



**ISSARA INSTITUTE**  
**AT-A-GLANCE**



**WE BELIEVE WE CAN TRANSFORM THE LIVES OF  
MILLIONS OF WORKERS IN GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS  
THROUGH WORKER VOICE, PARTNERSHIP, AND  
INNOVATION**



# OUR TEAMS & WORK

Issara Institute is an independent non-profit organization based in Southeast Asia and the United States, tackling issues of human trafficking and forced labour through technology, partnership, and innovation. The Institute was established in 2014 by a team of anti-trafficking experts coming out of the United Nations who created an alliance of private sector, civil society, and government partners to address labour issues in global supply chains.

With the support of development donors as well as corporate partners, we operate through 4 functional teams, collaborating together to implement our ongoing foundational model and 5 specific programs. Our teams are organized according to our strengths and our ethos—centered on worker voice, capitalizing on our position on the ground, and believing that partnership and innovation can—and will—transform responsible sourcing.

## OUTREACH & EMPOWERMENT

- + *The Institute's Outreach & Empowerment Team is comprised of professionals who are the nationality of the workers in the country of operations - so O&E officers in Thailand are Burmese and Cambodian, while O&E officers in Myanmar are Burmese. Together the team has expertise in counseling, case management, hotline management, and digital communications, and are the key team linking Issara operations to the populations we aim to empower - jobseekers and workers.*

## BUSINESS & HUMAN RIGHTS

- + *The Institute's Business & Human Rights Team is comprised of locally based, locally informed professionals in the country of operations. The BHR team's main objective is to provide ongoing support and technical assistance to suppliers, recruiters, and industries to improve ethical labour recruitment and management practices, taking guidance from worker feedback and other empirically-based means of risk assessment.*

## STRATEGY & GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

- + *The Institute's Strategy & Global Partnerships Team cultivates the connection and engagement between global brands, retailers, and importers, and the situation on the ground in their supply chains and more broadly. Transformations in how responsible sourcing is done globally are not possible without global buyers understanding and incentivizing more ethical labour recruitment and management systems within their supplier base.*

## TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

- + *The Institute's Technology & Innovation Team run Issara Labs, where Issara's software, technology, and analytics are developed in-house. Together the team has expertise in software and app development, human-centered design, database management, data security, and research and analysis.*

# INCLUSIVE LABOUR MONITORING

The Inclusive Labour Monitoring (ILM) system is a foundational approach for Issara and works across the entire supply chains of our global buyer business partners (our Strategic Partners), from fishing vessels and smallholders to processors and exporters, as well as labour recruitment agencies, in origin and destination countries. Through business partnership, data and analytics, and empowered worker voice and worker voice technology, the collaborative approach of ILM is yielding groundbreaking results in terms of labour risks identified and mitigated, system improvements, and remediation.

Issara currently operates in the seafood, petcare, agriculture, poultry, apparel and footwear, and electronics industries. The role of global buyers in eliminating human trafficking from supply chains is critical, and Issara invites global brands, retailers, and importers to join forces with other pioneering companies to make a real, measurable difference in the lives of the workers throughout extended supply chains.

Issara is, at heart, an anti-trafficking non-profit organization with a passion for data, innovation, and impact. As such, in addition to running supply chain improvement work with business partners, Issara undertakes other critical programming and research that complements and enhances our private sector engagement and ability to drive broader industry reform.





Ethical recruitment is labour recruitment whereby the costs of recruitment are borne by employers, not jobseekers and workers, and is conducted in a legal, fair, and transparent manner. Issara brings employers and recruitment agencies together to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their current recruitment practices and develop improvement plans to get the businesses on a more ethical track. Issara then brings ILM and worker voice into the entire recruitment process, building jobseekers' knowledge of their rights in the origin country, and how to report issues if they arise, whether pre – or post-migration. Worker feedback helps to validate the conditions and fees of labour recruitment, and whether improvements are having their intended positive impacts or not.

In collaboration with a unique network of grassroots partners operating in origin countries, we are able to engage jobseekers before they leave their home village or pay the first fees to brokers, at the earliest stages of recruitment where most debt bondage begins. This means that we are able to help verify all the fees charged to workers, if any, from the first mile.



## WORKER VOICE-DRIVEN ETHICAL RECRUITMENT PROGRAM

# FISHERY LABOUR IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (FLIP)

Issara is integrating labour into Fishery Improvement Programs (FIPs) to create the FLIP—the first FIP of its kind in the world, with environmental and traceability reporting designed by conservation specialists and aligned with supply chain and regulatory standards, and labour and social interventions being designed and led by labour specialists and workers themselves—as they should be.

A FIP, or Fishery Improvement Project, is a multi-stakeholder initiative designed to improve the sustainability of a fishery. Over the past few years, the environmental sustainability community has expressed growing concern and interest in the welfare of workers at sea, after a series of journalistic exposés uncovered slavery and murders in Asian commercial fishing fleets. Many in the environmental community recognized that their work in the fishing industry may be fraught with labour and social risks that they were unable to identify or know how to address with the tools and expertise at hand among traceability and sustainability practitioners.

Issara Institute has developed relationships to help this community understand the nature of labour risks in the fishing industry, as understood from the perspective of labour rights experts and those working to support and empower fishermen crew. It became clear that identifying and mitigating labour risks requires trust of and engagement of the crew, to create an environment where they can safely convey the realities of how they are treated—both on shore and in real time while at sea. Further, reducing their risks at sea requires eliminating their indebtedness to brokers and their employer, meaning that you have to be able to reduce risks in the labour recruitment process.

