

CORE PRINCIPLES

*in working with refugees
and other groups*



PENANG
STOP
HUMAN
TRAFFICKING
CAMPAIGN



Introduction

There is already so much information ‘gathered’ and presented about the situation facing migrants and refugees across countries, regions, and the world.

There have been so many meetings, so many trainings, so many reports.

Yet we continue this cycle, without any apparent interest in how this process has achieved or not achieved change, and how this process either positively or negatively affects the empowerment of migrant and refugee women, men and children.

And this at a time when ‘empowerment’ is becoming a buzz word, everyone is using it, everyone is heralding the necessity for ‘empowering communities’ and such like.

But what does this mean? Especially what does this mean for those non-refugee and non-migrant groups or individuals who claim they/we are working ‘with’ migrants and /or refugees.

It is high time we got serious about thinking about ‘empowerment’ and on what the principles of our work could and should be based. This small booklet is a small contribution to thinking about some of the fundamentals. Of course this is just a start: there are a myriad of issues and discussions about how to put principles into actual practice. Words are always easiest

But we can get there, if we continue to share, explore and challenge.

With love

Principle One: Migrant and Refugee self-determination and empowerment



In our work with refugees and migrant workers (as with all groups), our fundamental commitment is to **the principle of self-determination and empowerment.**

This is basic to everything we do; the ultimate goal where women, men and children from refugee and other migrant communities are empowered and able **to decide for themselves** their aspirations, actions and advocacy.

To realise this aim, our concern must always be towards creating spaces and opportunities for the exercise of self-determination by migrants and refugees – women, men and children.

This is true in any ‘research’ we might be involved with, with any discussion forum/fora we might be organising or participating in, in any advocacy we might be engaged with, and in any ‘service provision’ we might be offering.

The basic question always is:

Who does our work empower?

Does it empower our organisation/NGO? Good only for our personal or organisational ego? Helping establish ourselves as ‘expert’ on migrant and/or refugee issues and get us into a position to receive ever more funding?

Or does it help to really empower women, men and children in migrant and refugee communities – by ensuring they are from the beginning seen and made central to the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of any initiative..

Meaning, empowerment is explicitly the central goal of our work, not of our NGO or organisation or institution but of women, men and children migrants and/or refugees.



We cannot and must not claim that because what we do is 'about migrants and/or about refugees' that it automatically therefore benefits migrants and/or refugees. This is palpably NOT the case.

Millions of dollars a year are allocated, applied for and spent on the 'migration industry', involving NGOs, UN organisations/projects, academia, and others. But where are the migrants and refugees themselves in this process?

Many of us are making our careers out of it. We document, research, prepare reports, write papers, attend conferences and seminars and workshops, present, listen, discuss, organise and attend 'trainings', talk about 'successful advocacy' and 'slavery' and 'protection' and so on and so forth. All costing huge amounts of money.

And yet after all this, ***what real difference has this made to the daily lives of the millions of migrants and refugees??***

What difference has it made to their empowerment?

If we are serious about 'empowerment', we need to change the way we think. *We need to change the way we approach things.*

'Empowerment' demands a radical rethink of how we plan research, training, advocacy, meetings, and so on. It demands a radical re-think of what funding agencies are funding.

Do we have a strategy, do we have a plan, whereby year on year we commit to ensuring that more and more of this money and more and more of the decisions/planning/attendance/input/ evaluations/etc are in the hands of women, men and children from migrant and refugee communities, in the context of empowerment and self-determination?

Are we ready to challenge the status quo, which includes ourselves?

And change it?



Principle Two: The Empowerment of Women

The entrenchment of women's equal status as human beings is key to the achievement of change for the better in society.

We are all aware that the involvement and concerns of women are too often given the lowest priority especially in a patriarchal environment where women and children are seen as 'soft-targets', against whom violence and denigration are perpetrated with impunity.

So in our work, we commit to ensuring that **women migrants and refugees receive equal attention and visibility as women in their own right**, in achieving their own self-determination and independence, and to have their voice heard in forums that often exclude them.

We will use strategies that enable women to organise separately if they choose, as well as support their full participation within mainstream structures.

Again, this takes us back to radically rethinking how we plan research, training, advocacy, meetings..... It demands a radical rethink in the choices funding agencies make and the criteria by which they choose.

