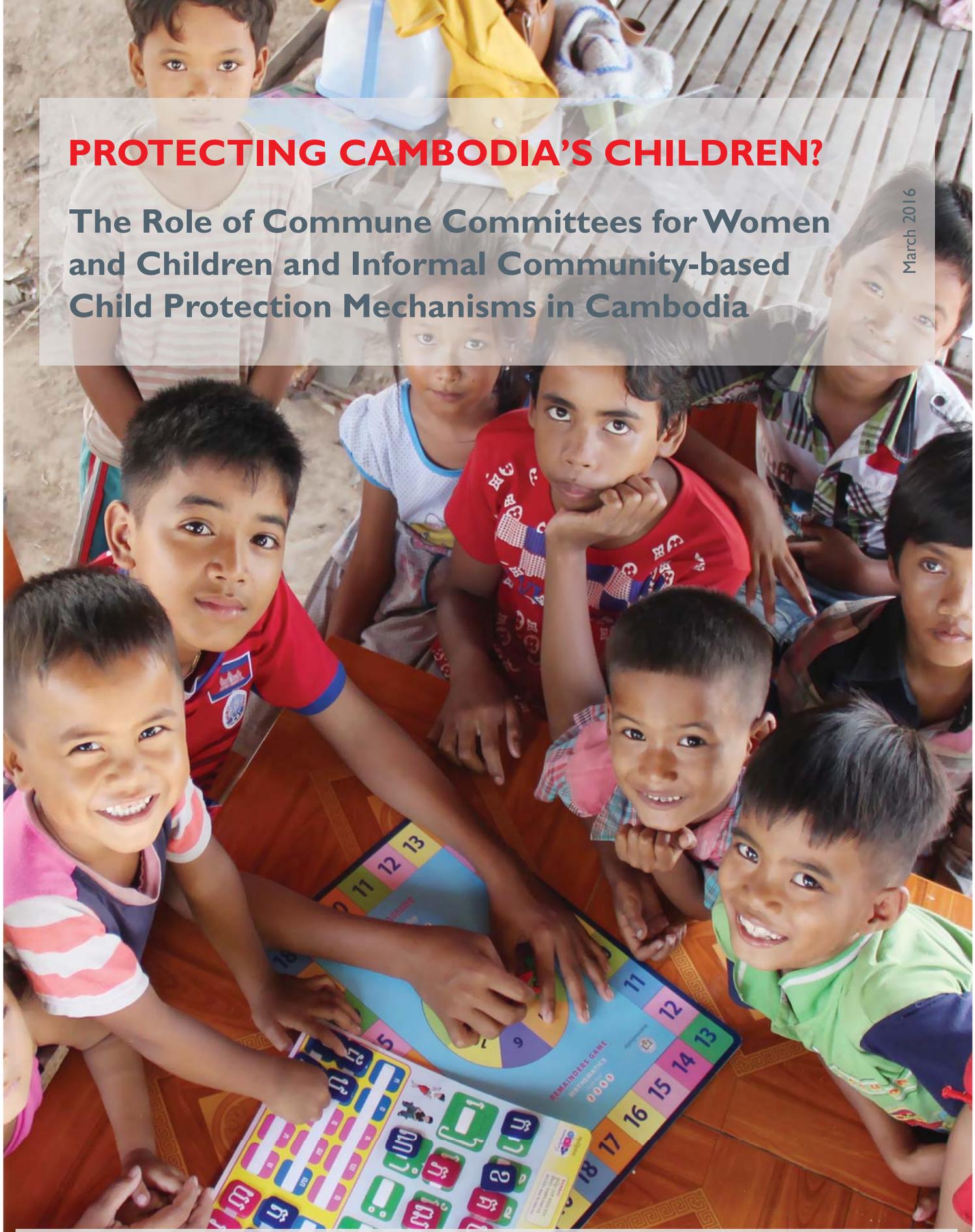


# PROTECTING CAMBODIA'S CHILDREN?

The Role of Commune Committees for Women and Children and Informal Community-based Child Protection Mechanisms in Cambodia

March 2016



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## **D** ISCLAIMER

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Children in Cambodia face a range of threats to their protection. Previous studies have shown that:

- Violence against children is a pervasive issue; over 50 percent of children report experiencing a violent incident before the age of 18, and over one third of children age 13 to 17 report witnessing physical violence in their home within the last twelve months.
- Sexual abuse is also of concern; one in twenty children and youth report at least one incident of sexual abuse prior to adulthood.
- Children are further at risk from economic exploitation: 19.1 percent of children aged 5-17 are economically active, and of these children, 56.9 percent are classified as child laborers, and 31.3 percent as in hazardous labor.
- Finally, the justice system may fail to prosecute alleged abuses against children, and when cases are prosecuted children are often inadequately supported and protected in the process.

While national strategies, plans of action and laws to address these issues exist, implementation and adherence to these policies often relies on local service delivery at the Commune or Sangkat (C/S) level. The Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY) is the Ministry tasked with the protection of children nationally; however, it lacks a mechanism for social service delivery at C/S level or the necessary funds to support it. Instead, services are often provided by NGOs, which results in limited coverage and changes based on NGO priorities.

In 2004, Commune Committees for Women and Children (CCWCs) were established as part of the decentralization and deconcentration process to be an advisory body to the Commune Council. CCWCs focus on women and children, and are tasked with planning, support, advocacy, awareness raising and monitoring of those issues. In response to reports of child abuse in the community, CCWCs also act as a referral mechanism to NGO child protection services, and to deliver services themselves.

Since their creation, there has been relatively little review or research related to CCWCs. This study aimed to fill a gap in information regarding the functioning of CCWCs, looking at both their success in meeting the tasks with which they are mandated in policy, and the roles they have taken on in providing or linking children and families to child protection services. The study also assessed both NGO supported and traditional community-based child protection practices (CBCPPs) that interact with the CCWC at the village level. The research identified factors that promoted or hindered CCWC success which will help inform both programming and policy.

This study was conducted primarily through qualitative methods—semi-structured interviews with 129 key informants and focus group discussions with 127 community groups across 32 Communes/Sangkats in 10 provinces and Phnom Penh. The sites were selected from within target areas of the four INGOs and a multi-lateral organization who commissioned the study. In addition, 12 interviews were conducted with key informants at national level and 65 documents were reviewed. After receiving endorsement from National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD), primary data collection was commenced from October to December 2015.

## INITIAL FINDINGS ON THE FUNCTIONALITY OF CCWCs

The study found that most CCWCs surveyed were at least minimally functional: holding monthly meetings, able to describe their role and able to give example of a case when the CCWC helped a child. CCWCs were fairly successful completing procedural roles. Most CCWCs reported monitoring vulnerable children; for many this was an informal process, but some received support from NGOs to complete more complex monitoring. Most also reported completing the Commune Investment Plan (CIP) and spending all the money allocated. There was evidence from the document review that NGO support to CCWCs in these processes resulted in increased allocation of funds from the CIP for social services (compared to other research suggesting that allocation for social services in the CIP is only between 3-4 percent).

### Most CCWCs:

- Reported conducting awareness raising to promote various aspects of child protection in the community.
- Showed relatively high levels of knowledge regarding child rights issues, with the exception of knowledge of sexual abuse.
- Reported that awareness raising and advocacy efforts had been effective, but more quantitative evidence to support this, such as pre and post tests, was not available.
- Had limited understanding of their mandated roles among their members.

It was revealed that CCWCs had moved beyond their mandate in policy and had begun delivering child protection services

It was revealed that CCWCs had moved beyond their mandate in policy and had begun delivering child protection services. This change had been prompted by several factors, such as constant requests for assistance and feeling compelled to address these, or in response to NGOs funding for services delivered through the CCWC.

The study looked at the efficacy of CCWCs in addressing child protection issues. CCWC members identified four main areas of need in which they provided services:

First, many CCWCs provided support for family or link to NGOs to prevent school dropout and it was reported to be the most effective intervention

First, many CCWCs provided support for family or link to NGOs to prevent school dropout and it was reported to be the most effective intervention. Participants believed that staying in school prevented children from entering child labor. Some CCWC intervened when children were considering leaving school to work through direct visits to families and advising them to allow their children to continue studying. Many others directly supported school fees, school supplies and family livelihood support that helped to keep children in school. This type of support was believed to be common both because of the expressed need from the community, and also because it was the easiest form of support for CCWCs to deliver.

Second, many CCWCs provided support to families affected by domestic violence but most CCWCs favored reconciliation over prosecution in these cases.

Third, CCWCs described receiving requests for assistance in cases of children affected by sexual abuse which was limited to rape cases, instead of wider range of sexual abuse, possibly because of a lack of knowledge regarding other forms of abuse.

Finally, CCWCs reported working to prevent unsafe migration

CCWCs struggle with a complex accountability

Second, many CCWCs provided support to families affected by domestic violence but most CCWCs favored reconciliation over prosecution in these cases. Prevalence of domestic violence is high in Cambodia, and children suffer from both direct violence and from exposure to violence between parents. Cases of domestic violence were frequently brought to CCWCs for resolution, and many CCWCs reported that this issue consumed most of their time. While reconciliation, which was favored by most CCWCs as the research found, allows families to stay together, it does not act as a deterrent, and places the victim at risk of future violence (from both direct violence and from exposure to violence between parents). While participants reported that NGO-supported CCWC programs had positive effects on abusive behavior in the short-term, it was unclear whether these effects could be sustained.

Third, CCWCs described receiving requests for assistance in cases of children affected by sexual abuse which was limited to rape cases, instead of wider range of sexual abuse, possibly because of a lack of knowledge regarding other forms of abuse. Most CCWC members strongly supported arrest and prosecution of perpetrators, and most rape cases reported had been addressed in this way. However, there was an identified lack of services for victims in the community, and some had been placed in shelters, separating them from their families during a traumatic time. Studies have shown that placing children, especially young children, in shelters is detrimental to children and thus the Cambodian government is working to reduce this practice through implementing an Alternative Care Policy.

Finally, CCWCs reported working to prevent unsafe migration. CCWCs interviewed stated that migration affected children in their communities in two main ways: firstly children who left school to migrate for work, and secondly, children who were left behind by parents who migrated. CCWCs reported conducting awareness-raising activities to prevent unsafe migration, and linking children to services that provided school support and other material provisions.

## FACTORS HINDERING OR PROMOTING CCWC EFFECTIVENESS

A number of factors were identified which hindered or promoted effectiveness of CCWCs.

**CCWCs struggle with a complex accountability.** CCWCs are comprised of assigned members who are structurally aligned to different ministries at the national level; this creates difficulties in accountability for the CCWC members individually and as a committee. The CCWC itself is structurally accountable to the Ministry of Interior (MoI), which focuses on governance, whereas many of CCWC functions is more closely related to mandate of Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY), which is responsible for protec-

CCWCs suffer from a lack of funding, both for administrative duties and for child protection services

**CCWCs suffer from a lack of funding, both for administrative duties and for child protection services.** Most members are assigned from other positions (Commune Council member, police, teachers and health center staff), and work for the CCWC is viewed as an additional unpaid duty. The CCWCs previously received funding through a multi-lateral NGO, but this has been withdrawn and most now lack adequate funds for basic functions, such as fuel to visit families for monitoring.

CCWCs are hindered by the lack of a national network of social services delivery and rely on NGOs to provide funds or links to social services for community members

**CCWCs are hindered by the lack of a national network of social services delivery and rely on NGOs to provide funds or links to social services for community members.** NGO coverage is limited to geographic areas, or to specific populations and services, which means CCWC members may be unable to refer community members to services required due to a lack of availability. NGO support does provide some examples of positive impact, such as increased child participation in decision making through links to children's clubs, and also social workers who had strong referral networks connecting with CCWCs; however, these are not sustainable practices or funding sources.

The effectiveness of CCWCs was negatively impacted by a lack of technical capacity

**The effectiveness of CCWCs was negatively impacted by a lack of technical capacity.** Many CCWC members had received training, but they still complained of a lack of skills or capacity to implement solutions to identified child protection issues. In many cases, CCWC members were filling the role of social workers, with little or no professional training on social service interventions.

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*In response to the findings of this study, the following changes are recommended*

## Funding & Resources

### Key findings:

- Child protection services at the village level are underfunded, with no dedicated funding from MoSVY and insufficient funds for CCWCs.
- Commune budgets tend to favor infrastructure projects over social services, and the process to use funds for social services is more complex than other sectors and projects. This may reflect a lack of knowledge on potential services that could be funded by local Commune budgets.
- When NGOs support planning and budgeting processes, the result is increased allocation of the CIP to social services.

### Recommendations for government:

- MoSVY should adopt clearer strategies to establish a comprehensive social service delivery system that will increase child protection social services at village and commune levels in the long term, and develop a clear funding request to the Royal Government of Cambodia for adequate budget to implement the system.
- As part of this strategy, funds to CCWC through MoI should be increased with a greater focus on prevention activities, data collection, costs for home visits and responding to cases of child and domestic abuse.
- The Commune process for requesting and receiving funds for social services should be reviewed and simplified.
- CCWCs should educate citizens on social services that can be funded through the CIP.

### Recommendations for NGOs, civil society and other partners:

- NGOs should continue to support CCWCs to fulfill their mandated roles according to government policy, including supporting child protection services at the local level, and provide inputs into the development of a national system for social services.
- NGOs should continue to expand support for CCWC and Commune Councils in planning and budgeting processes, and advocate for increased allocation of budgets to social services (at Commune, District and Provincial level).
- NGOs should support citizen participation in influencing and monitoring Commune budgets.

## Activities And Responsibilities (Programs)

### Key findings:

- Many CCWCs had moved beyond their role described in policy, and were providing child protection services. These services were often inadequate and in some cases placed children at continued risk.
- CCWCs' limited technical capacity results in inadequate response to child protection cases. For example, an overreliance on reconciliation of cases places victims at continued risk; sexual abuse cases other than rape were not always identified; an overreliance on shelters and residential care institutions as the primary response for children who have been raped.
- The involvement of local civil society groups, specifically parent and children's groups, can lead to increased reporting of child abuse to authorities, and can positively impact CCWC functioning.
- NGOs were often the main providers of child protection services, but these programs were often decided at national level with limited input from CCWCs and do not cover the whole population.
- A lack of faith in the justice system hampered efforts to prosecute abusers, and the justice system is not child friendly, confidential or affordable.
- Informal kinship care is an intrinsic part of community-based child protection.
- An NGO program supporting social workers who received referrals from CCWCs was effective and successful.

### Recommendations for government:

- Mol should review and amend the roles of CCWCs to bring greater clarity to their responsibilities, including their monitoring function, and the involvement of children, women, social workers and religious leaders in the committee.
- The monitoring function of CCWCs should be further strengthened, supporting CCWCs to use information collected to link with NGO services and ensure coordination of services with local providers.
- Further focus and guidelines on child and youth engagement and participation in CCWCs are required, and ensure their involvement aligns with their best interests.
- CCWCs should promote community based care and prevent unnecessary placement of children in residential care.
- Mol should collaborate with MoSVY to provide further capacity building to CCWCs on:
  - Budgeting for child protection issues,
  - Identification and monitoring of vulnerable children,
  - Ensuring the safety of children when responding to domestic violence or sexual abuse cases,
  - The benefits of linking to community based care programs and the negative impact of residential care on child development,
  - Referral processes to services (either government or NGO).
- Strengthen the implementation of domestic violence laws to ensure prosecution (and incarceration) of offenders and enhance support for victims.
- Reinforce existing laws with Commune Councilors, CCWC members and Police to ensure citizens are not required to pay informal fee to try cases and ensure the justice system provides confidentiality and access for children.

**Recommendations  
for NGOs, civil society  
and other partners:**

- In the medium term, NGOs should expand programs providing social workers/services (for victims and vulnerable children and families) that
- CCWCs can refer to, and support the strengthening of coordination mechanisms between the CCWCs and service providers (including identifying geographic gaps in service provision).
- Further advocate for the allocation of local Commune budgets for social workers.
- Strengthen staff knowledge and understanding of the CCWC roles (as outlined in policy) and ensure partnerships support the CCWCs capacity to identify and refer child protection cases.
- Further support government efforts to reduce residential care by mapping options for community based care and explicitly link new opportunities with CCWCs.
- Support programs and mechanisms that provide opportunities for citizens to express needs to CCWCs, and influence decision making regarding child protection services at the local level.
- Collaborate with sub-national governments at District and Provincial level to ensure referrals and networks between NGOs and CCWCs are well coordinated.
- Continue to evaluate, research and explore opportunities for kinship care in Cambodia and develop viable models.