The Issara Fishery Labour Improvement Program - FLIP - addresses these critical labour risks and opportunities for systems and industry strengthening, through a package of 4 key initiatives:





1. **REMEDiation:** Working with vessel owners and fishermen to educate on labour rights and the law, then identify and remediate labour risks through worker voice and ILM
2. **ETHICAL RECRUITMENT:** Working with the governments and progressive recruitment agencies to recruit skilled, guaranteed debt-free workers to crew fishing boats owned by participating vessel owners
3. **MULTI-STAKEHOLDER DEBT RELIEF FUND:** Working with Issara Strategic Partners to incentivize vessel owners to cancel debts of crew and absorb the costs of their recruitment, while understanding the competitive landscape and perspectives of vessel owners and buyers
4. **WORKER VOICE AT SEA TECHNOLOGY:** Integrating Issara's worker voice technology with the most cutting edge at-sea vessel tracking and catch traceability reporting VMS technology, for real-time connectivity at sea

# EMPOWERMENT INCUBATOR PROGRAM

Issara provides direct services to jobseekers, workers, and trafficking survivors, and also invests in the sustainable development of local capacity to provide more empowering support to these at-risk populations. As a service provider, Issara runs empowered worker voice channels and receives thousands of calls and messages monthly from jobseekers and workers, including a 24-hour free multi-lingual helpline, Facebook in several languages, chat apps such as Line and Viber (similar to WhatsApp), and our own Yelp-like smartphone app, Golden Dreams. Important to Issara's model, our outreach and services span borders, operating in both origin and destination countries, so that prospective migrants can receive seamless services and support from Issara and its network of service provider partners from the moment they begin researching work overseas from their home village, to throughout their overseas work experience. Our worker voice channels do not just operate where Inclusive Labour Monitoring or other Issara supply chain or industry-oriented programs are running—they serve anyone and everyone who calls—in any industry, whether or not they are in one of the supply chains of Issara's Strategic Partners.

To develop local capacity and scale up impact, Issara's Empowerment Incubator Program invests intensively in supporting an exciting, emerging civil society network across origin countries, aiming to improve services to trafficking survivors, and make a measurable reduction in exploitative job recruitment. Trade unions, faith-based organizations, grassroots rights groups, and research and advocacy NGOs have joined forces to connect jobseekers with more responsible recruitment agencies, cut out exploitative middlemen and debts, and shift the paradigm of the 'victim services framework' from (over)protection to empowerment. Investments have included coaching, training, and capacity building; support to coordination, networking and advocacy; and, sub-grants, including for staffing and core operational expenses, so as to help integrate empowering approaches into organizational programs and structures.



Targeted technical assistance is responsive and specific. For example, in the area of social work and post-trauma support, Issara developed and piloted a groundbreaking tool to measure levels of empowerment among clients, to be used by case managers through periodic assessments with clients, in order to help determine what kinds of services and individual, familial, and community factors contribute to empowering or disempowering clients. In the area of labour rights, Issara has connected the Myanmar network of CSOs—the CSO Network to End Trafficking (CSO-NET) —to progressive recruitment agencies, to foster innovative collaborations aiming to educate and reach jobseekers, and displace exploitative informal brokers.

Empowerment matters, and empowerment works!

KEY OUTREACH & EMPOWERMENT METRICS: 2018			
AVERAGE WORKER VOICE CALLS AND MESSAGES PER MONTH	NUMBER OF WORKERS COVERED BY INCLUSIVE LABOUR MONITORING (ILM)	GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS IN CSO-NET	GOLDEN DREAMS AMBASSADORS PROMOTING JOBSEEKER EDUCATION & EMPOWERMENT
2,500— 2,900*	150,000+	18	800+

\*As of mid-2018, the Issara worker voice channels, including the multi-lingual helpline, multi-lingual Facebook, chat apps such as Line and Viber, and Issara Golden Dreams smartphone application received more traffic than the United States and United Kingdom national anti-trafficking hotlines, combined!



Left: Ferries shuttling thousands of Burmese migrants between Kawthaung, Myanmar and Ranong, Thailand are outfitted with special blue sunroofs advertising the Issara worker voice channels,.

Middle: One of the 800+ Issara Golden Dreams Ambassadors (in white hat), a current Burmese migrant worker himself, shares information and resources to fellow migrant workers about their rights and how to get further information and assistance if they need it.

Right: A CSO-NET partner operating in a rural Myanmar area with high levels of out-migration introduces the Golden Dreams app to prospective migrant women. Whether or not they themselves end up migrating in the end, these women also serve as important sources of information and support to other family members and friends who may be considering work overseas.



# MULTI-STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT / ISSARA GLOBAL FORUM

Issara Institute takes a market systems development approach to reducing forced labour and human trafficking, aiming to transform how global responsible sourcing is done. Specifically, we believe that the welfare of millions of workers in global supply chains can be improved if their employers and recruiters are properly encouraged and incentivized toward more ethical labour recruitment and management. These incentives can pass down the supply chain, and, they can come through government regulation as well. In addition, they can be verified, confirmed, reinforced, and strengthened by workers and civil society. Therefore, we believe that it is important to convene all of these diverse and important stakeholders in ethical recruitment and ethical sourcing to exchange, on an annual basis, the realities of whether or not the corporate commitments at the global level are passing down the supply chain in the form of real incentives—that is, what is proving to be emerging good practice in human rights and responsible sourcing from around the world...and perhaps what is proving to be less effective. Year on year, Issara's annual Global Forum, held in Bangkok in November, convenes government, global buyers, suppliers, recruiters, civil society, academics, workers, and trafficking survivors together to all share, exchange, and debate the evidence, and chart collective, more effective ways forward.





**ISSARA MEANS FREEDOM**  
[www.issarainstitute.org](http://www.issarainstitute.org)