We repeat again, we cannot and must not claim that because what we do is 'about migrants and/or refugees' that it automatically therefore benefits migrants and refugees. This is palpably NOT true and **is especially not true in relation to migrant and refugee women.**

We need to re-frame and re-strategise our involvements in a way that sets step by step targets and initiatives which will ensure the increasing involvement and control of migrants and refugees generally, and migrant and refugee women specifically, over the decisions, activities, projects, writings, funding, and other initiatives taken 'on their behalf'.

Are we ready to do this?



Principle Three: Changing spaces and work practices

At present, many of the spaces for discussion and advocacy locally, nationally, regionally and internationally operate in a way that continue to exclude refugee and/or migrant representatives and serve (even if unintentionally) to cement their disempowerment.

Women are particularly disadvantaged and disempowered.

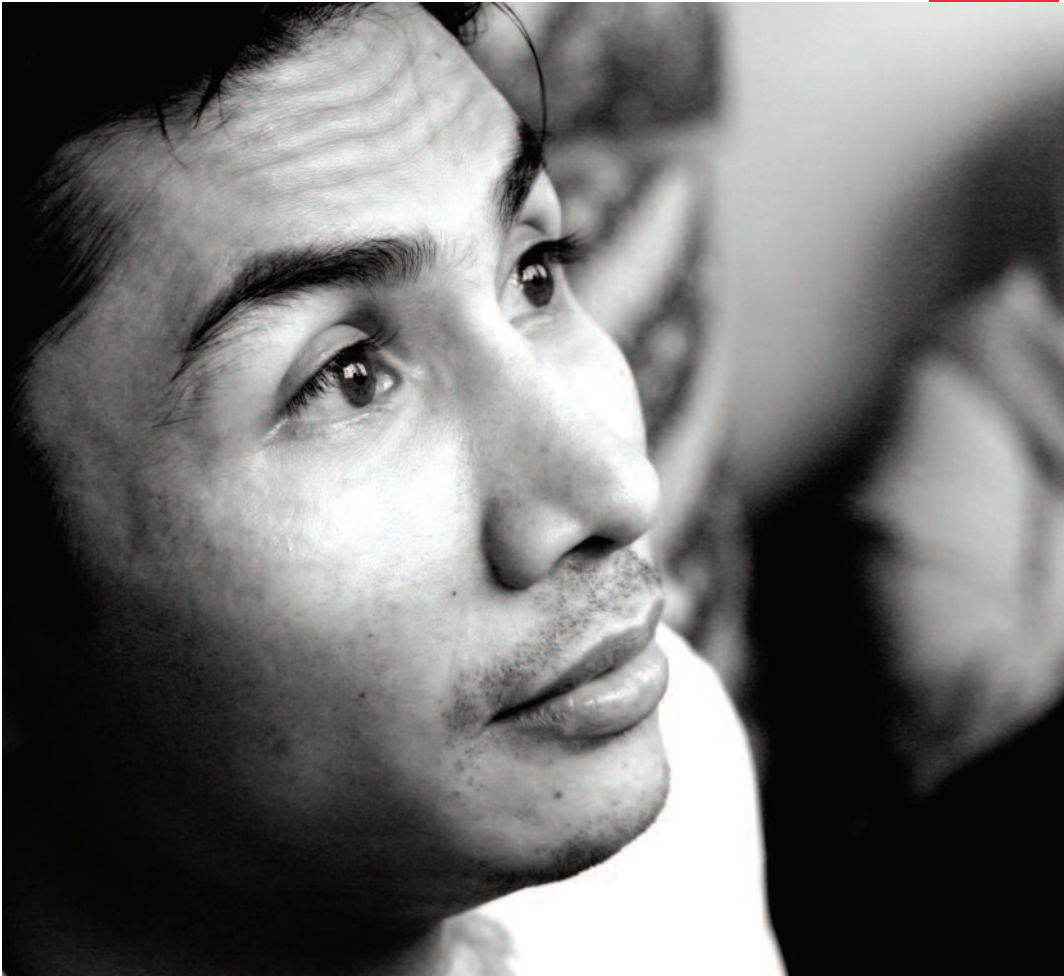
We should commit to changing this by ensuring that:

- Where present discussions and spaces use specific **languages** that help exclude women, men and children from the migrant and refugee communities, we will challenge and change this, through making sure we promote spaces where dual (or more, as appropriate) languages are used and where ideally the migrant and refugee communities/representatives control the choice of communication.
- Where present discussions and spaces employ vocabulary and/or shorthand (acronyms) **which cater only to 'those in the know'**, we commit to challenging this and to ensure vocabulary, like language, does not exclude but does the opposite.
- Where present discussions and spaces are occupied by the **'same group of people'** over and over again, we should wonder why (especially where this group(s) do not have (significant) refugee or migrant members).
- Where present allocation of funding is not accountable to the fundamental principle of empowerment and self-determination of migrant and refugee communities, we will challenge this and work to changing the basis and accountability of funding agencies. This is to ensure that funding does not become the preserve of non-refugee and/or non-migrant worker organisations, but that **funding policy explicitly also commits to promote avenues and opportunities for the empowerment and self-determination** of women, men and children in refugee and migrant communities. This includes supporting their own organisations and the development of their own spaces for meetings, exchange, etc..