**Key  
findings:**

- CCWC members have confusing reporting lines to different Ministries which undermines focus and commitment of members (from the police, health center, school, and to a lesser degree Commune Council).
- WCCCs do not appear to engage with or support CCWCs in a substantive manner.

**Recommendations  
for government:**

- Mol must clarify the roles and responsibilities of the members of CCWCs and build accountability mechanisms. New standards (that can be monitored) should be clearly established in policy. The new standards should also detail the roles, responsibilities, and participation of police, health centres, schools, Commune Councilors, and other government actors.
- Responsibilities for information sharing (such as police sharing information on child abuse cases reported) should be made more clear, and ensure other
- CCWC members are responsive to their role when information is shared with them.
- Mol should clarify how WCCCs can coordinate and better support CCWCs to fulfill their mandate for child protection; this will require amendments to existing Prakas, or new policies, to detail the timing of interactions, monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and responsiveness of WCCCs to the issues raised through CCWCs for further support.

**Recommendations  
for NGOs, civil society  
and other partners:**

- NGOs should ensure their programs support the diverse make up of
- CCWCs and maximize the link to other sectors.

## Acronyms and Terminology

### Acronyms

CBCPP	Community Based Child Protection Practices
CIP	Commune or Sangkat Investment Program
CDP	Commune or Sangkat Development Plan
C/S	Commune or Sangkat
CCWC	Commune Committee for Women and Children
CDHS	Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey
DOSVY	District Office of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation
Mol	Ministry of Interior
Moj	Ministry of Justice
MoLVT	Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training
MoSVY	Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation
MSACC	Minimum Standards on Alternative Care for Children
OoSVY	Office of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation
PACC	Policy on Alternative Care for Children
UNICEFVBK	United Nations Children’s Fund (formerly United Nations International Children’s Fund).
VBK	Vicheasthan Badosbondal Neakropkrong Kangea
WCCC	Women’s and Children’s Consultative Committee

### Terminology

In order to work within the existing framework, terminology within this report is drawn from Cambodian policy, research and project reports. Definitions of forms of care are drawn from Policy for Alternative Care of Cambodia, pp. 9-11.

Community and family based care

**Community and family based care** is defined as an approach designed to enable children either to remain with their own family or to be placed with a foster family, if possible within their community. Family in this context comprises the extended family offering kinship care, child-headed households and foster families unrelated to the child.

Kinship care

#### **Kinship care**

Kinship care is a situation in which extended family members take an orphaned or other child in. Carers could be grandparents, aunts, uncles or other relatives of the child. This common practice also is deeply rooted in Cambodia. This type of care may however be based on a written agreement between parents, extended family, local or central authorities and an organization.

Residential care

**Residential care** is a group living arrangement for children in which care is provided by remunerated adults for service provision, e.g. orphanages, recovery centers, child protection centers.

Child protection system

**Child protection system** is defined as a comprehensive and sustainable approach to preventing and responding to child protection issues, comprising of the set of laws, policies, regulations and services required across all social sectors, especially social welfare, education, health, security and justice to respond to and prevent protection-related risks.

Community-based child protection mechanism

**Community-based child protection mechanism** is a person or group in the community providing child protection. It may be voluntary or paid, and may be organized through external support (for example from an NGO) or independently within the community.

Sexual abuse

**Sexual abuse** is defined as including:

Unwanted Sexual Touching: if anyone, male or female, ever touched the respondent in a sexual way without their permission, but did not try and force the respondent to have sex of any kind.

Attempted Unwanted Intercourse: if anyone ever tried to make the respondent have sexual intercourse of any kind without their permission, but did not succeed.

Physically Forced Intercourse: if anyone ever physically forced the respondent to have sexual intercourse of any kind regardless of whether the respondent did or did not fight back.

Pressured Intercourse: if anyone ever pressured the respondent in a non-physical way, to have sexual intercourse of any kind when they did not want to and sex happened. When someone pressures someone else into sex, it could involve things like threats, harassment, and luring or tricking the other person into having sex.

Physical violence

**Physical violence** is defined as physical acts of violence such as being slapped, pushed, punched, kicked, whipped, or beat with an object, choked, smothered, tried to drown, burned, scalded intentionally, or used or threatened with weapon such as a knife or other weapon.

Child labor

**Child labor:** the definition of child laborer used in this report is defined as follows:

**a.** Children aged 5–11 years and engaged in any economic activity for one hour or more in reference week.

**b.** Children aged 12–14 years and engaged in permissible (non-hazardous) economic activity for more than 12 hours in the reference week.

**c.** Children aged 12–14 years and engaged in work for fewer than 12 hours in the reference week but working in designated hazardous industries and occupations.

**d.** Children aged 15–17 years and engaged in economic activity for more than 48 hours in the reference week.

**e.** Children aged 15–17 years and engaged in economic activity for 48 or fewer hours in the reference week but engaged in designated hazardous industries and occupations.

The number of child laborers is the sum of the children who fit into the three age groups.

Hazardous Child Labor

**Hazardous Child Labor** was determined as follows:

**a.** All children aged 5–17 years engaged in designated hazardous industries, designated hazardous occupations (and other criteria specified in the national legislation, excluding regulations on weekly working hours).

**b.** All children aged 5–17 years engaged in non-hazardous industries, non-hazardous occupations (working under non-hazardous conditions, as defined by national legislation) but working more than 48 hours in the reference week.

The number of children in hazardous labor is the sum of the children who fit into the two criteria.

## 1.1 Threats to Child Safety in Cambodia

Children comprise a large segment of Cambodia's population with 35 percent below the age of 15. There is no national standardized measure of the number of vulnerable children, but there are specific groups of children that may be at increased risk. Internationally, children living outside of family care have been found to be at increased risk (Malhomes et al. 2012). An estimated 11 percent of children are not living with their parents (CDHS 2014). Nine percent of children under age 18 live with their mother only, 2 percent with their father only (CHDS 2014).

#### Many children living outside families

**Many children living outside families** are placed in residential care institutions (RCIs). Approximately 48,775 children were estimated to be living in RCIs across Cambodia according to a recent national estimation by National Institution of Statistics, MoSVY, Columbia University and a private consulting firm in March 2016. A recent mapping by MoSVY and UNICEF provided figure in four provinces and Phnom Penh with a total of 11,788 children under 18 years reported to be living in 267 RCIs. Of which, 37 RCIs were unregistered institutions. The number of residential care institutions was reported to increase from 139 (2014) to 267 (2016) according to the mapping.

#### Poverty

**Poverty** also increases children's vulnerability. Cambodia has experienced impressive economic growth in recent years. A study by the World Bank (2013) found that poverty has been reduced dramatically from 53.2 percent in 2004 to 20.5 percent in 2012, and current estimates place the poverty rate at 17.7 percent. However, the study estimates that 3 million people live just above the poverty line, and that an additional expenditure of 1,200 riel (30 cents) a day would force this population below the poverty line, raising the poverty level to 40 percent.

#### Violence against children

**Violence against children** is a pervasive issue in Cambodia. UNICEF (2014) found that over 50 percent of children reported at least on incidence of physical violence before the age of 18, and more than three quarters of these experienced multiple incidents. Previous studies have reported similar high levels of physical abuse of children. World Vision (2015) found an estimated 70 percent of children said their parents or caregivers used physical punishment as a means of discipline. A study from 2009 found 64% of participants believed that parents should discipline their children by beating if they don't listen, and 61% said a teacher was right to beat a child if they did not do their homework (Gourley 2009). This study notes that, "it is clear that corporal punishment and harsh verbal discipline is commonly practiced and accepted in most Cambodian families," Only when a beating resulted in serious injury would it be reported to the authorities (Gourley 2009).

<sup>1</sup> <http://data.worldbank.org/country/cambodia>, accessed 01.25.2015



## Domestic violence

**Domestic violence** perpetrated against a spouse, and witnessed by a child, can be detrimental to the child and has been shown to cause developmental delays and increase prevalence of long-term health problems (Kitzman et al. 2003, UNICEF 2004). The survey on violence against children in Cambodia (UNICEF 2014) found over a third respondents aged 13 to 17 had witnessed physical violence in their home in the last twelve months, and four in ten witnessed violence in their community.

## Sexual abuse

**Sexual abuse** is also of serious concern. UNICEF found that one in twenty of children and youth reported at least one incident of sexual abuse prior to adulthood (2014). Nearly half of female participants and over three quarters of male participants aged 18 to 24 did not tell anyone about an incident of sexual abuse. While there is no published national registry that records incidents of sexual abuse, LICADHO (2009) found that levels of rape were increasing and that 78 percent of rape victims seeking support from the human rights NGO Adhoc were children. If children do disclose rape, it is believed to be more commonly reported to police because it is perceived as one of the most egregious forms of child abuse (Gourley 2009). In addition, it may be that rape of children is more commonly reported since it is easier to prove in court that it is not consensual. Gourley (2009) found that 29% of respondents agreed with the statement that sometimes rape is the girl's fault.

Studies have also shown a disturbing trend in the way in which rape cases are settled. In 2009, Gourley (2009) and LICADHO (2009) found that out of court settlements and marriage to a perpetrator were common solutions to rape cases, believed by many to be valid because they protected the victim's honor, as well as that of her family. These kinds of settlements were believed to safeguard a girl's future, since it was believed that it would be difficult for a girl who had lost her virginity to find a husband (Gourley 2009, Jordanwood 2010).

## Child labor

**Child labor** is prevalent in Cambodia, both in rural and urban areas. The 2012 Cambodia Labor Force and Child Labor Survey found an estimated 19.1 percent of children age 5-17 are economically active, 86.7 percent of these in rural areas, and 13.3 percent in urban areas. Child labor is a subset of economically active children. Of these economically active children, 56.9 percent were classified as child laborers, and 31.3 percent were in hazardous labor. Levels of child labor, and children in hazardous labor are higher in rural areas than in urban areas, working in the agricultural, forestry or fishing industries, or in domestic service. More than half child laborers had dropped out of school or had never attended school.

Cambodia is undergoing a surge in migration levels. The Ministry of Planning (MoP) CRUMP long-term study of migration in Cambodia (2012) provided information about prevalence of migration and its impact on children. About 80% of migrants are below 30 years old. 2.3 percent of migrants move with a spouse. Of that 2.3 percent, over half migrate with their children under age 15, and 8 percent leave these children behind. The majority of children left behind

grandparents. Both MoP (2012) and UNICEF (b2014) found that migration may result in both beneficial and negative impacts on children. Remittances can improve families' standard of living, with 80.5 percent of migrants supporting their families financially. However, children of migrants are more likely to drop out of school and more likely to work and are more likely to be unwell or malnourished (Hing et al 2014.)

**The Cambodian court system** fails to adequately provide for children who report crimes. Reimer (2015) interviewed 54 children who had brought cases to court, and found that crimes against children were seldom immediately reported to the police, and that courts often failed to provide child friendly provisions for children. Children were seldom interviewed alone, or by female police (in cases of sexual assault this can be particularly important). In some cases children were mocked by police, and in most cases children encountered the perpetrator during the court proceedings. 20 percent of children interviewed had been asked to pay additional money on top of normal court fees, and this number may have been higher than reported since many children had not been aware of financial proceedings. It was extremely difficult for families to provide for the costs of court, and many had borrowed money to do so.

While the issue of neglect is a child protection issue, the study did not cover this and neither was it highlighted as a particular issue in which CCWC has responded.

## 1.2 Formal Child Protection System and the Role of CCWC

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) is tasked with governance of administrative bodies, police and protection of people of Cambodia. In 2002, as part of the decentralization and deconcentration reform, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) through the MoI established Commune Councils as an elected local governance body which represents community members at commune level.

In 2004, this was followed by the establishment of CCWCs. CCWCs are commune level committees comprised of members that are either elected or appointed depending on their role. Policy mandates that CCWCs be comprised of the Commune or Sangkat (C/S) chief and deputy, a Focal Point for Women and Children, a member of the police, a member of the school faculty, a member of the health center and village chiefs from all villages it represents (RGC 2008). The main roles and responsibilities of the CCWC are outlined in the Functioning of the CCWC (RGC 2008), and are included in the Inset 1. Broadly, these responsibilities include planning, coordination, advocacy, awareness raising and monitoring.

CCWCs also support the monitoring and implementation of the Safe Commune/Sangkat Policy (SSP) (RGC 2010). This policy aims to provide safety and security within communities in Cambodia. It is written by MoI, the Ministry

- Prepare an annual work plan and budget for the Committee and submit to the C/S Council for approval;
- Provide advice and assist the C/S Council and the C/S chief on the tasks related to women and children in C/S;
- Raise awareness on laws and other policies related to women and children's rights to the people in the C/S and to mobilize the respective communities on health, education, protection and child development including registration of newborn babies and children;
- Advocate for women to participate in decision making relating to the development of the C/S
- Increase and strengthen communication, collaboration and coordination among C/S Councils, service providers and villagers that implement activities to help women and children in the C/S;
- Assist C/S Councils to collect, analyze information and data related to issues and needs of women and children and integrate this information into the CDP and the CIP;
- Participate in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the C/S work plan related to women and children;
- Monitor the situation of women and children in the C/S and report regularly to the C/S Council and include this information in the C/S reports. plan related to women and children;
- Monitor the situation of women and children in the C/S and report regularly to the C/S Council and include this information in the C/S reports.

*Excerpt from "The Functioning of Commune Committee for Women and Children" (RGC 2008)*

**Inset I. Major Roles and Responsibilities of the C/S Committee for Women and Children**

**No theft, snatching or robbery**  
**No production or dealing of illegal drugs**  
**No prostitution, child trafficking or domestic violence**  
**No organized gangs**  
**No illegal games, no use of illegal weapons or crimes**  
**No traffic accidents**  
**No accidents due to non-explosive weapons**  
**Existence of preventative and response mechanisms in regards to natural disasters**  
**No illegal check points**

Local authorities are tasked with ensuring the security of the community in relation to these areas. Communities that report low levels of crime are awarded a prize, and prior studies have found this acts as a disincentive to reporting (VBNK 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Circular on Functioning of CCWC mentions too little about the support by WCCC for CCWC and how it should be carried out in practice while Prakas on establishment and functioning of WCCC does not specify the kind of support for CCWC.

It is notable that within these policies CCWCs are not responsible for delivery of child protection services to families and children

**It is notable that within these policies CCWCs are not responsible for delivery of child protection services to families and children.** Within practice, however, as a result of factors discussed later (in CCWC Referral to and Provision of Child Protection Services), some CCWCs have begun to fulfill this role.

In 2009, Women's and Children's Consultative Committees (WCCCs) were established as a mechanism to empower women and children at the sub-national level, under the jurisdiction of provincial and district councils. In Prakas 4275, WCCC tasked with advising capital, provincial, municipal and district councils regarding issues relating to women and children. In particular, their mandated responsibilities include coordinating with provincial departments and relevant stakeholders in order to support C/S council and CCWC to implement activities related to mother's health, hygiene, community pre-school and child protection, and seeking support from councils, board of governor and other committees of capital, provincial, municipal, district and Khan councils in order to jointly solve social issues related to mother's health, hygiene, community pre-school and child protection (Circular on Functioning of CCWC, 2010, p. 9).

However, research (Harachi 2014) suggests that these councils have not been active, rarely meet, and are often unaware of their responsibilities. It can be assumed that WCCCs do not engage with or support CCWCs in a substantive manner.

The CCWC also exists within a national policy and institutional framework that is created and driven by ministries other than the Ministry of Interior

**The CCWC also exists within a national policy and institutional framework that is created and driven by ministries other than the Ministry of Interior.** MoSVY is the Ministry tasked with protecting and providing services to vulnerable children and peoples. At the national level, MoSVY leads a number of councils, working groups and task forces which develop policy, and coordinate services provided by NGOs in the areas of residential care, reintegration, street children, people with disabilities and vulnerable children in general.

Sub-nationally a department of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (DOSVY) represents MoSVY at the District level. DOSVY provides child protection services largely through institutional care, managing 21 government residential care and drug rehabilitation centers. . DOSVY seldom engages in direct social service provision to families within communities. The Office of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (OoSVY) reports on

<sup>2</sup>Circular on Functioning of CCWC mentions too little about the support by WCCC for CCWC and how it should be carried out in practice while Prakas on establishment and functioning of WCCC does not specify the kind of support for CCWC.

