

Training at the Village-level: Awareness Raising to Prevent Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children in Cambodia

Country: Cambodia
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Area of work: Prevention

A. ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

1. Organizational profile

The Cambodian Centre for the Protection of Children's Rights (CCPCR) is a local non-governmental, non-profit organization established in Cambodia on November 20, 1994 by Mr. Yim Po, Executive Director, to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Its core activities are to promote and protect children's rights and to prevent sexual abuse, traf-



ficking, and sexual exploitation of all children, irrespective of nationality, social origin, language or sex, in accordance with the CRC. CCPCR has operated officially since March 1995 under an agreement with the Ministry of Interior and with the financial and technical support of the United Nations Cambodia Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (COHCHR). CCPCR's mandate includes the implementation of the Agenda for Action of the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Stockholm, 1996). It has been successful in implementing activities with the financial and technical support from many funding agencies such as the COHCHR, the World Food Programme, and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for East Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

CCPCR's Central Office and Recovery Shelter are based in Phnom Penh, with branches in seven other provinces (Svay Rieng, Kampong Cham, Kampong Thom, Kampong Speu, Sihanoukville, Banteay Meanchey and Koh Kong). CCPCR also has two vocational training centres, one in Svay Rieng and the other in Sihanoukville, and a development centre in Kampong Cham.

CCPCR is comprised of an executive director, a consultant, two administrative personnel, a programme coordinator in the central office, two financial officers, 43 full-time paid staff, and two volunteer staff. The gender balance among staff is roughly even.

All staff are literate and have experience working in NGOs or as high-school teachers. Most staff are provided with the opportunity to strengthen their capacity through various local and international human rights courses, as well as meetings, workshops or seminars organized by affiliated organizations.

2. Goals

To implement the CRC and the Agenda for Action of the first World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, CCPCR has carried out its activities towards two long-term goals:



1. To promote and protect children's rights;
2. To prevent sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children of any nationality in Cambodia.

3. Impact

CCPCR has five major programme areas: (1) Prevention (2) Investigation and Rescue, (3) Recovery, (4) Reintegration, and (5) Development Centre for Young Girls.

1. *Prevention Programme:* The achievements of the prevention programme are described in detail in the following sections of this case study.
2. *Investigation and Rescue Programme:* CCPCR investigators' duties are to search sex establishments for minor sex workers; receive complaints concerning commercial sexual exploitation of children; investigate incidents; and provide legal protection to the children against the offenders. In cooperation with local authorities, CCPCR investigators have rescued many child victims of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, as well as at-risk children. In 2000, CCPCR rescued 217 at-risk children and child victims of rape, trafficking, violence and illicit detention, and 13 out of 30 offenders were prosecuted. CCPCR also receives children from other partner organizations into their shelters.
3. *Recovery Programme:* The rescued children are placed in CCPCR's Recovery Shelter or Vocational Training Centre. In the centres they are provided with accommodation, clothing, food, medical care, psychological counselling, literacy skills, holistic awareness, legal protection and vocational skills such as sewing, weaving, hairdressing and flower making.
4. *Reintegration Programme:* After staying in the centre for a few months, children may be reintegrated into their families and communities. In 2000, 105 children from the three centres returned to their families, 37 children went to work in various garment factories, and 7 children were sent



to centres run by partner organizations. 27 out of the 105 children who returned to their families, and 27 out of the 37 children who went to the factories, were each provided some seed money as a revolving fund to facilitate their reintegration process. A follow up evaluation found that the children's living status had improved after reintegration.

5. *Development Centre for Young Girls:* Rescued children in serious circumstances often cannot be reintegrated into their families in a short period of time. They are therefore placed in the Development Centre for Young Girls. In 2000, CCPCR sent 10 children to the Development Centre, to meet their medical and psychosocial needs. The girls are also provided with agricultural and animal husbandry skills to help them generate income when they leave the Centre.

B. GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE MODEL

1. Model profile

CCPCR's core activity is its Prevention Programme through Raising Awareness on CRC and Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children at the Community Level. Since 1996, in cooperation with local authorities, CCPCR has conducted this awareness-raising programme in seven targeted provinces, i.e. Svay Rieng, Kampong Cham, Kampong Thom, Kampong Speu, Sihanoukville, Takeo and Banteay Meanchey. These seven provinces are high-risk areas for the commercial sexual exploitation of women and children. The training sessions target local authorities, police, NGOs, teachers, monks, parents, children and people in the community at large. The three-day training sessions are conducted with local authorities to raise awareness on children's rights and to strengthen community capacity to prevent child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation and to protect children in the community.