- Where funding involves research and documentation, we will be completely ready to challenge the rationale for such research/documentation where it does not centrally include refugee and/or migrant communities in research design (including setting the objectives), implementation and follow-up.

We are painfully aware of how present acceptance and funding of **‘research’ actually contributes to the objectification of women, men and children in migrant and refugee communities**, extracting information from them which in the end helps enrich only the credibility and reputation of external researchers, individuals and/or organisations.

Again, it is too often not at all clear how research benefits refugees and migrants, and what transparency and accountability exists to them.



Principle Four: Information belongs to migrants and refugees

We need to be much more aware of how we extract information from migrant and refugee communities. Does it exploit and consolidate the marginalisation of people in these communities? Or is it explicitly part of the process of empowerment and self-determination? We need to be very honest with ourselves on this.

Even where it is claimed that such information will help the communities concerned, in practice this is too often not at all clear. More often than not, it is used to build an individual's or an organisation's profile and credibility, with little or nothing going back into the community.

It must be stressed that ***the information taken does not belong to the person taking it; it belongs to the community.*** This is true whether it is narratives, stories, biodata, other statistics, interviews, photographs or videos. In planning, supporting or facilitating the collection of information from communities, we must be aware of how the information is used and who is using it. It should not be used to build external individual reputation and 'expertise', ***but rather be used as an opportunity to help build community capacity and strength*** and ultimately ensure empowerment and self-determination.

It is of course the case that women, children and men in migrant and refugee communities are generous in their willingness to share of themselves and their experiences without asking for anything.

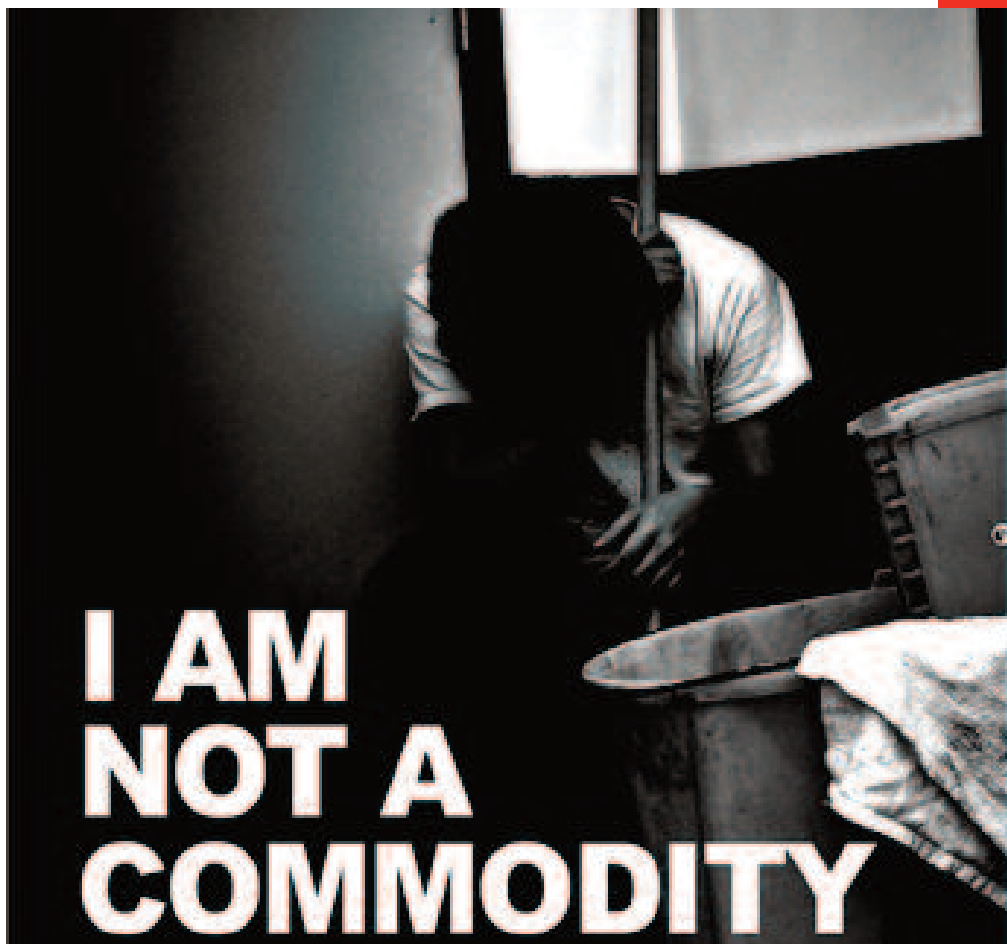
But we cannot simply refer to this as an excuse to support a (research/media/ information gathering) dynamic that does not support in clear and tangible ways the empowerment of migrant and refugee communities.