It was not known if DOSVY and OsSVY engages with CCWC

Harachi (2014), in her review of social work practice, noted that at the time of her report there were only 1,017 sub-national personnel within DOSVY or OoSVY within Cambodia, including non-service providers, who were expected to cover 1633 communes. She notes that the majority of time of these personnel is spent delivering pensions to veterans, retired civil servants and persons with disability. She further finds that staffing levels within MoSVY and DOSVY have seen year-on-year declines. Finally, she identifies a significant lack of funding, capacity and provision of child protection services at the local level. **It was not known if DOSVY and OsSVY engages with CCWC.**

Neither Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labor nor Ministry of Justice employ social workers

Delivery of child protection services should not be limited to social service providers, but should encompass a range of stakeholders including health, education, labor and justice professionals. Harachi (2014) further notes that social workers are important in the delivery of psychiatric care in health, in preventing school drop out in education, in preventing child labor, and in helping children within the justice system. However, within Cambodia, social work is not acknowledged as a key component of delivering services in these areas. **Neither Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labor nor Ministry of Justice employ social workers.** The CCWC does, however, work with the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training (MoLVT) in respect of identifying child labor in the community, and is requested to work with provincial departments of labor who have a responsibility to track and eliminate child labor by cooperating with the CWCC, schools and through inspecting formal workplaces.

There is no research or policy dedicated to the interaction between CCWCs, OoSVY and DOSVY members. However, it has been mentioned in studies related to other topics. Research suggests that at the commune level, CCWCs will seek assistance from DOSVY members in special cases in which a CCWC feels that the authority of DOSVY would help, and that DOSVY members are often called upon as signatories on child placements, or to fulfill a ceremonial at reintegration ceremonies (Jordanwood 2015, Harachi 2014).

<sup>3</sup>The DOSVY for Poipet District in Banteay Meanchey province also manages the Poipet Transit Center for children returning from migration or trafficking to Thailand and drug rehabilitation centers

### 2.1 Research Rationale and Research Questions

Children's rights to protection in Cambodia are far from being met, as discussed above (in Context). At the same time, the country lacks a national child protection mechanism to provide services for vulnerable children. As a part of the decentralization and deconcentration process, CCWCs were established nationwide in 2004. The roles and responsibilities of CCWCs focus on planning, coordination, advocacy, awareness raising and monitoring. NGOs have been working with CCWCs to build their capacity to fulfill these roles. However, while substantial research regarding local governance structures such as Commune Councils exists (Plummer and Tritt 2011, Plummer 2012, Conferal 2012), there has been very little research on informal child protection systems and CCWCs, as discussed later (in the *Literature Review*.)

This study aims to contribute to learning and improvement of the child protection system in Cambodia by providing further insight on the functioning of CCWCs - their partnerships with NGOs, interactions with informal child protection mechanisms at the village level, factors which promote or hinder CCWC success, and the attitudes and behaviors they hold towards children and child protection.

The research study has involved 14 programs across 5 organisations (World Vision, ChildFund, Save the Children, Plan and UNICEF) that provide system strengthening for child protection in Cambodia. These organisations were responsible for the design of the research objectives, identification of research participants, and input on initial drafts of the study with the goal that it will be useful to on-going child protection programs.

This study answers the following research questions, posed by the steering committee:

1. What are attitudes and behaviors of local government actors and community members toward children and child protection?
2. What are existing INGO-supported community-based child protection practices (CBCPPs) which involve CCWCs and other informal child protection networks? Which of these are most successful? Why?
3. What are critical factors hindering and enhancing functionality and effectiveness of CCWCs with regards to child protection issues?

## 2.2 Methodology

### Participatory Research

Research was conducted as a partnership between the research team and the core steering committee. These organizations collaborated with the research team at every stage of development. This process allowed the researchers to identify misrepresentations in the research, and to mold the study into a form that was more useful to practitioners and decision makers in future. The partnership between the research team and the NGO implemented projects created a potential for bias in the sample selection, discussed below (in Sample). However, efforts were made by the research team to mitigate the bias, particularly through being clear about the process and the limitations of the study.



### Research Team

The research team was composed of an ex-patriot lead researcher, who has over ten years of experience working in child protection in Cambodia, and eight experienced Cambodian assistant researchers.

### Document Review

65 documents were reviewed as part of this research that included four principle categories, which informed different parts of this study as noted in Table 1. In an effort to protect the confidentiality of the 14 programs included in the study, a list of documents reviewed is not included.

**Table 1. Documents Reviewed to Inform Specific Sections**

Research Study Section	Documents Reviewed to Inform Section
Cambodian child protection context	Studies related to violence against children, child labor, children in RCIs, rape, the impact of migration on children
Mapping of models of INGO-supported CBCPMs	Project proposals and reports from 14 collaborating programs
Literature review	Studies regarding effectiveness of CCWCs Studies regarding attitudes towards children

## Data Collection

### Tools

This study was conducted mainly through qualitative methods, for two reasons. Firstly, as a result of the general lack of literature on CCWCs this research was exploratory. This necessitated the use of open questions, which enable new information to emerge. Secondly, this study aimed to examine the complex social factors related to attitude, behavior and child protection responses. Qualitative research allows for these issues to be explored in more detail.

### Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with government officials at commune and district levels, CCWC focal person, children, school director and key informants from relevant NGOs (See Inset 2). Such interview allowed the researcher to investigate a range of predetermined topics, whilst providing the flexibility to follow-up on unanticipated responses.

### Inset 2: Interview Participants

- CCWC Focal Points
- District Social Workers
- Local Project Staff
- Commune Chiefs
- DCWC/PCWCs
- School directors
- Children (girls and boys) age 15-17
- Key informants from national staff NGOs focused on child protection
- Key informants from national staff NGOs focused on governance
- Key informants from staff focusing on governance and child protection within bi-lateral agencies

### Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

FGDs were conducted with eleven different categories of groups, as listed in the Inset 3. FGDs allowed the

researcher to access a range of commonly held attitudes and behaviors. FGDs were well suited to promote discussions among community members regarding the current roles, functionalities and effectiveness of the CCWC, and other informal networks. The FGDs followed a semi-structured guide including open-ended questions.

The guide also included some questions from which the group was expected to choose from a list of responses. The facilitators asked the group to come to consensus regarding a response, if consensus was not reached, then the researchers marked the question as “no response.” Almost all groups regularly reached consensus, and there was often a similarity between responses between different groups in the same area (i.e. between families and CCWC members in the same C/S) which lead the researchers to have increased faith in the validity of the tool. The research team was scheduled to meet with CCWCs in 32 C/S.

Two CCWCs did not arrive at the appointed time, so the sample is limited to 30 CCWCs. In some cases, CCWC members chose for whatever reason not to answer a question. In these cases, the denominator is therefore lower, x/29, for example.

### Inset 3: FGD Participants

- CCWCs
- Children (girls and boys) 9-15yrs old
- Village Support Group
- Village family protection network
- Village safeguards
- School Support Committee
- Child protection committee
- CCWC and Child Labor Monitoring Committee
- Families with children in child labor
- Families with children not in child labor
- Community working group



### Sample Selection

The sample was selected according to examples of positive and negative deviance. Positive deviants were cases that were unusual in their success and negative deviants were unusually challenged. The steering committee was responsible for identifying positive and negative deviant CCWCs, based on CCWCs perceived functionality. Within each province the steering partner identified two communes; a commune with a positive deviant CCWC (a CCWC that has been working effectively in collaboration with an INGO partner), and a commune with a negative deviant CCWC (CCWC that has not been working effectively). In order to prevent bias, the research team did not know which CCWCs had been identified as positive or negative prior to data collection. However, it became clear in data analysis that the positive/negative deviant division could not be meaningfully analyzed due to other factors in the sample (discussed below in Analysis of Positive or Negative Deviance).

### Data Analysis

Qualitative data

**Qualitative data** was translated, and then coded for themes, based on prevalence of responses. The themes were then sorted according to the three research questions: attitudes and behaviors towards children, INGO-supported CBCPPs and factors promoting or hindering CCWC effectiveness. Each research question had several sub-categories of themes. Next, the researcher went back to the data and text relating to themes was isolated and compiled. This compiled text was then further summarized to arrive at key findings.

Qualitative data

**Quantitative data** was counted to provide a sense of prevalence in different districts, and in some cases ranked according to frequency of response. Qualitative and quantitative findings were then compared, and findings overall were compared to existing literature to ascertain whether findings built on existing knowledge. It should be noted that it was not the intention of the study to provide statistical significance, allow generalization, or establish causation or correlation. The study is exploratory, and focuses on attitudes and behaviors and therefore, is best addressed through primarily qualitative research.

### *Analysis of Positive or Negative Deviance*

The research protocol had called for comparison of positive and negative deviance, however, during the data analysis it became clear that this was not possible.

Most CCWCs reported (both in open questions and in survey list questions) as conducting the majority of responsibilities assigned to the CCWC through government policy (RGC 2008). As a result it was difficult to separate positive and negative deviants within these responses. Moreover, some steering committee NGOs provided substantive support, with active engagement to CCWCs. In communes receiving this kind of support from a specific NGO, both the positive deviant and the negative deviant were showing higher functionality than in communes not receiving these levels of support. It was a lesson learned that positive

after an initial round of support, then a second round of in-depth report completed afterwards.

## 2.3 Limitations

All CCWC responses are self-reported, and therefore, may be subject to bias. In addition, steering committee members, who fund projects working with CCWCs, were responsible for contacting participants who may have had a prior involvement with, and therefore knowledge of CCWCs. However, a large number of participants reported not having heard of CCWCs and a high number and a wide range of participants are believed to mitigate this sample bias. Furthermore, efforts were made to increase the validity of findings through triangulation by the comparison of responses from the different groups within a community. Responses within communities related to prior child protections responses were found to be similar, presenting a consistency in the data that lead the research team to believe it was valid.

Evaluation of success of CBCPP through document review was limited. Few project documents evaluated communities prior to the commencement of projects, and evidence in documents focused on outputs not impacts. An inter-agency evaluation of community based child protection networks encountered similar issues regarding the measurement of impacts of interventions (Wessells 2009). The lack of prior measurements made it difficult to assess whether models had resulted in positive outcomes for children from organizational documents. Success of CBCPPs is based, therefore, on qualitative data from interviews and FGDs with the large number of participants that took part in this study.

Some participants did not understand the term CCWC. As the field research continued researchers became increasingly adept at helping participants understand what was meant by the term. The lack of understanding was both a finding and a limitation.

The scope of the project expanded to four times the size of the original proposal. Measures were taken to adjust for this they were not sufficient, and an extremely limited time was provided for data analysis. As a result, data analysis was constrained.

While the issue of neglect is a child protection issue, the study did not cover this and neither was it highlighted as a particular issue in which CCWC has responded.

### 3.1 Efficacy of CCWCs

The discussion below is structured around identified factors affecting success

Established in 2004, CCWCs are a relatively new commune structure, and there is limited literature related to factors hindering or enhancing their efficacy. There are three principle studies in the literature reviewed below. In 2006 UNICEF published An Assessment of CCWC and Commune Focal Points, which was based on information gathered in three provinces supported by UNICEF. In 2008 UNICEF conducted a Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Survey of CCWCs and Focal Points, in 70 C/S. In 2010 Vicheasthan Bandonbondal Neakropkrong Kangea (VBNK) conducted a Capacity of Assessment of the CCWC, through conducting an extensive document review. **The discussion below is structured around identified factors affecting success.**

The CCWC Focal Point represents the CCWC on the Commune Council. The Focal Point is the only member of the committee whose main responsibility is the CCWC. Other members are assigned as representatives of other institutions, for example, the local school and health center are each asked to send a representative to the committee. The Focal Point is an assigned member and receives a salary for doing this job, which other members do not. Focal Points are appointed and often have experience working in an area related to women and children, such as a midwifery.

CCWCs are impacted by the differing personalities of the Focal Point and other CCWC members (UNICEF 2008). CCWCs have limited funds. While no information was available regarding the level of focal point salaries, members described them as small and described spending their own money and time to fulfill duties. Given this limitation, it is not surprising that the dedication of CCWC members, particularly the Focal Point, has been described as a determining factor in impacting the committee's success. The confidence of the Focal Point and other members has also been shown to impact functionality and effectiveness (UNICEF 2006, UNICEF 2008, VBNK 2010). Additionally, the confidence of Focal Points may be undermined by gender discrimination. Some women feel that when the views of female Focal Point are shared with the Commune Council, they are often dismissed by male members (VBNK 2010). CCWC Focal Points have described a lack of confidence as constraining their ability to implement the responsibilities of the CCWC (UNICEF 2008).

CCWC members have identified a lack of skills as hindering their success (UNICEF 2006, UNICEF 2008). These skills fall into three categories: leadership skills, (including communication and facilitation skills), operational skills (preparing Commune Investment Fund (CIF) budgets) and subject-area skills, (knowledge of specific child protection issues) (VBNK 2010). When leadership skills were lacking, this impacted attendance and CCWC meetings, and constrained participation from local communities (UNICEF 2008). While studies of both Commune Councils and CCWCs found that these committees

operational skills could result in both committees failing to spend their full budget, or not trying new interventions because they were unsure of their skills to manage operational procedures.

A lack of adequate technical knowledge regarding implementation areas was also identified as a constraint (UNICEF 2008). The roles and responsibilities of CCWCs call upon members to implement health, education and child protection advocacy, monitoring and awareness raising. Although CCWC members are usually appointed from community members with relevant skills (each committee aims to include member from health center and a teacher), CCWC members often have no experience in areas in which they are expected to work. In addition, there is a low level of capacity nationally in child protection and social work (Harachi 2014). This can negatively impact their ability to identify vulnerability and to implement activities pursuant to CCWC goals (VBNK 2010).

While CCWCs are given training, both through government efforts and frequently through CSO partnerships. UNICEF (2006) found that training had led to better levels of capacity among committee members and improved clarity of CCWC roles. VBNK however, found that training of CCWC members is seldom evaluated through pre and post tests (VBNK 2010), and as a result unclear how much knowledge is transferred during training.

CCWC effectiveness was further hindered by lack of adequate data collection mechanisms within CCWCs leading to difficulty in gathering data (VBNK 2010). Some CCWCs do collect data, but it not used to inform programming (VBNK 2010).

Strong collaborative working relationships were found to enhance functionality and effectiveness of CCWCs (UNICEF 2008). CCWCs were found to forge relationships with Commune Councils, Village Chiefs and DOSVY, as well as with NGOs (UNICEF 2006, UNICEF 2008, VBNK 2010). Working relationships with NGOs offered CCWCs opportunities to link community members with services. CCWC-NGO collaborations were generally found to increase CCWC ability to fulfill its mandate (UNICEF 2006, UNICEF 2008, VBNK 2010).

When CCWCs provided direct services to community members, this increased their credibility within the community (VBNK 2010). This 'real value' was often achieved through collaborative partnerships linking CCWCs to NGO services. However, it was cautioned that in some cases partnerships with NGOs could impair CCWCs. In cases in which CCWCs partnered with several NGOs this resulted in overburdening members of CCWCs (UNICEF 2006). Plummer and Tritt's 2011 study of Commune Councils found that partnerships with multiple NGOs resulted in priorities being set by the NGO, rather than the council and community. Although this was not mentioned in studies of CCWCs, it is possible that a similar issue existed in CCWCs.

### 3.2 Literature Related to Attitudes of Community and Local Authorities towards Children and Child Protection

There is little literature regarding attitudes towards children in the context of development in Cambodia

**There is little literature regarding attitudes towards children in the context of development in Cambodia.** O’Leary and Nee’s study in 2001, Learning for Transformation looked at attitudes towards development among 43 development practitioners. Although this study did not focus on children, it did detail cultural attitudes towards hierarchy, which are applicable to the relationship between adults and children. Jordanwood (2010) assessed attitudes towards child participation, in a survey of 2000 children nationally. In 2009 Gourley wrote the study, the Middle Way, based on interviews and surveys with 2,340 participants. This study investigated attitudes towards child rights. The discussion below looks at three key values identified in these studies that inform attitudes towards children.

#### *Attitudes towards Children’s Role in Society*

All three studies found that societal hierarchy was highly valued in traditional Cambodian culture. Within this hierarchy, children occupied a lower status than adults, and were perceived as having fewer rights than parents. Jordanwood (2010) found that children were strongly expected to show respect towards parents, and noted that the common proverb, “A child must respect parents and listen to teachers” was offered by all FGDs as a key description for children’s roles. While the UNCRC focuses on children’s rights, Gourley found that children in Cambodia were widely viewed as having responsibilities rather than rights. Gourley and Jordanwood linked these responsibilities to a sense amongst children that they owed a debt to their parents for providing for them since birth. Jordanwood (2010) found that the belief that children should respect the dictates of parents was so strong that children believed it was their responsibility to follow their parent’s advice, even if it resulted in harm to the children.