2. Problem addressed

Chronic war and civil unrest over the past two decades have given rise to extreme poverty among many Cambodians. According to a report of the Ministry of Women's and Veteran Affairs, the majority of the rural population in Cambodia live below the poverty line. Economic hardship is a root cause behind the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Most children, especially young girls, give up school at an early age to find jobs in city centres, to bear part of the family burden. Once they arrive in the provincial towns and cities, these children become extremely vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation. Some children are also lured to the cities by their friends and neighbours, who promise to help them find well-paid jobs. Instead, these friends and neighbours sell them to brothel owners or procurers. Some others are sold to brothel owners by their new husbands, who come courting disguised as respectable men. Children from poor families and families with problems of domestic violence are particularly vulnerable.

In the era of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, many adults prefer to have sex with children because they believe that children are free of HIV/AIDS. This makes children even more vulnerable to sexual abuse and sexual exploitation.

Seeing that most villagers in the rural areas are illiterate and unaware of the offenders' tricks, that children are too young to know about such tricks, and that most children in vulnerable families are at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation, CCPCR's awareness-raising programme at the community level works to reduce the at-risk conditions of those vulnerable children. It is hoped that after the training, the communities will have increased knowledge about the potential dangers facing children in their communities.

3. Model objectives/activities

The objectives of the awareness-raising training programme are:

- To disseminate information on the rights of the child as defined in the CRC;
- To disseminate information on the tricks offenders use to the people in the communities, to prevent children from being commercially sexually exploited;



GOOD PRACTICES IN COMBATING SEXUAL ABUSE AND SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN ASIA

- To follow up and investigate the root causes of child sexual exploitation at the community level;
- To provide at-risk children with vocational skills, as well as holistic counselling, so as to reduce their risk of sexual exploitation;
- To eliminate the dissemination of pornographic and obscene videos;
- To improve and strengthen existing community networks, so that when incidents of sexual abuse or sexual exploitation occur, villagers can make urgent interventions;
- To appeal to authorities and relevant institutions to punish offenders; and
- To secure cooperation with the government and local authorities.

In pursuance of these objectives, CCPCR has organized a training workshop in each district commune. Participation is usually limited to 35 persons per workshop, and comprised of commune headsmen, village chiefs, competent authorities, teachers and other prominent people in the commune. The most capable among the participants—usually village headsmen and teachers—are encouraged to organize and conduct a separate training workshop in their village for the community at large, with the facilitation of CCPCR trainers and coordinators. Local authorities and other prominent people in the communities also play a role in raising awareness in their respective villages, by speaking, for example, during village ceremonies about the ploys of the traffickers and about laws against kidnapping and trafficking of human persons, thus reminding villagers to pay more attention to their children. Sometimes the village headsmen go door to door, to discuss with poor families how they might protect their children.

The awareness-raising training is divided into three different stages:



1. *Pre-assessment and invitation*

Before holding the training workshop, the trainers conduct a three-day pre-assessment survey to decide whether the location qualifies as a target place. The trainers ask local authorities and villagers for information such as the number of sex establishments in the village, demographic and geographical background of the people, and the situation of the children. This information is used to determine the venue of the training workshop and to assess the ability and the needs of the target groups, what their suggestions are, and how they can cooperate with CCPCR. If it is determined that most people in the particular village are not aware of the ploys of those who lure children into commercial sexual exploitation, CCPCR contacts the commune headman to ask permission to organize the workshop. CCPCR cooperates closely with local authorities to identify and invite the participants. If a particular location is not safe, CCPCR trainers invite local police to accompany them to approach the invitees.

2. *The training workshop and village-level training*

About one week after the pre-assessment and invitation stage, CCPCR trainers—usually in teams of two—conduct a three-day training workshop. The content of the training covers: (1) the concept of child rights and the CRC; (2) the roles of parents/caregivers and local authorities in implementing the CRC; (3) the ploys used by those who lure children into commercial sexual exploitation; (4) the laws against kidnapping and trafficking of human persons; (5) the difficulties child victims of sexual exploitation face; (6) the establishment of a community network to facilitate urgent community interventions to help at-risk and victimized children; and (7) the dangers of HIV/AIDS and drug addiction.

