFORMING GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS THROUGH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP



“Our strategic partnership with Issara has allowed us to identify risk areas within our supply chains that have not been raised through other means such as third party ethical audits. With many of our supplying partners involved in the programme, it has shown that there are common themes across different food industry sectors – one of the most clear being around recruitment agency practices. Issara has provided in-depth information around the complicated and very “grey” area regarding the labour supply chain of recruitment agency workers, regulation and general practices of recruitment agencies. Although hugely complex, our partnership provides [our company] and our supplying partners with the tools and ongoing support and guidance to begin to tackle these risk areas and drive improvement where most needed. “

-Issara Strategic Partner



“Working with Issara is like no other. The team has positive and collaborative attitudes, which is crucial for creating a harmonious working environment, hence truly uplifting the quality of life of the workers. They are fair and do not take sides. I’m happy working with Issara. So far so good!”

- Thai shrimp processor and exporter



“We, the workers, are very happy when Issara staff visit. When Issara comes, they can solve all our problems, so the workers are always looking forward to seeing them. The supervisors’ behaviour has changed. Now, our boss and supervisors have a smile when they see the workers. In the past, our employers and supervisors treated us like strangers. We understood being treated this way was due to being factory workers, however, after Issara’s engagement, we are pleased that our employer has started acknowledging the workers. Now, the workers say that they can see the improvements when Issara comes.”

- Ma Wa Tote, Issara client and seafood processing factory worker

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Worker and victim empowerment

Issara's programming focuses on empowering workers and helping businesses eliminate labour risks and abuses in workplaces within their supply chains, and between 2014–2016 focused primarily on migrant workers in Thailand. Through the course of this programming, however, several cases came to light where supply chain leverage could not be used, and more traditional approaches were used to get trafficked persons out of the harm environment – essentially, raid and rescue or escape. Because these types of traditional assistance are by their nature disempowering, Issara explored how other development sectors empower their clients, and identified unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) as a promising empowerment approach.

In 2015–2016, Issara ran a pilot UCT program for trafficked persons, called Freedom of Choice, which supported 468 trafficked persons—174 of whom received unconditional cash transfers equal to 3 months of minimum wage

(approximately US \$257/month in Thailand and \$130/month in Myanmar). The UCT was one component of a package of assistance that Issara made available to clients, including legal assistance, healthcare, job placement assistance, and referrals to and information about other social services and benefits—in recognition of the fact that there are limitations to what can be achieved by cash alone, and cash is not a panacea to meeting all needs of trafficked persons.

Giving trafficked persons cash to spend or save as they see fit, plus job placement assistance so that they can live independently and get themselves back on their feet, gives workers the dignity and self-determination that the mainstream shelter-based victim assistance framework does not. It is hoped that sharing our lessons learned will lead to a shift in mainstream practice to more empowering, demand-driven approaches.



FREEDOM OF CHOICE CLIENTS CAN GET SUPPORT TO REBUILD THEIR POST-TRAFFICKING LIVES IN THE DESTINATION COUNTRY, WHERE THEY ARE ASSISTED IN FINDING SAFE, NEW JOBS AND ACCOMODATION, PROVIDED WITH LEGAL AND MEDICAL ASSISTANCE, AND EMPOWERED WITH UNCONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFERS TO SPEND HOWEVER THEY DEEM MOST USEFUL.

Empowering exploited migrant workers with pioneering unconditional cash transfers

At the end of 2016, an independent evaluation of the Freedom of Choice unconditional cash transfer pilot project concluded that Issara's "cash-plus" model can be an effective tool in supporting and empowering victims of trafficking. The results of the pilot demonstrated the diverse needs of each individual, and as such the evaluation concluded that it would be very difficult to meet these needs as efficiently or effectively through the provision of support in kind, as is typically done in the mainstream assistance system. Cash as a modality allowed people to meet their needs themselves, with dignity – this was recognized as important given Issara's overarching objective of providing options for assistance that are empowering to beneficiaries. It was concluded that the pilot empowered clients, supporting them in thinking for themselves again and planning their own futures – and, they were able to address their most urgent needs.

Issara's analysis of trafficked persons' reported needs and priorities (to be published May 2017) yielded fascinating results:

- 75% of clients had selected **finding a job** as a top priority—not economic support or vocational training, but specifically getting a job.
- 72% prioritized **legal aid to get documents and/or pursue a labour case to get back unpaid wages**; however, less than 1% of clients were interested in pursuing a criminal case (even though some were forced to participate in one).
- **Safety and security** was rated as a high priority by only 30%, but the majority of those saw deportation and harassment by the authorities as their biggest security threat, not brokers and traffickers.
- Only 24% prioritized **medical and psychosocial care**, even though clients presented with broken bones, high-risk pregnancies, blindness, tuberculosis, and a range of other serious health issues.