#### *Attitudes Towards Children’s Participation*

The respect that children owe to parents was found to act as a disincentive to children’s active participation in development. O’Leary and Nee (2001) note that within traditional hierarchical structures, those with power are also assumed to be the bearers of knowledge, and the role of those below is to receive this knowledge without questioning. Jordanwood (2010) found that within families and schools children were rarely encouraged to ask questions or to offer opinions. Gourley (2009) and Jordanwood (2010) found that although attitudes did appear to be changing, traditional Cambodian attitudes dissuaded children from participating in decisions that affected their lives, and in actions to improve their lives. Participation was found to be particularly challenging in influencing decisions in the public sphere (O’Leary and Nee, Plummer 2012).

#### *Attitudes Towards the Individual Child Versus the Collective Good*

Gourley (2009) discusses the conflict between the value placed on the individual child in the UNCRC, and the value placed on the collective good within traditional Cambodian society. All three studies note that traditional Cambodian attitudes promote the collective good alongside the rights of the individual, and note the role that these values play in resolution of cases of abuse. Gourley illustrates the impact of these conflicting values through a

“ You must understand: [female] virginity is very important in Cambodia, and if people know that my daughter has been raped, (we will all) lose respect; and if this happens, no one will want to marry her; and if no one marries her, who will take care of her when my wife and I die? ” p.24.

Gourley (2009) and Jordanwood (2010) both found that within traditional Cambodian culture, children were frequently expected to sacrifice their individual rights for the harmony of the collective. It is important to note that in a case of extreme poverty, the survival of the individual may depend on the collective good. For example, in a case in which members of a family continue to live with an abusive spouse, because they require the additional salary to provide food. In a case like this, the child's right to protection (not to be hit), is sacrificed for the child's right to survival (the right to food).

The literature suggests that traditional Cambodian attitudes towards children may act as disincentives to participation by children in local governance practices

**The literature suggests that traditional Cambodian attitudes towards children may act as disincentives to participation by children in local governance practices.** The traditional value placed on hierarchy, and the belief that children should listen and respect, but not speak out, could act as barriers to involvement. Traditionally, individual rights are less important than collective harmony, and this may also act as a barrier to not only participation, but also to reporting abuse. The belief that children owe a debt and responsibility to parents can impede children's actualization of rights, however, it might also be redirected. If participation in local governance can be conceived as a child's responsibility, it may be more strongly supported by parents.

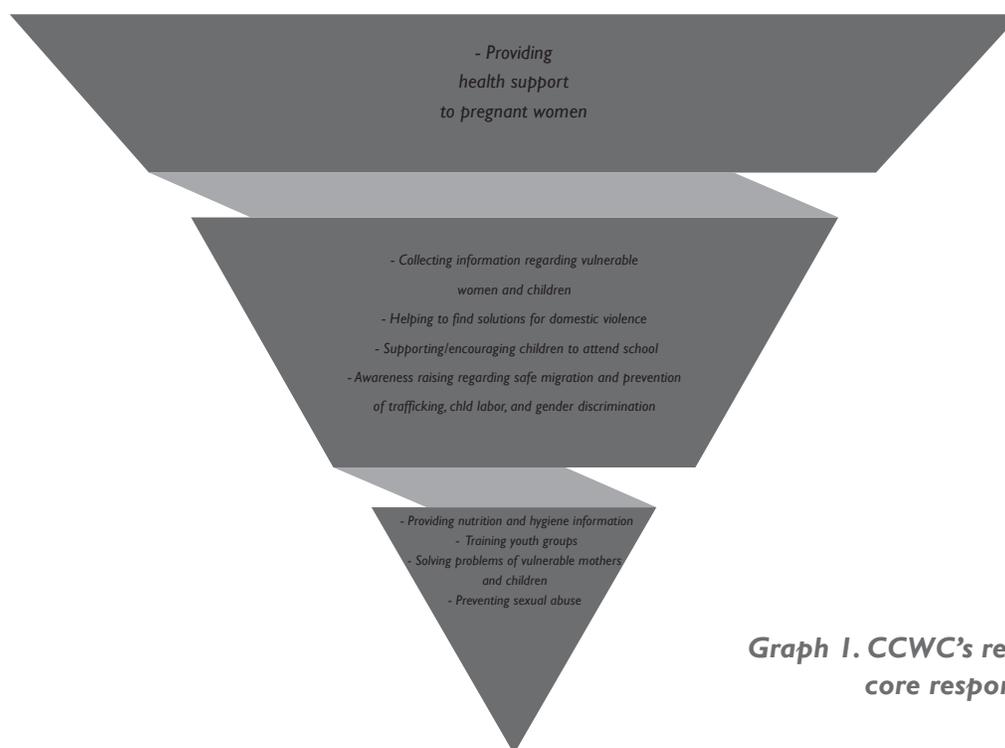
## Functionality of CCWC with regard to Child Protection Issues

This section looks first at functionality of CCWCs, identifying the responsibilities of CCWCs, and then examining how effective CCWCs are at fulfilling these responsibilities. The section focuses on CCWC effectiveness in fulfilling the most commonly identified child protection responsibilities reported: awareness raising, gathering information regarding women and children, and referring to or providing services. It then goes on to assess CCWC efforts as other responsibilities with which CCWCs are tasked by policy, but did not list as key responsibilities in data collection.

### 4.1 Reported Responsibilities of CCWCs: Ranking of Open Questions and Listing

In order to understand the work that CCWCs were doing, the research team asked CCWC members first to list their responsibilities in response to an open question, and then to select key from a list descriptions of jobs completed by their committee. The responses to the initial open questions were then analyzed, categorized and then ranked.

Following nine activities appeared to be core activities of many CCWCs. Presented on first level was the most commonly given response, scoring several points more than all others. The next level responses were mentioned with equal frequency while the last four activities were mentioned with lesser yet equal frequency. These nine top ranked answers were mentioned repeatedly in responses to different questions later in the same FGDs, and were also mentioned frequently in FGDs with other groups and in interviews.



**Graph 1. CCWC's reported core responsibilities**

### Of the nine responsibilities CCWCs ranked,

**5/9** were directly related to child protection (*helping to find solutions for domestic violence; solving problems of vulnerable mothers and children, Preventing sexual abuse; awareness raising regarding safe migration, and prevention of trafficking, child labor, and gender discrimination; gathering information regarding vulnerable women and children*).

**1/9** was related to education (*supporting/encouraging children to attend school*), but as many stakeholders interviewed argued, was closely related to child protection since attending school may prevent children from entering child labor and may lessen their chances of migrating.

**2/9** were related to health (*providing health support to pregnant women; providing nutrition and hygiene information*), and the final responsibility.

**Training youth groups** may have been related to many different areas.

The ranking suggests that CCWCs perceive their responsibilities to be focused on child protection needs of communities.

Comparing to their mandate, CCWC's reported responsibility ranking falls into three statuses: aligned, loosely related and not mentioned, as presented in Table 1.

*Table 1: Mandated responsibilities VS. Reported responsibilities*

Comparison against policy	Mandated responsibilities	Reported responsibilities
<b>aligned</b>	Awareness raising on laws and other policies related to women and children's rights to the people in the C/S	Awareness raising regarding safe migration and prevention of trafficking, child labor and gender discrimination
	Assisting C/S Councils to collect, analyze information and data related to issues and needs of women and children and integrate this information into the CDP and the CIP	Gathering information regarding vulnerable women and children
<b>loosely related</b>	<p>Mobilizing the respective communities on health, education, protection and child development including registration of newborn babies and children</p> <p>Participating in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the C/S work plan related to women and children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing health support to pregnant women</li> <li>• Providing nutrition and hygiene information</li> <li>• Helping to find solutions for domestic violence</li> <li>• Supporting/encouraging children to attend school</li> <li>• Solving problems of vulnerable mothers and children</li> <li>• Preventing sexual abuse</li> <li>• Training youth groups</li> </ul>
<b>not mentioned in the ranking</b>	Prepare an annual work plan and budget for the Committee and submit to the C/S Council for approval	N/A
	Advocate for women to participate in decision making relating to the development of the C/S	

5/9 reported CCWC activities could be considered to be service delivery

Finally, the ranking also showed the CCWCs perceive their responsibilities as having expanded beyond advocacy, awareness raising and monitoring, to include implementation of service delivery. 5/9 reported CCWC activities could be considered to be service delivery: 5/9 reported CCWC activities could be considered to be service delivery:

- *Providing health support to pregnant women*
- *Helping to find solutions for domestic violence*
- *Supporting/encouraging children to attend school*
- *Training youth groups on a wide variety of subjects*
- *Solving problems of vulnerable mothers and children*

Following the ranking, CCWC FGD members were asked to select jobs that their CCWC did, from written list. These responded closely to the responsibilities of the CCWC, listed in policy (RGC). Asking participants to choose from a list of responsibilities that are assigned in policy may have led to bias in the responses since participants may have felt that they 'should' be doing each activity. The researchers believe that the initial open question regarding CCWC responsibilities were more valid than the survey list.

Most CCWCs reported completing almost all the jobs listed. This suggested that CCWC members were aware of the jobs they were mandated to complete. This was surprising because half the CCWCs were purposively sampled because they were believed to be ineffective. However, as the researchers probed further it became clear that many tasks were only nominally completed. The effectiveness of CCWC in completing the responsibilities with which they are tasked by policy is discussed in the following section.

## **4.2 Assessment of Reported Responsibilities of CCWCs**

### **4.2.1 Awareness Raising Regarding Safe Migration and Prevention of Trafficking and Child Labor**

many CCWC members had a high level of knowledge regarding most rights issues related to child protection, specifically child rights, and child labor

According to policy (RGC 2008), CCWCs are tasked with raising awareness on laws and policies related to women's and children's rights. FGDs with CCWCs and interviews with Focal Points found that many CCWC members had a high level of knowledge regarding most rights issues related to child protection, specifically child rights, and child labor. Most parents and children had strong knowledge of these child protection issues as well. This was also evidenced in one program document, a survey that reported that 78.8 percent of girls, and 66.5 percent of boys age 8-18 reported knowledge of child rights.

However, participants had low levels of understanding of sexual abuse, an issue that closely relates to child rights

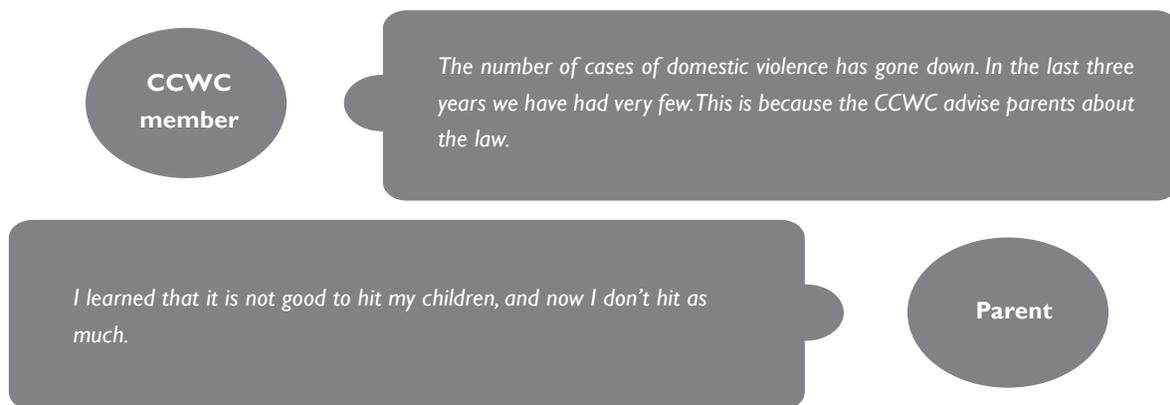
However, participants had low levels of understanding of sexual abuse, an issue that closely relates to child rights. CCWC members and families focused only on rape, and other forms of abuse were not mentioned. This is in keeping with a recent evaluation of a program addressing sexual abuse and exploitation, which found low levels of understanding of forms and methods of sexual abuse (Embody 2015).

<sup>4</sup>Responses given to different questions at later points in the data addressed these tasks to some degree, and these responses are also discussed.

It was not possible for the research team to assess whether this knowledge of child rights, child labor and child protection issues in general resulted from NGO support, due to the lack of pre and post tests regarding participant knowledge. Gourley in a national study in 2009 found that parents had a high level of child rights and child labor knowledge, so it may be that knowledge preexisted.

**Awareness raising was loosely defined by CCWC members**

Awareness raising was loosely defined by CCWC members. When asked to describe awareness raising activities, many CCWC members described forums and events. The examples mentioned focused around health issues, such as explaining to holders of Health Equity Fund cards how to use them, or informing participants about the importance of registering children for birth certificates. The few issues mentioned related to child protection were the importance of attending school and safe migration. Some CCWC members described almost every activity of the council, including holding monthly meetings, as a form of awareness raising. Neither the research nor the documents provided by NGOs included pre and post tests of awareness raising events. Several participants, however, voiced the belief that their activities had had an impact, as described below,



#### **4.2.2 Gathering Information Regarding Women and Children to Inform Allocation of Services**

**Many participants in FGDs with CCWCs and in interviews with local authorities described processes of gathering information regarding women and children to inform practice**

CCWCs are tasked with monitoring the situation of women and children in the C/S and reporting regularly (RGC 2008). Many participants in FGDs with CCWCs and in interviews with local authorities described processes of gathering information regarding women and children to inform practice. In some cases these involved **formal information gathering processes** completed with support by NGOs described below (*in Support for Mapping and Monitoring of CCWCs*). Most of these explained that **semi-formal process of information gathering** was common, and occurred at the CCWC meeting. In some CCWCs members would formally report the numbers of vulnerable women and children in their village. In many CCWCs the **monthly meeting** provided a venue for members to report cases of women and children that they believed required assistance. CCWC members said these cases were usually brought to their attention by the village chief, who was in turn informed by the community.

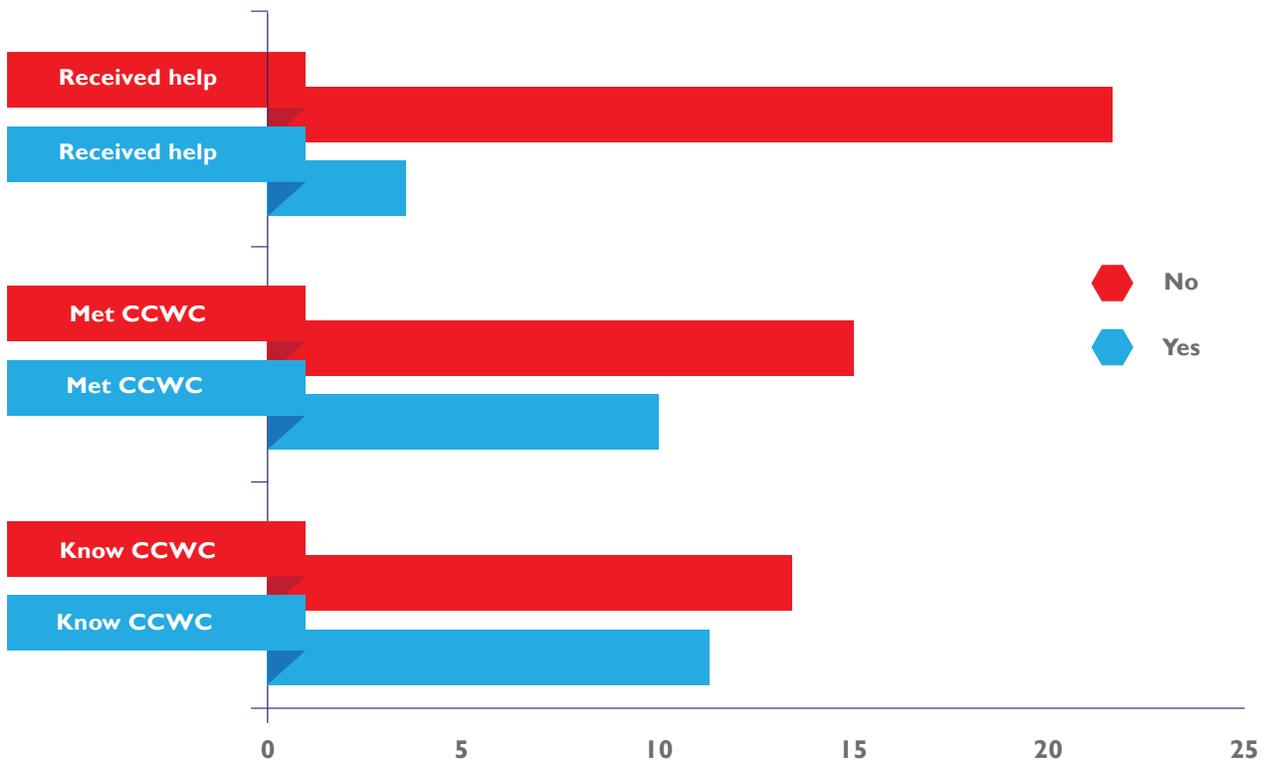
While some CCWC members said that they were also directly approached by families or children, this did not appear to be common practice. Most families in FGDs said they knew what CCWCs were. This may have been as a result of the sample bias, because a monitoring document from an NGO that was a member of the steering committee found most households did not know CCWCs, but knew a member of the CCWC without being aware of their role in the committee. Children had lower levels of knowledge of CCWCs.