We can change the way we do this. We can lobby funding agencies, organisations and institutions to change their ways.



We need to ensure that the process of designing, implementing, disseminating and using research/survey/questionnaires/stories always and obviously involves people from the community **at every stage**, actively seeks to build the capacity of the community to do its own documentation and advocacy, and avoids any possible accusation of ‘information mining’.

‘Information mining’ is where women, men and/or children in communities are reduced to **objects in the process of extracting information** from without any effort made to include them in the process of designing whatever information or documentation project is to hand, neither is any effort made to include them in the use or dissemination of the results.



Principle Five: Legal Status is Crucial



Millions of women, men and children migrants and refugees have no legal status. They may have no legal status in their homeland, or no legal status in the country where they now seek refuge, or both.

Without legal status, they have no recognised rights. No human being on our planet should be in this situation.

Lack of legal status is a major impediment to both immediate as well as to longer-term empowerment and self-determination. It denies the securement of basic rights

Lack of legal status may also create significant barriers for our own work. ***Lack of legal status will significantly affect the possibilities for women, men and children*** from migrant and refugee communities to participate in many of the discussions and forums about them (within countries, or regionally, or internationally).

But this should not mean that we accept this as unfortunate and that we 'cannot do anything about this'. Far from it, we should accept this as part of the need to radically re-think what we are doing and how we are doing it.

Fundamental to this is to commit to actively work towards obtaining a secure, respectful legal status, as basic to the control and ***the full involvement of migrant and refugee women, men and children*** in all matters which concern them.

This includes putting forward the position that, in claiming their right of self-determination, migrants and refugees must be given the option of applying for permanent resident status or citizenship in the country where they have worked in for a period of time or sought safety.





Part of this is to find a coherent and consistent strategy for pressurising governments to ratify, implement and enforce **the relevant UN Conventions and treaties (including ILO Conventions)**, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol.



Principle Six: Fight xenophobia, racism, sexism and all other forms of discrimination

In our commitment to the principle of self-determination and empowerment, we are committed to the idea that **migrants and refugees are key to providing the basis for a better society.**

We will therefore challenge any negative perceptions and stigmatising relating to the acceptance of migrant and refugee communities into our respective societies.

We will challenge division and discrimination in any form.

We challenge all forms of **xenophobia.**

We will challenge any discrimination based on sex, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, race, mobility, class, sexuality or any other potentially divisive categorisation.

We understand that xenophobia and racism are **a part of a neo-liberal environment** which thrives on divisions and 'divide and rule'.

We absolutely refute this, and instead choose to build our world based on **love, mutual respect, solidarity** and the principles of social justice.



STOWAGE OF THE BRITISH SLAVE SHIP BROOKES UNDER THE
REGULATED SLAVE TRADE

Act of 1789

By
Parliament

And whereas it is enacted by the said Act that the slaves who shall be imported into this Kingdom shall be stowed in the hold of the ship in such manner as shall be approved by the Board of Trade and the Commissioners of the Customs and Excise in and according to the following regulations to wit That the slaves shall be stowed in the hold of the ship in such manner as shall be approved by the Board of Trade and the Commissioners of the Customs and Excise in and according to the following regulations to wit

“YOU MAY CHOOSE TO
LOOK THE OTHER WAY
BUT YOU CAN NEVER
AGAIN SAY THAT
YOU DID NOT KNOW.”

—WILLIAM WILBERFORCE



Fig. 1
Cross Section
of the Ship



Fig. 2
Cross Section
of the Ship



Fig. 3
Cross Section
of the Ship

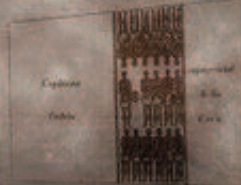


Fig. 4





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