Participants are encouraged to share their ideas and past experiences in protecting the rights of the child in their own communities. Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials are also used. For participants whose houses are far from the venue of the training workshop, CCPCR provides financial support to cover part of their food and travelling expenses.



At the end of the training workshop, the trainers evaluate the participants' understanding of the subjects. The trainers lead the participants in a role-play, to enable them to become trainers or to disseminate what they have learnt to their fellow villagers. The trainers also help formulate a timetable for the village headmen, schoolteachers and *Achar Wat* (priests in the religious temples) to set the date for the village-level training.

Following the training workshop, CCPCR trainers observe and facilitate various sessions of the village-level training. Each session lasts for two to three hours, at a time convenient for the villagers. IEC materials (posters, brochures and booklets) are used in each session, and also distributed to the villagers. Videotapes on the commercial sexual exploitation of children are also shown to attract the villagers to attend the training, and to inform them about ploys of the offenders.

3. Follow-up and refresher course

Follow-up stage

Two to three months after the commune-level and village-level workshops, CCPCR provincial trainers conduct follow-up activities with local authorities and villagers to assess changes in attitudes among community members, including the authorities, towards child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. A questionnaire is used to collect data on at-risk children and child victims, to see whether the number of such children has decreased compared to the period prior to the training workshop. CCPCR trainers also ask villagers whether there have been any new incidents of commercial sexual exploitation of children and whether any children have left the village to find jobs in the city centres.

Refresher course

All participants from the training workshop at the commune level are invited to attend a one-day refresher course. The participants are provided with money to subsidize part of their food and travelling expenses. The one-day refresher course aims to strengthen the participants' capacity to ensure that they



can effectively use the knowledge and skills gained from the training workshop to better protect children and prevent the commercial sexual exploitation of children. A student-centred method is used in the refresher course, to obtain information from the participants and to let them take part in the monitoring and evaluation of the programme.

The participants are encouraged to share the achievements and difficulties that they encountered during village-level workshop implementation. Both participants and trainers discuss **problems** that arose and try to find solutions. In case something cannot be resolved at the village level, CCPCR trainers note it down and later pose it to the government, partner organizations, and relevant funding agencies.

If a participant asks the CCPCR trainers to rescue a child at the refresher course, as often happens, the trainers ask the participant to write a report on the situation of the child and, whenever possible, they rescue the child. These children are accepted into CCPCR's centres or other centres run by partner organizations, where they learn life skills and vocational skills.

C. EVALUATION

1. Responsiveness/relevance

Through utilization of pre-assessment activities, CCPCR is able to target the right sites, i.e. where the risk of commercial sexual exploitation of children is extremely high. One aspect that is examined is whether the area has many at-risk children and child victims of commercial sexual exploitation. Village living standards and problems of gambling, alcoholism and pornography are additional factors that are taken into account when selecting a target site.

To encourage participation in the training workshop, CCPCR listens to the participants' preference in terms of where, when and how the training should be conducted, and who should be targeted. Training workshops are conducted during times



that are convenient for the participants, and CCPCR cooperates with local authorities to ensure the safety of the participants as well as the trainers. CCPCR also takes into consideration the distance from the participants' houses to the venue of the training workshop, and provides financial support to those who live far from the venue.

The community members' abilities, local context, and preferences dictate how CCPCR formulates the appropriate training workshop content. If there are many poor families, for example, CCPCR emphasizes precautionary advice, warning families to be wary of letting their children go find jobs in the provincial towns or city centres. CCPCR also develops IEC materials that take cultural and socio-economic factors into consideration. For instance, before publishing the IEC materials, the organization consults with relevant local partner NGOs in order to ensure that the materials will be acceptable to the public.

CCPCR works with local authorities throughout the programme, from inviting the participants to facilitating the training workshop. Before conducting the training, staff members contact local authorities at the district, commune and village levels for advice on how they should conduct the awareness-raising session and how the authorities could cooperate with CCPCR. The trainers introduce themselves to the authorities, explain the objectives of the organization, and interview the authorities to get a sense of their abilities and their needs.

The prevention programme aims to sensitise the community to child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation and to reduce negative feelings towards child victims. In the training workshop, CCPCR teaches community members about confidentiality issues, and encourages them to respect the identity of child victims, and not to repeat details of the incidents to others. By doing this, CCPCR can build trust among the community members and thus encourage them to cooperate with the organization.