*Children never ask for help from the CCWC because they don't know the CCWC.*

**CCWC member**

**Less than 50% of the children who took part in FGDs reported knowing of CCWCs**

Less than 50% of the children who took part in FGDs reported knowing of CCWCs. 10/22 FGDs of children reported knowing what the CCWC is, 9/22 had met with the CCWC, and 2/22 reported having received help from the CCWC, as illustrated in Graph 2. Participants explained that culturally parents would be expected to fulfill the role of contacting authorities, and that children were too shy to contact the CCWC themselves.



Graph 2. Children's Reported Knowledge of

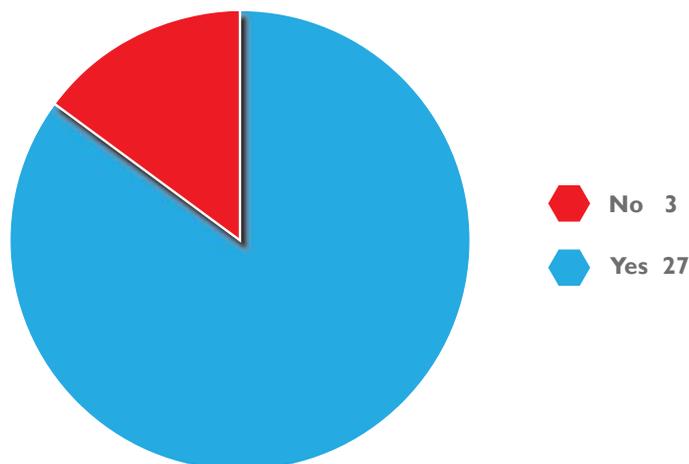
<sup>5</sup>Semi-formal, in that it centered around the formal CCWC meeting, but did not involve a formal monitoring process.

While 27/28 CCWC member groups said they conducted outreach, this was described as visiting poor families who had previously been identified. **Few CCWCs described an ongoing systematic processes for identifying vulnerable women and children conducted on a monthly basis, and it was possible that the needs of many vulnerable families did not therefore make it to the CCWC.** The main form of ongoing monitoring for many CCWCs appeared to be based on the informal assessment of cases brought to the CCWCs through Village Chiefs. The impact of this information gathering on the CIP is discussed below, (in *Preparing a Work Plan and Budget*).

### 4.2.3 CCWC Referral to and Provision of Child Protection Services

CCWCs are tasked with planning, advocacy, awareness raising and monitoring for women and children. They are also responsible for strengthening coordination between Commune Councils, service providers and villagers and assisting the Commune Council on tasks related to women and children (RGC 2008). However, as noted earlier, **CCWCs are not tasked with service provision. This study found, however, that many CCWC members believe that provision of social services is also their responsibility, and take steps to achieve this.** Participants identified three main reasons that CCWCs have begun to provide social services. First, the lack of a national body providing child protection services means that needs are not met. Through their work in monitoring, advocacy and awareness raising, CCWCs identify a range of problems faced by members of the community, and once these have been identified, members want to help alleviate these problems. Second, members of the community who know about the CCWC are not aware of the limitations of their role, and believe the CCWC is tasked with service provision. Community members request service provision from the CCWC. **Many family members in this study did not have a strong defined sense of the role of the CCWC, and believed that it was responsible for generally taking care of women and children.** Third, INGOs and their local NGO partners offer support to CCWCs to provide child protection services.

Service provision was common among CCWCs taking part in the study. In FGDs, 28/30 CCWCs reported providing services, and 27/30 could offer an example of case in which a child was helped, as illustrated below.



Graph 3. Number of CCWCs that Helped a Child, as reported by CCWCs

CCWC participants reported receiving a small budget for social services from the Commune Council

The services CCWCs provided were funded or accessed by a variety of sources. CCWC participants reported receiving a small budget for social services from the Commune Council. According to a study of CIPs, only 3-4 percent of the CIP is allocated for social services (Ramage 2015). While the budget for different communes varies greatly according to demographic considerations, when asked to estimate the amount of money allocated for children's services many CCWCs estimated amounts in the hundreds of dollars. CCWC participants also reported receiving funding to provide services through NGO support. Finally, CCWCs also reported referring community members to services provided by NGOs.

There were no examples of CCWCs providing more complex social service interventions, such as therapeutic or psychosocial support for victims of violence or sexual abuse, with Commune funds

CCWCs members described providing a small number of services through commune funds. The examples listed in the data were almost all either for payment of transport to hospitals or payment of school supplies. There were no examples of CCWCs providing more complex social service interventions, such as therapeutic or psychosocial support for victims of violence or sexual abuse, with Commune funds. This is not surprising since many CCWCs described themselves as lacking in technical skills, and these types of intervention are complex.

CCWCs reported collaborating with a large number of NGOs to help communities access support. In these cases the CCWCs would either provide services with NGO funds, which was less common, or refer families to NGO services, which was more common. Participants often failed to distinguish between the two different modes of service delivery, and credited the CCWC with providing services, when in fact they had provided referrals to NGO services.

CCWC members reported linking to not only the 14 NGO programs taking part in the study, but to a wide range of other NGOs including health services and legal support. Collaborations with supporting NGOs emerged as a theme throughout the FGDs. NGOs specifically mentioned included organizations with a national reach, and small organizations working only in the local area.

- Prevention of school drop out and child labor
- Support of families affected by domestic violence
- Support of children affected by sexual abuse
- Prevention of migration and support to children left behind by migra-

CCWC members most commonly mentioned providing services or referring to services in the following areas

CCWCs were clearly providing or referring to a wide range of services. The government has an important role to play in the protection of children. As previously noted, while MoSVY is the Ministry tasked with child protection, it lacks both funds for services and a mechanism to deliver child protection services within the community. **CCWCs have taken on this role, without adequate training, experience and support from the government.** As discussed below, CCWC are largely failing to provide adequate child protection services to families in the community.

## CCWC Response to School Drop Out and Child Labor

The 2012 Cambodia Labor Force and Child Labor Survey found an estimated 19.1 percent of children age 5-17 were economically active, and that most of these (87.3 percent) live in rural areas. 56.9 percent of these economically active children were classified as child laborers, and 31.3 were classified as working in hazardous labor. Children worked predominantly in agricultural, forestry or fishing industries, or in domestic service. More than half child laborers had dropped out of school or had never attended school.

The most common form of support provided by CCWCs was school support

The most common form of support provided by CCWCs was school support. According to policy, primary education is free in Cambodia. In practice, however, students are required to pay a range of informal school fees to teachers for tuition. These play such a large role that the Cambodian education system has been termed a hybrid public private system (Bremh 2012). It would be difficult for a child to progress through the Cambodian education system without paying fees. These fees pose barriers to education for poor families, and when children leave school to work they can contribute to the families welfare. Thus children face strong incentives to drop out of school. Participants explained that it was common for children to drop out of school due to either school fees, or in order to provide funds for the family, or in many cases a combination of the two,

CCWC  
member

*One girl lived in poverty with her sister, she earned only a little money, and the cost of extra school fees and the money for the exams was too expensive, so she stopped studying and went to work in Thailand to release the family debt.*

One CCWC participant explained that dropping out of school was an almost irrevocable step, since those who left seldom returned. The options for the future of children who had dropped out of school were described as extremely limited.

Numerous examples were offered throughout the data of cases in which children had dropped out of school to work. Many participants, both CCWC members and parents and children, presented school drop out and child labor as linked: the need for funds from labor lead to drop out, and school drop out

*The girl, her family was poor, and she had no money for school. So we gave her money for school, because otherwise she would stop studying and begin working, and she is too young to work.*

CCWC  
member

In CCWCs that were supported by an organization implementing child labor program, school support was provided specifically as a measure to prevent child labor. A few CCWCs provided funds for informal school fees, uniforms and bicycles to go to school, but it was more common for CCWCs to refer community members to NGOs that supported these funds. Some CCWCs collaborated with NGO programs offering tutoring, mentoring and vocational training support, alongside awareness raising on the importance of keeping children in school. Most CCWCs described the importance of keeping children in school. In areas without strong support from NGOs this was seen as a general good, in areas with strong support from NGOs, particularly in areas supported to address child labor, it was described school support a key factor in child protection.

**It may be that CCWC members also favored school support because it was the easiest form of support to provide**

At the same time, it may be that CCWC members also favored school support because it was the easiest form of support to provide. The provision of funds or materials is a relatively simple, when compared with other child protection interventions. Moreover, in the experience of the researcher, families are most likely to request this type of support, and community members are most likely to understand its benefit. It is more difficult to find solutions for complex problems such as domestic violence or sexual abuse, as noted in Gamer and Mauney (2009), and as discussed below.

### ***CCWC Response to Domestic Violence***

**The prevalence of domestic violence was a common theme in this study, and the majority of CCWC members said it was the issue that took up most of their time**

Domestic violence is prevalent in Cambodia, with 20 percent of women experiencing physical violence since the age of 15, and 8 percent experiencing it in the last 12 months (CDHS 2014). The prevalence of domestic violence was a common theme in this study, and the majority of CCWC members said it was the issue that took up most of their time. Children may be victims of violence by their parents, or indirect victims, witnessing violence against a mother by a father or other partner. Both experiencing violence and witnessing violence may have long term physical and emotional negative effects on children (Kitzman et al. 2003, UNICEF 2004). Domestic violence is generational (CDHS 2014), and solutions to domestic violence are often complex and difficult to implement.

Most CCWC members, family members and children who took part in the FGDs disapproved of domestic violence, and believed it should be reported to local authorities. Domestic violence was described as having a negative impact on both the victims and the community as a whole. When asked to consider a hypothetical situation in which a child was a victim of violence from a mother, 27/30 CCWC members and 20/22 children said that this case should be reported to the CCWC. Among most CCWC members and families that took part in FGDs there appears to have been an attitudinal shift, against domestic violence. In a 2008 study only 54 percent of men and 47 percent of women believed it was never acceptable for a man to hit his wife, and over 50 percent of all respondents said that violence was justifiable if a wife provoked a husband (Morrison 2009). This contrasted with this research in which the majority of participants strongly disapproved of domestic violence.

**Almost all examples of interventions to respond to domestic violence focused on mothers**

When discussing domestic violence participants often did not distinguish between violence against adults and violence against children. However, almost all examples of interventions to respond to domestic violence focused on mothers. It may have been that in cases in which a child was physically abused, the mother was also a victim. However, since children may be victims of domestic violence from both parents, there remains a need for greater awareness of violence against children as an issue regarding intervention independent of the mother's status.

**CCWC members frequently reported that they responded to domestic violence by advising the perpetrator to stop**

CCWC members frequently reported that they responded to domestic violence by advising the perpetrator to stop. The Khmer word for advice is "nae noam", but has a stronger meaning, connoting strong guidance or remonstrance. When CCWCs described advising perpetrators, they were describing a strong verbal intervention. However, when CCWCs were probed further regarding this response, it became clear that many CCWC members did not believe this response to be adequate, but employed it when they believed they had few other options. There was little evidence that advising perpetrators to stop impacted domestic abuse levels.

**A second common response to domestic abuse was to attempt to facilitate reconciliation between partners**

A second common response to domestic abuse was to attempt to facilitate reconciliation between partners. In these cases, CCWC members with the village chief, would typically visit family members and would attempt to mediate the conflict with the aim of reconciliation. In many cases this would involve "advising" the perpetrator to stop, and discussing ways in which the victim could alter behavior to avoid provoking the abuse. Inadequate food preparation, talking to outsiders or complaining to an abusive spouse were all listed as forms of provocation. It is of concern that many CCWC members attempted to resolve domestic violence by attributing blame to the victim, and by attempting to reconcile the couple. Regrettably the focus on reconciliation rather than prosecution removes a much needed deterrent and places women and children at continued risk of violence.

**A third common response was to try to find temporary safe place for children to stay when a parent was having a violent, abusive episode**

A third common response was to try to find temporary safe place for children to stay when a parent was having a violent, abusive episode. One woman explained that she would take her children to sleep in the forest. This is clearly not a sustainable safe solution for children. However, several CCWC members and family group members described supporting children to sleep at neighbors' homes on these occasions. These were described as providing temporary safety for children. The temporary housing of children in the homes of neighbors is a traditional CBCPP.

More research would be required to evaluate whether this practice is adequate to ensure children's safety, and guidelines would be necessary to ensure that children were not placed at additional risk in the homes of neighbors. In addition, short-term community shelter must not be used as an alternative to prosecution of offenders.

As discussed later, in some C/Ss, CCWCs in partnership with local NGOs, organized closed groups for families experiencing domestic violence. These groups included separate groups for children, spouses who were victims and perpetrators. As the result of a meditation from the CCWC, perpetrators would be required to attend a closed group on a monthly basis, with the intention that these groups would act as a preventative measure. The groups for children and spouses appeared to fulfill a therapeutic role for victims. However, this study concurred with the findings of Mauney (2013) noted that as a result of the mandatory attendance of perpetrators, closed groups resulted in mixed attitudes to attendance. Mauney reports attending closed groups in which attendants ranged from husbands who arrived inebriated, to those who were extremely resistant to attending, to those who credited the group with helping them to change their behavior. It was not possible to assess if domestic violence levels had decreased. The government does not maintain a public national database of reports of violence to hospitals and legal authorities. Documents provided by NGOs in the steering committee did not measure pre-project levels of violence against which to measure a decrease. There was anecdotal evidence in this study suggesting closed groups and reconciliation had an impact on domestic violence, with some CCWC members crediting these interventions with resulting in less incidents of domestic violence. In addition, a few participants from FGDs with parents said the interventions had helped them change their behavior, and this is hopeful. As Mauney notes, domestic violence is an intransigent issue in many societies, and change in domestic violence patterns usually requires long periods of intervention.

**However, when asked what actually occurred in these cases in their own C/S, most said that the incidents had been resolved through reconciliation and mediation**

When asked about a hypothetical situation involving an abusive parent, CCWCs supported reporting and, in most cases, prosecution. However, when asked what actually occurred in these cases in their own C/S, most said that the incidents had been resolved through reconciliation and mediation. Several reasons were offered for these contradictory positions. First, the law on domestic violence contains weak provisions for prosecution. Second, families rely on both parents for economic survival, and this acts as a disincentive to prosecute an abusive spouse. Third, the legal system is perceived as corrupt and therefore it is expensive to prosecute. This is discussed further (in Lack of Trust in the Justice System). Finally, as discussed earlier (in Attitudes towards the Individual) cultural attitudes promote harmony and collectivism over justice for the individual (Gourley 2009). So while there had been an attitudinal shift in relation to domestic violence, this study did not find evidence that it was translated into adequate responses to protect children.

### **CCWC Response to Domestic Violence**

A comprehensive definition of sexual abuse is included in the section Terminology at the beginning of this study. UNICEF (2015) found that more than 6% of females and 5% of males aged 13 to 17 reported at least one experience of childhood sexual abuse.

Abuse occurred both in homes and in the community. Within this study the only sexual abuse mentioned was rape. This may have been because rape is one of the few kinds of sexual abuse that is widely known and understood in communities. Sexual abuse of boys was not mentioned.

Although both rape victims of both genders may not tell anyone, men are less likely to disclose than women (UNICEF 2014). Again a lack of understanding of sexual abuse against boys, coupled with a lack of knowledge regarding cases, may explain why sexual abuse against boys was not mentioned.