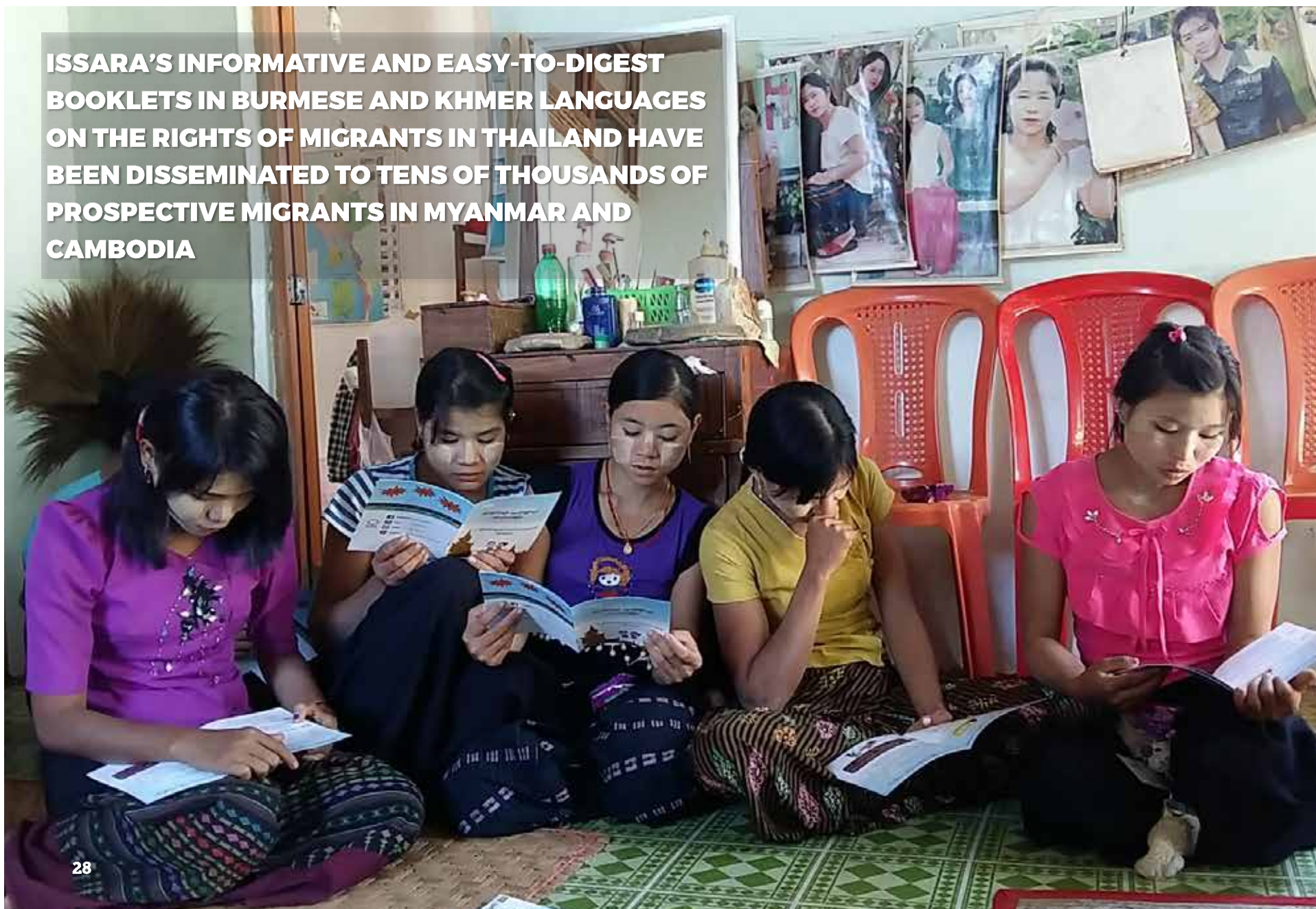
Support to job placement appeared to function as a 'gatekeeper' service: those who got jobs seemed more willing to consider healthcare and other services presented by the team—after we proved to clients that we understood and respected their priorities.



“I could not imagine what would have happened to me if I did not receive help from Issara. I had nowhere to go and no place to stay because I had lost contact with my family members since I left for Thailand when I was 10 years old. I almost decided to return back to Thailand, as I found no hope of survival in Myanmar. But Issara helped me get in contact with my friends, who welcomed me. With the money provided by Issara, I was able to pay for my room rental and food while I looked for a job and got myself familiar with life back in Myanmar.”

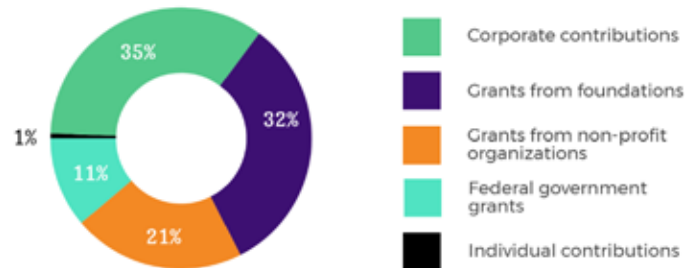
- Ah Than @ Kyar Gyi, Issara client and survivor of eight years of forced labour on a Thai fishing boat

ISSARA'S INFORMATIVE AND EASY-TO-DIGEST BOOKLETS IN BURMESE AND KHMER LANGUAGES ON THE RIGHTS OF MIGRANTS IN THAILAND HAVE BEEN DISSEMINATED TO TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PROSPECTIVE MIGRANTS IN MYANMAR AND CAMBODIA



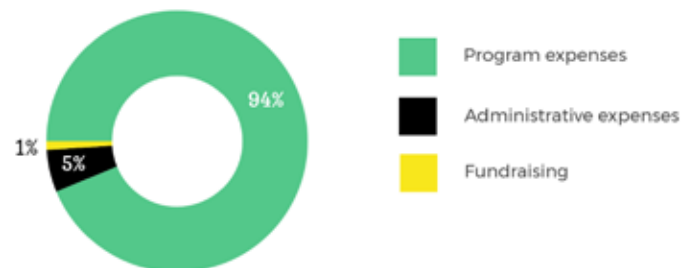
2016 FINANCIALS

CONTRIBUTIONS



TOTAL CONTRIBUTIONS:
US \$1,878,031

EXPENSES



TOTAL EXPENSES:
US \$1,059,793

CORPORATE PARTNERS

Aquastar
Beaver Street Fisheries
Lyons Seafoods
Mars
Nestle
Red Lobster
Sainsburys
Sea-Farms
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