2. Sustainability

CCPCR is able to continually mobilize social, technical and community support for its programme through maintaining contact with the communities. It fosters partnerships with other NGOs that provide various kinds of support to CCPCR programmes, such as through information exchanges with NGOs by attending their seminars or inviting them to attend CCPCR's meetings. CCPCR also cooperates with the government.

During programme implementation, CCPCR obtains the cooperation of community members, as well as the local authorities. The target groups have a sense of ownership over the training, which helps to cement their commitment to combating the commercial sexual exploitation of children. To sustain long-term community support CCPCR periodically conducts follow-up activities at the project sites, to visit the villagers and to gather information regarding child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, as well as other kinds of child rights violations. Staff members also keep in touch with community members and local authorities to rescue at-risk and victimized children. CCPCR thus builds trust with the target groups and encourages their long-term commitment to combating child sexual exploitation. Even after completion of the training workshop and follow-up activities, the target groups often suggest to CCPCR that it extend the project activities and keep in touch with the communities.

Local authorities are mobilized to use their power to protect children from commercial sexual exploitation and to help at-risk and victimized children. Commune chiefs and village headmen are included in all processes and are encouraged to use every opportunity to inform the people in their villages on the deceitful means used by traffickers, as well as to disseminate prevention messages.

National and local organizations are involved in the training workshops at all stages. They help facilitate the workshops and also participate in the monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes, through report writing, sharing of information, and initiatives to improve the programme activities. Other relevant NGOs contribute to the effort by incorporating the messages of the prevention programme into their activities.



Such links with the communities, government and NGOs help to ensure the programme's long-term sustainability.

3. Impact

The programme has realized many of its desired outcomes. Children are more aware of the ploys of the traffickers and can better protect themselves. Child victims of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation receive support from the community, both in terms of counselling as well as material support. Some at-risk children gain vocational skills in CCPCR's vocational training centres so they can earn a better income, thus reducing their risk of being sexually exploited.

People in the communities can make better interventions to help at-risk children and to rescue sexually abused and sexually exploited children, as they are sensitized on the issues. They now pay more attention to the children in the community, and are able to intervene on their behalf. For example, in Mriem Khan Choeung Village, Mriem Commune, Romeas Heik District, Svay Rieng Province, community members responded to incidents of domestic-violence in the home of an at-risk child and two sexually exploited children. The villagers decided to make an urgent intervention to rescue the child victims of sexual exploitation by informing the local authorities so that the authorities could make a legal intervention to sue the offenders. They also notified the CCPCR investigator in Svay Rieng to follow up with the cases. The child victims were then sent to a nearby local health care centre.

Villagers have established networks in their own villages to monitor the commercial sexual exploitation of children. They have created a mechanism to inform local authorities, and sometimes they arrest the offenders themselves, if they witness incidents of sexual abuse or sexual exploitation. Community members cooperate with local authorities and other villagers to protect the children in their community. Law enforcement officers can also better perform their duties to protect children from sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, thanks to the training and follow-up activities.



4. Conclusion

The prevention programme against child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation has so far been successful and is worth replicating elsewhere. Personnel, finances and activities of the programme were managed in a systematic way. Involving many target groups in assessing the outcomes of the programme has helped to ensure that its objectives are achieved.

Throughout the different stages of implementation, two key factors stand out as crucial to the success of the programme: (1) conduct of a thorough pre-assessment in order to assess the abilities and the needs of the target groups; and (2) implementation of the refresher course and other follow-up activities in order to cement the strengthened capacity of the target group, to assess the changes in attitudes among local authorities and community members, and to involve them in monitoring and evaluating of the programme.

In replication of the programme, some constraints may be encountered during project implementation, such as a lack of security at the project sites, training times that may not be convenient for the participants, the low level of education of the participants, and a general lack of interest in attending the awareness-raising training. Such constraints, however, can be overcome through careful programme design and implementation. The trainers must: (1) cooperate with local authorities to ensure the trainers' safety; (2) consult with community members to find out the busy seasons (e.g. harvest time), and avoid scheduling training workshops during that period; (3) use IEC materials such as illustrated posters and leaflets to help illiterate people to clearly understand the content of the training; and (4) obtain the cooperation of local authorities to invite the villagers to attend the training workshops, or show videos to attract the attention of the villagers.

CCPCR demonstrates that awareness raising at the village level can be an effective way to prevent sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children when local factors are carefully assessed and taken into account. By building the capacity of leaders and local authorities to spread prevention messages, the programme seeks to combat sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children with the full support of the community.