When describing what happened to the victim, 3/8 mentioned that the girl had been sent to a residential center for crisis intervention

Rape was considered a serious crime. Previous research has found that rape is considered shameful, and that some feel it should be concealed to protect the victim. (Gourley 2009). However, most participants in this study did not share these views. CCWC members were asked to consider a hypothetical scenario of the rape of 16-year old girl. The majority of CCWCs supported reporting and prosecuting the case. When asked if they had ever had a situation like this in their community, 8/30 CCWC members who responded said that they had. When considering this number, it is important to remember that 8/30 represents the number of CCWCs in which at least one member recalled a case. This number does not represent prevalence of rape overall. Nevertheless, it is of concern that it is so high. CCWCs that reported having a similar case in their community, were asked how they responded. Most said that the CCWC had assisted with reporting the case to the police and that the case was subsequently taken to court. When describing what happened to the victim, 3/8 mentioned that the girl had been sent to a residential center for crisis intervention. The placement of victims in residential shelters is controversial. While it provides access to services, but can be punitive for victims to be removed from their family support system and their communities during time of crisis. A recent evaluation of one program of the steering committee also found that victims were placed in shelters, without a prior safety assessment on behalf of the child, and that in some cases the families were unaware of where the child had been placed (Embode 2016).

While no community-based support programs for victims of rape were mentioned by participants, one evaluation did identify a NGO that was providing these services in communities in some areas noted in the research. In addition, as discussed later, (in Provision of Trained Social Workers to Work with CCWC), one CCWC-NGO program supported social workers collaborated closely with CCWCs to provide therapeutic services to children.

While most CCWCs members favored prosecution of perpetrators, one CCWC had responded in a manner that warrants concern

While most CCWCs members favored prosecution of perpetrators, one CCWC had responded in a manner that warrants concern. The CCWC described the response to rape case that had been reported to the police. The police had worked with the CCWC, and the parents of both parties, to pressure the perpetrator to marry the victim. **The perpetrator was given a choice of marriage or incarceration.** The CCWC viewed this case as successfully resolved. Resolutions of this kind have been mentioned in previous research (Gourley 2009). One stakeholder described the thinking behind such resolutions:

NGO staff member

*The family of the boy doesn't want him to go to jail, so they suggest a resolution to the authorities. They suggest a marriage. This means the authorities have a solution, and the boy's family is happy, and the girl's family might get money. They just don't care about the girl.*

**Resolutions such as this may potentially incentivize rape, since perpetrators utilize them as a way to force a marriage in a case in which the girl is reluctant**

Although this solution is culturally acceptable in some communities, it places the victim at risk of continued risk of violence, and legitimizes the violence she has already suffered. Resolutions such as this may potentially incentivize rape, since perpetrators utilize them as a way to force a marriage in a case in which the girl is reluctant.

### **CCWC Response to Migration**

**Migration was a reoccurring theme among participants**

Migration was a reoccurring theme among participants. A national survey in 2012 of migration found about 80 percent of migrants are below 30 years of age (MOP 2012). The study does not record the number of these migrants who are below eighteen but anecdotal evidence from NGOs suggests that children do migrate, particularly children over age 15 which is the legal age for work in Cambodia, both internally and overseas, to work in agriculture, domestic service and construction. A separate study found that the majority of children and youth that migrate went to another country (World Vision 2014). Children also migrated when they accompanied their parents. The national survey of 2012 found that 2.3 percent of migrants move with a spouse, and over 50 percent of those bring children under age 15. Another 8 percent leave children behind (MOP 2012).

CCWC members, families and children described the difficulties faced by these children. Children were described as migrating during school holidays to work on construction sites, which is a form of hazardous labor. Children were described as seasonally migrating, leaving school during the academic year to work in farms. Children who seasonally migrate often fall behind in grades and are less likely to graduate (EMC, in press). Several cases were described of children who left school permanently to work, both in Cambodia and in Thailand and Malaysia.

**CCWC members also described difficulties faced by children left behind by migrant parents**

CCWC members also described difficulties faced by children left behind by migrant parents. In all cases described, the migrants left due to poverty, and the children were left in households with limited financial means. 80 percent of children left behind are left with grandparents (MOP 2012), who were described in this study as constrained in caring for children by their advanced age.

**The main response of CCWC to migration was prevention of unsafe migration**

The main response of CCWC to migration was prevention of unsafe migration. CCWCs conducted awareness raising activities to encourage children to delay migration and migrate safely. A few CCWCs worked to identify parents planning to migrate, and encouraged them to leave their children with family in the village, rather than taking them with them. CCWCs also provided services. Many participants described how CCWCs identified children who had been left by migrating parents, and provided services to these children including school support or other provisions.

#### 4.2.4 Preparing an Annual Work Plan and Budget

Although most CCWC members did not mention completing work plans or budgets, in the initial descriptions of CCWC roles, these were frequently mentioned later in the interview when asked directly about these functions

Although most CCWC members did not mention completing work plans or budgets, in the initial descriptions of CCWC roles, these were frequently mentioned later in the interview when asked directly about these functions. Previous research found that CCWCs were adept at completing procedural roles (Plummer 2012). The research team was unable to access these documents in order to assess the degree to which they reflected child protection concerns. Ramage (2015) found that only 3-4 percent of CIP was allocated to social services, and since this number included a wide range of social services, the actual allocation for child protection services may be assumed to be lower. **28/30 CCWC members said they had spent the entire budget allocated last year, which suggests that in these areas there is no longer under-spending.** CCWC members in this study were asked the number of issues related to child protection included in the CIP, some said they did not know or could not remember, others offered costs in riel without offering details of how this money was spent. **Data from CCWCs on this issue was not robust.** Previous research that found limited information gathering from communities by CCWCs and limited inclusion of this information in planning processes (VBK 2010). However, recent studies have reported a change. The positive impact of NGO support on social service allocation in the CIP is discussed below (in Support for Mapping and Monitoring of CCWCs).

The process for developing the CDPs and CIP was described as participatory, and had fair community engagement. This process is largely the responsibility of the Commune Council, and the CCWC contributes largely in an advisory capacity. NGO support for this process was reported in many cases. The planning process was described as reflecting the articulated requests of community members.

Several studies found that when selecting services for their C/S, communities tend to favor infrastructure projects, for a number of reasons (Ramage 2015, UNICEF 2008, VBK 2010). Infrastructure projects such as roads have a visible impact, and benefit a large segment of the community. They are also simple projects to understand. Social service projects are more complex, and community members may not know that the CIP is able to provide for school support or livelihood support. It is, moreover, a great deal more complicated to obtain funds from the CDP for a social services project than for an infrastructure

First you request an advance from treasury, then you get money, then do activity, then report on the activity, the number beneficiaries, (its very detailed), then you need to go back to treasury, then maybe they make problem, they say that you need a stamp and sellers signature, but maybe they (the sellers) don't have that, then you go and come back and go again, and all this is for a very small amount of project money. With an infrastructure, you do the bid, you do the contract,

NGO  
stakeholder

The comment above illustrates how the process of obtaining funds for a single service includes a process of requesting funds, reporting on the activity, and providing stamped and signed receipts. Each service provided requires procedure be followed, requiring transport to and from relevant offices, for which CCWCs may not have fuel or time. Every time the process is followed there is also an opportunity for those distributing the payments to request graft. In addition, suppliers of infrastructure projects may have previously completed vetting procedures, where as this is less likely with suppliers of small social services.

#### 4.2.5 Children's Participation in CCWCs

While the policy (RGC 2008) notes that CCWCs are tasked with advocating for women to participate in decision-making relating to the development of the C/S, it does not mention advocating for participation of children

While the policy (RGC 2008) notes that CCWCs are tasked with advocating for women to participate in decision-making relating to the development of the C/S, it does not mention advocating for participation of children. This was noted by some CCWC members in response to questions regarding children's involvement, and was given as a reason for the lack of engagement with children. One child attributed a lack of involvement to attitudes of adults to children,

*Grown ups say that children don't know a lot, children are young and still need to study, but although children are young, they do know a lot but grown ups refuse to listen*

In many cases CCWCs did involve children but this involvement did not appear to meaningfully engage children

In many cases CCWCs did involve children but this involvement did not appear to meaningfully engage children. For example, when asked to describe children's participation one CCWC leader said,

*Children come to our events and we advise them on how to walk the good path.*

In this case the children were only the audience, not participants in the discussion

In this case the children were only the audience, not participants in the discussion. This CCWC member does not appear to fully understand the meaning of child participation. It is similar to findings of the study mentioned earlier which found that only 2 percent of children had ever been asked a question regarding opinion in school (Jordanwood 2005).

In other cases CCWC members explained that children were unable to participate,

*We invite children, we give children a chance but they don't talk much because they are too shy*

However, particularly in areas where children's groups (described below in Children's Groups) are active, children were more meaningfully engaged, attending annual planning processes, and advocacy events

However, particularly in areas where children's groups (described below in Children's Groups) are active, children were more meaningfully engaged, attending annual planning processes, and advocacy events. Children seemed to have learned these skills through children's groups.

Finally, some CCWC described a high level of children's engagement, with children attending CCWC monthly meetings and offering views at these meetings. Some participants from FGDs with both CCWC members and children said the NGO support through children's groups had helped facilitate children's participation in CCWCs. Given that traditional attitudes do not favor participation from children, and that children are given very little training in participation in schools, this is an achievement.

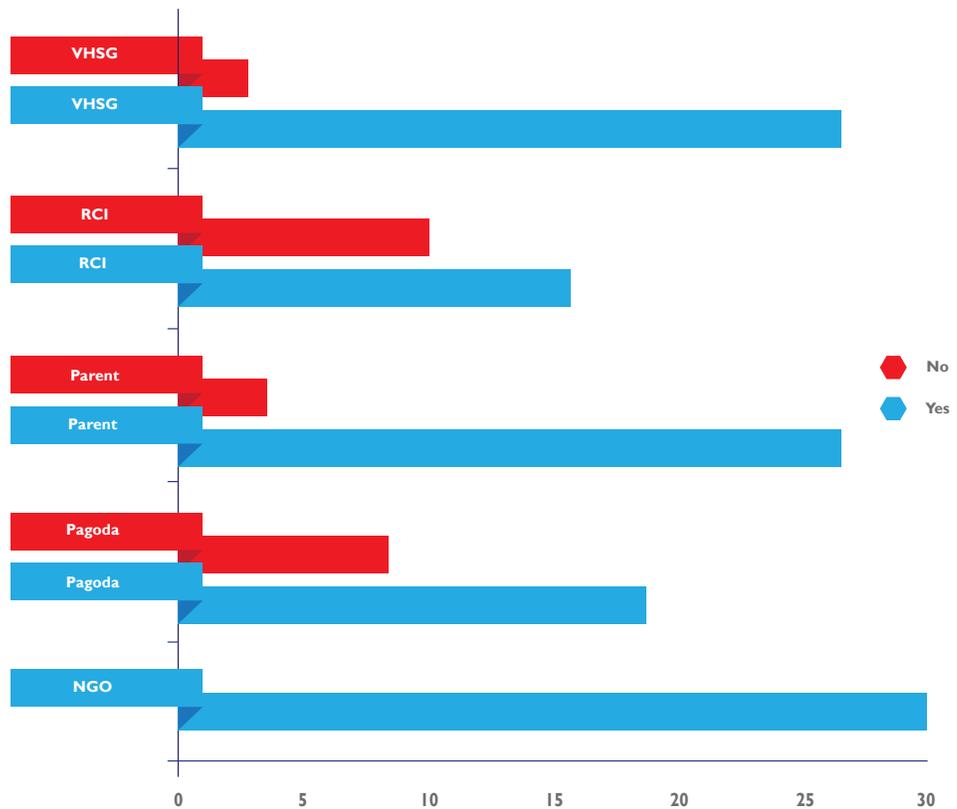
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## Community based Child Protection Practices (CBCPP)

### 5.1 NGO-supported CBCPP involving CCWCs

There is no national system that provides standardized or comprehensive child protection services across Cambodia

International and local NGOs provide a wide range of child protection programs within Cambodia. In many cases NGOs fill the gap left by the lack of government support for child protection services at the commune and village level. However, these NGOs do not provide national coverage, often focus on specific populations and types of service. There is no national system that provides standardized or comprehensive child protection services across Cambodia.



Graph 4. Partners of CCWCs, Reported by CCWC members

In all locations and all groups, participants listed NGOs with whom the CCWC collaborated to deliver services

In all locations and all groups, participants listed NGOs with whom the CCWC collaborated to deliver services. The prevalence of NGOs has been noted earlier, (in CCWC Referral to and Provision of Child Protection Services). The majority of NGOs listed were not part of the steering committee. The programs they managed were limited to focused service delivery, in which an NGO, having already established a project and target group built a partnership with a CCWC to deliver these specific services and benefits. While many of these NGOs viewed government partnerships as important, their main intention was to deliver focused services to beneficiaries, not strengthen the government child protection system.

This model had benefits and drawbacks. The delivery of services was described as giving the CCWC credibility and providing good in the community. However, its focused service delivery limits the input of community members and CCWC members, since decisions about which services to provide were not made at the local level, but were made by the organization's national or inter-

## 5.2 System Strengthening CBCPPs involving CCWCs

The 14 programs of the four NGOs and one multi-lateral organization on the steering committee all focused on providing support that was more comprehensive than focused service delivery. *These programs worked to strengthen the national child protection system*; either implementing programs directly, or through partnerships or sub-contracts with local NGOs.

The programs provided a variety of forms of support to CCWCs

While these models involved work at the national and district level, the scope of this study is limited to community-based interventions, and so only interventions at the commune and village level are discussed here. At this level, all 14 programs aimed to strengthen the CCWC. The programs provided a variety of forms of support to CCWCs. Programs worked to impact not only CCWC members, but also community members and gatekeepers whose work intersected with the CCWC. The primary interventions provided by these 14 programs were **support to organizational and technical capacity, support for monitoring, support for social service delivery, and facilitation of children's and community groups**. Since many of these programs overlapped, in order to prevent repetition, the program interventions are summarized into models in the discussion below.

### 5.2.1 Supporting Organizational Capacity

All 14 programs worked to support CCWC functioning, but the levels of support varied. For some this support was minimal, while for others it involved substantial inputs in terms of training, support for CCWC functions, including links to services and mapping to support commune planning. Each of these practices is now discussed in more detail.

## Training on Organizational Capacity

CCWC members required training to be able to fulfill these administrative duties

There are several reasons that training on organizational capacity was necessary. Many CCWC members had a low level of administrative capacity, identified both in this study, and in previous reports (Gamer and Mauney 2013). Managing an active CCWC can involve complex paperwork, particularly if the CCWC becomes involved in delivering CIP funds to community members (as described in Preparing an Annual Work Plan and Budget), or is required to keep administrative receipts as part of an NGO partnership. CCWC members required training to be able to fulfill these administrative duties.

In addition, some CCWC members needed training to be able to actively participate in meetings. In a study on commune councils, a lack of communication skills was identified as limiting participation (Plummer 2012). CCWC Focal Points are women, and gender biases among male council members have been identified as barriers to participation in CCWCs (VBNK 2010). NGOs had offered training in participation. NGO evaluation documents reviewed described these as positively impacting CCWC functionality

## Community based Child Protection Practices (CBCPP)

During FGDs CCWCs showed high levels of knowledge regarding child protection issues

The system strengthening NGOs also offered training in issues related to child protection. The most commonly mentioned training topics mentioned were identifying and responding to domestic abuse (both spousal abuse and violence against children), sexual abuse and child labor. A number of studies found that knowledge of child protection issues among CCWCs that had received training was high (Gamer and Mauney 2014, Moore 2014, Save the Children 2014, Bowen 2015). During FGDs CCWCs showed high levels of knowledge regarding child protection issues. This knowledge did not appear to be being translated into adequately increased reporting (Gamer and Mauney 2014, Moore 2014, Save the Children 2014). Moreover, as discussed later (in Residential Care Centers), and as evidenced in other studies (Embody 2015), CCWCs continued to refer children to RCIs, which have been shown to have a range of negative impacts on children, suggesting that CCWC face barriers in translating training into practice.

### 5.2.2 Support for CCWC functions

a lack of funding for the most basic functions was a reoccurring theme, both in this data for this study, and in the literature

Several NGOs provided direct support for CCWC functions. As discussed later, a lack of funding for the most basic functions was a reoccurring theme, both in this data for this study, and in the literature (UNCIEF 2006, UNICEF 2008, VBNK 2010). Funding provided by NGOs included providing for snacks at CCWC monthly meetings, which were found to be an incentive for attendance and in some cases, providing fuel for CCWC members to conduct official activities. None of these 14 programs reported paying salary supplements.

However, Commune Councils had not assumed responsibility for this funding, and key informants explained that one effect of this had been to change scheduling of meetings for many CCWCs

Several key informants noted that previously one organization had provided \$200 per annum to CCWCs to support functioning of the committee. Participants recalled this supplement, and noted that it had been very useful. In an effort to get the Commune Council to take on this funding role, the organization had ceased providing this funding. However, Commune Councils had not assumed responsibility for this funding, and key informants explained that one effect of this had been to change scheduling of meetings for many CCWCs. In these cases Commune Council meetings and CCWC meetings were being combined, limiting time for discussion at CCWC meetings. In other cases, key informants reported that members of both Commune Councils and CCWC would choose to attend only one meeting, and this was more likely to the Commune Council meeting because it was perceived as a more important council.

### 5.2.3 Support to CCWC to Link to Services or Provide Services

CCWCs had moved beyond their mandated roles

CCWCs had moved beyond their mandated roles in awareness raising, advocacy and monitoring roles, to provide services themselves (in CCWC Referral to and Provision of Child Protection Services). **They frequently intervened in domestic violence cases, and provided school support.** They also linked community members to NGO services, which might be argued fit within their mandate to increase communication, collaboration and coordination between NGOs and community members. CCWC members seldom distinguished between these two roles, providing services and referring to services, and generally appeared to view their role as improving the lives of vulnerable children in the community.

This study found that the priorities of NGOs often impacted the priorities of the CCWCs

NGOs collaborated with CCWCs, both to offer services and, to a lesser degree, to provide access to funds for CCWC members to use to deliver services themselves. This study found that the priorities of NGOs often impacted the priorities of the CCWCs. The CCWCs were asked to describe the committee's role. These responses were then compared with the reported activities of the NGOs with whom the CCWCs collaborated. If a CCWC worked with an NGO supporting safe birth, then safe birth was often listed as one of the jobs of the CCWC. In other words CCWCs voiced their commitment to delivering services and benefits that the NGO supported them to deliver. In a previous study, Plummer (2012) had also found that the activities of local authorities might become dictated by the agenda of NGOs. **Within this study, the effects of this were found to be both beneficial and detrimental.** CCWCs were committed to assisting in delivering the services and benefits that partner NGOs provide, and these were believed to positively impact children in communities. However, allowing NGOs to dictate the agenda did not empower the CCWC members to make choices based on the expressed needs of the community. It was perceived to undermine the genuine participation of the community in local governance.

Gourley (2009), discussing traditional Cambodian attitudes and values, notes that the dominant model of charity within Cambodia has long been the patronage system. Within this structure a patron provides charity to those in need. The recipients of this charity are expected to be thankful, but not empowered. The "power to affect change remains with the patron," p.17. In some cases the relationship between CCWCs and the NGOs providing focused services and benefits replicates the dynamics of the traditional patronage model.

When CCWCs are reliant on NGOs to deliver focused services and benefits, this may limit their capacity to dictate the child protection services offered

A further contributing factor to these power dynamics may also have been the lack of funding available to CCWCs. When CCWCs are reliant on NGOs to deliver focused services and benefits, this may limit their capacity to dictate the child protection services offered. The delivery of services through CCWC-NGO partnerships appeared to be dependent on continued NGO funding. The research team did not encounter any service delivery programs through CCWC-NGO partnerships that were perceived as sustainable by CCWCs alone. The Cambodian government does not provide sufficient child protection services at the commune level, and since NGOs are the main providers of services, their agendas may be prioritized.

Almost all CCWCs expressed their belief that these NGO partnerships and the services they provided were beneficial to the community

Almost all CCWCs expressed their belief that these NGO partnerships and the services they provided were beneficial to the community. Many CCWCs requested further services, and no CCWCs voiced complaints about the kinds of services being delivered (although there were complaints from members about lacking skills and funds to properly deliver services.). It was anticipated that CCWC might feel they were being asked to collaborate with too many NGOs, but when asked, only 6/28 CCWCs said this was an issue. Discussion with Focal Points found that many CCWCs were overburdened with requests for assistance from poor families, and therefore felt any help was useful.

#### **5.2.4 Support for Mapping and Monitoring by CCWC**

Some system strengthening programs in this study provided direct support to CCWCs to complete this process, often working through community volunteers

Policy (RGC 2008) notes that the CCWC should "Assist C/S Councils to collect, analyze information and data related to issues and needs of women and children and integrate this information into the CDP and the CIP." VBNK (2010) found that this was an area of weakness for CCWCs, and that when data was collected it was infrequently used to inform planning. Some system strengthening programs in this study provided direct support to CCWCs to complete this process, often working through community volunteers. One project supported the CCWC to collect detailed evidence of the child labor situation in communes. The results of these assessments were then shared at forums to incorporate findings into the Commune Development Plan (CDP) and the Commune Investment Plan (CIP).

**CCWC members in communes that had received support reported that it had helped them to build skills and had ensured the needs of the community were represented in planning processes.**

Participants (both in communes that received support and in those that did not) described the difficulty of finalizing the CDP and the CIP

Participants (both in communes that received support and in those that did not) described the difficulty of finalizing the CDP and the CIP. This process involved numerous stakeholders, and it was at this stage the compromises were made, limiting the incorporation of results of data collection.

The document review found evidence that NGO support in these planning processes positively impacted commune allocation of social service funds in the CIP

Nevertheless, the document review found evidence that NGO support in these planning processes positively impacted commune allocation of social service funds in the CIP. One NGO project summary recorded an increase in Commune Council budget allocation for social services from 3 percent to 6 percent in communes in which the NGO actively supported the CCWC. Ramage (2015) also found that allocation for social services in UNICEF supported communes increased three times, suggesting that NGO support can positively impact CIP expenditures on social services. Furthermore, Ramage also found a positive correlation between vulnerability and social service provision suggesting that the CIP reflects the needs of the vulnerable.

#### **5.2.5 Establishment of Children's Groups**

Most system strengthening NGOs in this study supported programs which organized children or youth groups in the community as part of a child protection circle of care. These groups increased knowledge around child protection issues and developed children's participation skills.

Many CCWCs had strong relationships with children's groups

Many CCWCs had strong relationships with children's groups. Children from these groups engaged in CCWC activities. In some areas children and youth group members attended periodic or annual events, but in others group members were members of the CCWC. Documents from steering committee members found that when supported, children became confident to contribute to CCWCs.

Children's groups can encourage children to raise awareness and to report, but it is dangerous for children to intervene in child protection cases in any way

Documents also showed that children's groups could lead to increased reporting of child protection abuses (Gamer and Mauney 2013, Save the Children 2014). These reports were often made by members who were friends of children who were suffering the abuse. However, documents cautioned that children and youth groups must be carefully monitored to ensure that children do not overreach. Children's groups can encourage children to raise awareness and to report, but it is dangerous for children to intervene in child protection cases in any way.

### **5.2.6 Establishment of Parents' Groups**

Some parents who took part in FGDs for this study reported that they were more likely to use positive parenting and less likely to use physical abuse

Several NGOs established parents' groups that were linked with the CCWC. These groups aimed to increase awareness, promote positive parenting in members households and, in some cases, act as peer to peer education models. Parents' groups lead to a higher level of knowledge among participants. Some parents who took part in FGDs for this study reported that they were more likely to use positive parenting and less likely to use physical abuse. Documents from system strengthening NGOs found similar results (Gamer and Mauney 2014, Save the Children 2014). **Children and parents groups also built links between these groups and the CCWC, and several participants gave examples of how these links had facilitated CCWC functioning.**

### **5.2.7 Establishment of Groups for Families with a History of Abuse**

These groups provided a supportive community, and most members voiced strong opinions against domestic violence. The impact of groups for perpetrators was mixed

One NGO established groups for victims and perpetrators of physical abuse. Perpetrators signed contracts mandating attendance with village authorities as a result of mediation proceedings. Both groups required highly trained facilitators, and required significant skill and effort to lead. Groups for victims were described as more successful, both in this study, and in documents (Gamer and Mauney 2013). These groups provided a supportive community, and most members voiced strong opinions against domestic violence. The impact of groups for perpetrators was mixed. Perpetrators attendance was not voluntary. While some group members were committed to using the group as a vehicle for improvement, others were embarrassed by attendance or resented the groups. There is a correlation between alcohol abuse and domestic abuse (CDHS 2014) and Mauney reports visiting groups in which members were both drunk and hung-over. Mauney raises a concern that members who resent attendance may vent their anger on their spouses after attendance. However, some members of groups for perpetrators reported, both in this study and in NGO documents, that the groups had helped them to decrease violent behavior. Domestic abuse is a deep-seated issue, often passed from generation to generation, and decreases are slow. **The reported short-term decreases in domestic violence due to group attendance are hopeful, but warrant further research.**

### 5.2.8 Provision of Trained Social Workers to Work with CCWC

One NGO supported the provision of social workers within communities. These social workers were trained by a long-established organization focused on social services in Cambodia. They were also provided with ongoing support through monthly meetings, in which practitioners shared resources, discussed cases in confidentiality, and received refresher trainings. The project built partnerships with CCWCs and Village Chiefs to facilitate referrals, and also conducted outreach in the communities so that families could contact the social workers, in phone or in person.

Social workers provided therapeutic support to children

Social workers provided therapeutic support to children. Children met social workers in a home or another safe place and discussed their problems. Social workers and children would then make a service plan. Some plans were carried out in the community, others involved referral to other services such as medical services, legal services or shelters in the community. Children were able to meet with social workers to as many times as needed to develop coping mechanisms or to seek solutions.

This model was described as successful for a number of reasons. CCWCs are not trained social workers. They have neither the skills nor the time to provide on-going support for complex child protection issues. This model links CCWCs to social workers, who are not only trained, but also receive both monitoring and support. They are able to provide individualized support based on therapeutic best practice.

## CBCPPs and Non-CBCPPs

### 6.1 Traditional CBCPPs

CBCPPs in Cambodia include both formal interventions through CCWCs and informal interventions through CCWC-NGO partnerships. However, there are also CBCPPs that are a long established part of the traditional culture of the community. There has been little research on the role these practices play in child protection. While this research focused on CCWCs and NGOs, the relationship between CCWCs and traditional CBCPPs was explored.

#### 6.1.1 Pagoda Care

Pagodas are a common form of alternative care for children

Pagodas are a common form of alternative care for children, but little research exists on child protection services pagodas provide for children. Community members without a residence are permitted to live in pagodas, and many children live in pagodas. The government of Cambodia does not record official numbers of children living in pagodas. A small-scale study of pagodas in Kandal in 2004, found 5-7 **children lived in each pagoda (ICC HOSEA). If a similar number of children live in the approximately estimated 3,000 pagodas in Cambodia, the number of children in this kind of care may be high.** It is an area that warrants further research. Traditionally, girls are not

live in many pagodas. In those pagodas which accept girls, girls are expected to leave after menstruation (Ramage 2005). The population of children living in pagodas is therefore assumed to be predominantly male.

The main form of support offered by pagodas appears to be residential care; Pagoda-based residential care is not subject to the Minimum Standards on Alternative Care for Children (MSACC) and oversight by MoSVY

The main form of support offered by pagodas appears to be residential care; Pagoda-based residential care is not subject to the Minimum Standards on Alternative Care for Children (MSACC) and oversight by MoSVY. Within this study there were no reports of pagodas offering services other than residential care. NGO partnerships with pagodas to provide social services do exist, but these were not encountered in the data collection process. Very few child participants identified monks as people to whom children could turn when faced with problems. A study of forms of care for reintegration of trafficking victims also found this was the case (Smith-brake 2014).

The quality of care provided to children in pagodas has been described as poor

The quality of care provided to children in pagodas has been described as poor. A study from 2004 (ICC HOSEA) found that children in pagodas are not well cared for by monks, whose primary focus is religious service not childcare. It seems unlikely that monks received training in childcare. Children in pagodas are often discriminated against by community members for their poverty (ICC). Many pagodas are the site of traditional weddings and ceremonies, which are attended by youth. There are reports from children living in pagodas of witnessing violence between youth at these ceremonies (Jordanwood 2010). There have also been recent high-profile cases of sexual abuse in Pagodas (Elliot and Chanyda 2016, Hilton 2008). Overall, there is a little research on the conditions of children living in pagodas, and that which exists is out of date. **More research would be required before NGOs consider building partnerships with pagodas to provide community-based child protec-**

### 6.1.2 Kinship Care

Kinship care is the most prevalent form of care for children separated from their parents in Cambodia. The CDHS (2014) found that 17 percent of families included children who were either fostered or orphans. Care of this kind is often organized informally. Within this study CCWCs and families were found to draw upon kinship care as an option for vulnerable children. Some CCWC members described facilitating the placement of children who were abused into the home of extended family members. Others described advocating for families who were migrating for seasonal harvests to leave children with relatives so that the children did not miss schooling.

International studies have found kinship care can provide significant advantages in terms of emotional wellbeing and development. However, it is not always beneficial, and children in kinship care may suffer in comparison with children in RCIs. Due to the lack of research on this subject in Cambodia, it is unclear what the effects of placement in kinship care are. It is an area that warrants research.

## 6.2 Non-CBCPPs

### 6.2.1 Residential Care Institutions (RCIs)

In this study 22/30 CCWCs reported that their CCWC authorized placement of children in RCIs, and 17/30 CCWCs could recall a case when a child from their community was placed in an RCI

Research has found that in the absence of social support for vulnerable children within the community, families will send their children into residential care in order to assure their needs are met (Jordanwood 2012). National policy within Cambodia states that residential care should only be accessed as a last resort (RGC 2009). However, research has found that local authorities seldom follow policy, and many recommend placement in RCIs as an initial response (Jordanwood 2012). In this study 22/30 CCWCs reported that their CCWC authorized placement of children in RCIs, and 17/30 CCWCs could recall a case when a child from their community was placed in an RCI. When asked to consider a hypothetical scenario in which a child was placed in an RCI, 22/30 CCWCs said that this was a good decision. Given that recent research (NIS, MoSVY, Columbia University, MLT Consulting 2016) finds that there are over 48,000 children living in RCIs in Cambodia, this is not surprising. RCIs may be the largest formal child protection intervention in the country.

The research found that in several cases CCWC members provided an introduction to children to RCIs

The research found that in several cases CCWC members provided an introduction to children to RCIs. Some CCWC members described relationships that had developed between the CCWC and the RCI. The CCWC would introduce the family and child to the RCI in order to facilitate placements, as described below,

*We consult with children, and advise them, and introduce them to the orphanage to solve problems.*

**CCWC member**

These relationships may have made it more likely that a CCWC would recommend placement in an RCI than a community based option.

A surprise finding of this study was that many CCWC members, families and children were aware of both positive and negative impacts of placement in RCIs

Placement in RCIs has a range of negative long-term impacts on physical and social development (Nelson et al. 2007, Parker et al. 2005, Project Sky 2007, Zeanah et al. 2005). However, research in Cambodia has found that when no other community-based services are available to children, RCI can offer improved access to education (Whetten 2013). A surprise finding of this study was that many CCWC members, families and children were aware of both positive and negative impacts of placement in RCIs. While largely supporting RCI placements, many participants explained that children in residential care would suffer emotionally from their separation from families and communities.

*If we (the CCWC) put a child in an orphanage the child will be able to study. If the child stays with the parents, the child will not be able to study. At the orphanage the child will become knowledgeable, will have enough school supplies, and enough food...but at the orphanage the child will feel hopeless. The child will be afraid because the orphanage will not take good care like parents do. The child will want to meet their parents again.*

**CCWC member**

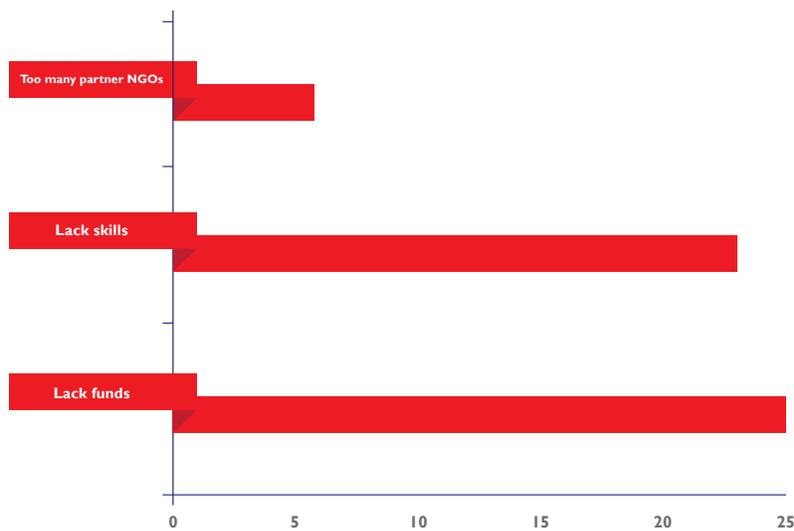
Overall, CCWCs showed favorable attitudes to RCIs, and viewing them as an appropriate option for children's care

Overall, CCWCs showed favorable attitudes to RCIs, and viewing them as an appropriate option for children's care. CCWCs appeared in some cases to be actively promoting RCIs. At the same time, they were aware that being placed in an RCI could be distressing for children. Whilst system strengthening NGOs have shown success in transforming attitudes related to many areas of child protection, the attitudes regarding RCIs appear to remain unchanged since Jordanwood (2011) found most local authorities supported RCIs. A recent thematic mapping of services related to residential care found that local authorities viewed residential care as a options for care of children (Fiss and Matthews 2016). It is of particular concern that CCWCs favor placement in RCIs, since local authorities are key gatekeepers for children in need of protection.

### Factors Hindering or Enhancing the Functionality and Effectiveness of CCWCs

Both CCWC members and key stakeholders identified a number of factors which impacted the functionality and success of CCWCs

Both CCWC members and key stakeholders identified a number of factors which impacted the functionality and success of CCWCs. These included complex lines of accountability and a lack of funding. The personality of CCWC members, especially the Focal Point was also important, and a lack of skills among members hindered CCWC effectiveness. The effectiveness of CCWCs was further hindered the lack of a comprehensive network of referral services, and limited faith in the justice system. However, NGO interventions such as the establishment of children and parent groups with strong links to the CCWC, and the provision of social workers to partner with the CCWC improved effectiveness, as discussed below.



Graph 5. CCWC Challenges to Doing Job, Reported by CCWC Members

## 7.1 Impact of Complex Accountability

Participants reported that these members often view involvement in CCWC as an additional duty, and are not invested in promoting child protection

CCWC members are accountable to different ministries, and this hinders the effectiveness of the committee. In some C/Ss, the CCWC monitors child labor, which is reported to the MoLVT. Members of the CCWC are drawn from Commune Council, police, school and health center. These members are accountable to MoI, MoEYS and MoH. Participants reported that these members often view involvement in CCWC as an additional duty, and are not invested in promoting child protection. Focal Points are the sole members of the committee for whom work for the CCWC is their main duty, and some Focal Point interviewed explained that they felt solely responsible for implementing activities, and that other members did little more than attend meetings. A further problem is that the CCWC reports to the Commune Council, which in turn reports to the MoI. The MoI is tasked with administration, governance and national protection, and does not focus on child protection. MoSVY is responsible for child protection, but has no implementing body at the C/S level. While many CCWCs mentioned collaborating with DOSVY officials, these collaborations were limited to assistance in isolated cases. DOSVY officials did not appear to be playing an active role in child protection through the CCWC, and CCWC did not appear to be significantly benefiting from DOSVY expertise.

The challenge that CCWCs face is that staff from other sectors have been assigned to CCWCs, as an extra duty which is not effectively monitored by their employers. The complex lines of accountability to which CCWC members are subject, hindered functioning

It is not unusual for child protection systems to involve a wide range on stakeholders. An effective child protection system relies on a range of stakeholders, often including actors from the education, justice and health sectors (Wessells 2009). The challenge that CCWCs face is that staff from other sectors have been assigned to CCWCs, as an extra duty which is not effectively monitored by their employers. The complex lines of accountability to which CCWC members are subject, hindered functioning.

## 7.2 Impact of Funding

30/30 CCWCs reported lacking money

A lack of funding for CCWCs was a reoccurring theme in the data. 30/30 CCWCs reported lacking money. Some participants noted that the absence of a sufficient salary dedicated exclusively to work completed for the CCWC hindered effectiveness. The CCWC focal point is an appointed member of the commune council, and she receives her salary through that committee. Other members of the CCWC are appointed from the health center, the school and the hospital, and receive their salary from these institutions. **There is no CCWC member that is paid to work exclusively on the CCWC, and many participants said that as a result, CCWC work is perceived as voluntary or additional.** Moreover, several CCWC focal points said that their salaries were insufficient to cover their living expenses.

A second issue related to funding is the lack of sufficient provision for operational costs

A second issue related to funding is the lack of sufficient provision for operational costs. CCWC receive a small annual stipend for administrative costs, but most CCWCs complained that they lacked adequate funds to fulfill their duties. CCWC members said they lacked computers, money for snacks and money for office supplies. The most frequent issue mentioned was the lack of money to pay for fuel. CCWCs are currently conducting advocacy, monitoring and delivering

services, and each of these requires CCWC members to travel to meetings and to vulnerable families. Without sufficient funding for transport, CCWC members are unable to complete their duties.

Even with the funds provided with or through NGOs, a lack of funding for services was a reoccurring theme

A third funding related issue was the lack of money to provide services. CCWCs are not tasked with implementing services in policy (RGC 2008). As noted earlier (in CCWC Referral to and Provision of Child Protection Services), members have begun to take on service delivery to vulnerable families, in response to prompting through NGO partnerships and requests for assistance from community members. Since MoSVY lacks an implementing agency at the C/S level, CCWCs have begun to attempt to fill this gap. CCWCs receive some funds from the Commune Council budget, but since only 3-4 percent of this is currently spent on social services, a significant gap remains (Ramage 2014). Even with the funds provided with or through NGOs, a lack of funding for services was a reoccurring theme.

### 7.3 Impact of Access to Child Protection Services

A second issue related to funding is the lack of sufficient provision for operational costs

The research found that CCWCs often rely on collaborations with NGOs to link families with services. As noted earlier, Cambodia does not have a national government social services network to provide social work services and NGOs are often the main social service providers at the C/S and village level. **While some CCWCs were involved in identifying services required, for the most part decisions regarding the NGO service provision appeared to be made by donors and NGOs at the national or international level. CCWC members have little input regarding which services are offered in their communities.** When community members approach CCWCs to request services, members of the CCWC are only able to link them to services NGOs have selected to provide. Most NGOs work in specific geographic areas and with specific target groups. This means that if a child protection issue is brought to the CCWC, and there is no NGO that provides these services in the community, the CCWC may not be able to help.

The response of the CCWC or focal point is limited not only by the availability of services, but also by the individual CCWC member's knowledge of services

The response of the CCWC or focal point is limited not only by the availability of services, but also by the individual CCWC member's knowledge of services. CCWC members do not appear to have access to listings of NGOs, but rely instead on established, personal relationships with NGOs. The effectiveness of CCWCs in linking women and families to services is limited by these factors.

### 7.4 Impact of Capacity of CCWC Members

The capacity of members hindered the effectiveness of CCWCs

The capacity of members hindered the effectiveness of CCWCs. Although 28/30 had received training, 28/30 CCWCs said that they lacked skills. A low skill level among CCWC members, was noted in previous studies (Gamer and Mauney 2009, VBNK 2010) and in interviews, key informants noted that some CCWC members are not literate. All CCWC members involved in FGDs appeared to be literate but many lacked other skills, specifically social work skills.

The ability to identify child protection abuses, and to know how to respond to these abuses is necessary to fulfill these roles effectively

CCWCs are tasked in policy with providing awareness raising and advocacy, as well as working to improve communication, coordination and collaboration between Commune Councils, service providers and community members to support women and children. The ability to identify child protection abuses, and to know how to respond to these abuses is necessary to fulfill these roles effectively. Most CCWC members competently described roles of CCWCs, and when asked about hypothetical scenarios described responses focused on service provision or prosecution of offenders. However, almost no CCWC members described more complex social work interventions such as therapy, and as noted earlier, CCWC members favored reconciliation without fully considering the protection of victims. **CCWC members had sufficient capacity to identify abuse, but insufficient skill to know how to appropriately respond.**

CCWCs are not tasked with providing social work services, and yet routinely intervened in the case of domestic abuse, an area in which most were unskilled

CCWCs are not tasked with providing social work services, and yet routinely intervened in the case of domestic abuse, an area in which most were unskilled. There is a significant lack of trained social workers within Cambodia as a whole, and most people employed as social workers have not received professional training (Harachi 2014). It is therefore not surprising to find that CCWC members have limited social work skills, especially since service provision is not within their government mandate. Moreover, it must be noted that social protection is a complex field, and practitioners globally struggle to find solutions. However, CCWCs are taking on the role of providing support in complex cases with minimal training. **If NGOs continue to strengthen child protection systems through CCWCs they should address the lack of child protection capacity within CCWCs, and consider scaling up models which fund social workers within communities supporting the CCWCs.**

## 7.5 Impact of Lack of Faith in the Justice System

There was a gap between ideal response and the actual response. Many participants attributed this to a lack of faith in the justice system

Most CCWC members, families and NGO partners, when asked to consider a hypothetic situation involving the physical or sexual abuse of a child, recommended reporting the case to the local authorities and prosecuting perpetrators. However, those who reported a similar situation in their own community explained that these cases were not always reported and prosecuted. There was a gap between ideal response and the actual response. Many participants attributed this to a lack of faith in the justice system. Participants noted that it was expensive to prosecute a case. One participant described police as reluctant regarding visit the poor vulnerable families, and noted a general sense of complacency regarding domestic violence. Another participant noted that police lacked the skills and equipment to collect forensic evidence in cases of rape or sexual abuse. Previous studies have found that police not only lack skills to conduct this kind of investigation, but also do not protect the confidentiality of the victim (Rosas 2012). One participant supported reporting in cases of domestic abuse, but when asked why a case wasn't reported explained that the victims lived too far away for the CCWC and police to reach them in time to investigate. Finally, some participants believed that even if a case were prosecuted, the perpetrator would not be convicted due to corrup-

It is important to note that CCWC members shared stories in which perpetrators were prosecuted and convicted for both rape and to a lesser degree physical abuse. Overall, however, the lack of faith in the justice system hindered CCWC effectiveness in promoting prosecution.

## 7.6 Impact of Attendance and Participation at CCWC

The data collection found that CCWCs are not well known amongst the general population

The data collection found that CCWCs are not well known amongst the general population. Researchers found that in data collection they often were required to explain what the CCWC was both to children and to families in FGDs. As noted earlier, (in Gathering Information on Women and Children to Inform Allocation of Services), few children knew about CCWCs. There is a possible explanation for the finding that **while CCWCs might identify vulnerable families through outreach, community members were unlikely to reach out to CCWCs themselves.**

Many CCWC members noted that CCWC meetings were not well attended, and this limited the effectiveness of the CCWC

Many CCWC members noted that CCWC meetings were not well attended, and this limited the effectiveness of the CCWC. Ramage (2015) found that citizen engagement in commune councils was high, with approximately 2/3rds of randomly sampled participants in that study having attended a meeting in the last year. Although this was true in some cases, many participants in this study reported that CCWC meetings were less frequently attended. **One participant explained that Commune Council meetings were seen as the governing body of the C/S, and CCWC were viewed as less influential, and therefore less well attended.**

As mentioned above, CCWCs were not well known, and this is the most likely reason for low attendance. In addition, participants noted that families were poor, and worked hard to subsist, and did not have leisure time to attend meetings.

Another common complaint was the people who attended CCWC meetings were not the intended audience

Another common complaint was the people who attended CCWC meetings were not the intended audience. Several CCWC members, focal point and local NGO staff explained that meetings would be arranged to conduct advocacy or advise particular target groups, and that these groups would not attend.

*If we are doing a group about domestic violence we invite the husbands, and wives come instead, if we are doing a group about contraception we invite the mothers, the grandmothers come.*

CCWC member

In several instances CCWC members explained that the people who had the free time to attend meetings were seldom those whose behavior the group wished to influence

CCWC members targeting families that migrate would find they were unable to reach these families because they were too busy working, or had already left the country. CCWC members targeting abusive men would find they were working or unwilling to attend. In several instances CCWC members explained that the people who had the free time to attend meetings were seldom those whose behavior the group wished to influence.

Participants noted that children in particular were unlikely to share views at meetings

In addition, a number of CCWC members noted that participation at meetings was limited. Ramage (2015) found that although two thirds of people regularly attended commune council meetings, only a quarter actively participated. A similar situation existed in CCWCs. Participants noted that children in particular were unlikely to share views at meetings. To some degree this might be attributed to traditional Cambodian cultural values, which do not promote speaking out. Jordanwood (2005) found that only two percent of children in schools had ever been asked to share an opinion in the classroom. Similarly, Gourley (2009) found that the traditional system of patronage was incompatible with the UNCRC aim of participatory empowerment. It is the experience of the research team that in traditional Cambodian culture, people are reticent to voice opinions in formal settings. This may have contributed to the low levels of active participation in CCWCs.

There were exceptions to this however. A few NGO programs supported children's groups that strengthened children's awareness of rights, knowledge of abuse and communication skills. These programs facilitated children's participation on CCWCs, resulting in reported increased participation, as described directly below (in Impact of Children, Youth and Parent Groups.)

## 7.7 Impact of Children, Youth and Family Groups

It is commendable that children were participating in local governance in this way

Several INGOs and local partners had established groups or clubs for children and parents (discussed in NGO-supported CNCPPs). **These groups provided three main benefits.** First, they built the knowledge base of members, so that they were more able to engage. Second, these groups also helped to build communication skills of members and to prepare them for active participation in CWCC meetings. This is particularly important given that the cultural context does not expect children to be engaged in speaking out or making decisions. Third, these groups established clear links between group members and local authorities. It is the experience of the researcher that personal connections are extremely important in Cambodian culture, and the personal links established by these groups were described as promoting attendance at meetings. These groups prepared children to attend CCWC meetings, and in a few cases to become members of CCWCs. Program evaluations noted that children's groups resulted in a greater level of knowledge and openness regarding child abuse, and that this translated into increased reporting of physical abuse both in school and in the home (Save the Children 2014, Moore 2014). It is commendable that children were participating in local governance in this way.

## 7.8 Impact of Social Workers

These social workers worked closely with CCWCs, receiving ongoing referrals

As noted earlier (in Provision of Trained Social Workers), one NGO trained social workers to provide social services at the village level. These social workers were given an initial training, which was followed up with periodic trainings. They were also given on-going technical support. This relatively high level of training allowed them to offer effective social services to community members. These social workers worked closely with CCWCs, receiving ongoing referrals. The CCWCs in these areas reported good relationships with social workers, and families and children in these areas reported benefiting from their services. **Social workers were able to provide therapeutic services within the community, which provided an alternative to other CCWC common responses of reconciliation in cases of domestic violence without further support, or referral to RCIs.**

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## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of formal and informal child protection mechanisms exist at the C/S level in Cambodia. CCWCs provide the only formal government child protection body at commune level. Their mandate focuses on planning, awareness raising, advocacy, and monitoring, as well as increasing communication and collaboration between CCWCs, services and community members. However CCWCs have moved beyond their mandate to deliver services, such as resolution of domestic violence cases, themselves.

CCWCs have also built strong partnerships with NGOs. Most NGOs provide services which are accessed in part through CCWC referrals. A smaller number of NGOs, focused on child protection, support CCWC functioning, so that the committees can fulfill their government mandate. Through these NGOs, CCWCs receive support for functioning, training, monitoring, planning and delivering services. NGOs also conduct a range of interventions that promote child protection within the village and increase participation in CCWCs, and reporting of abuses to CCWCs. These include children and parent's groups, Village Protection Networks and the provision of trained social workers to work with cases referred from CCWCs (among others).

CCWCs report that the most common issues related to child protection in their communities are school drop out and child labor, domestic violence, sexual abuse and migration. CCWCs respond to these issues with varying levels of success. School drop out is closely linked to child labor by participants, and is addressed largely by advice to stay in school and the provision of school fees or supplies. In areas where CCWCs are supported by a NGO program to prevent child labor, support to combat school drop out is more comprehensive, and includes livelihood support, however, this form of support is not provided by CCWCs alone. Domestic violence is addressed through awareness raising, and reconciliation. Attitudes regarding domestic violence appear to have shifted, and the majority of all participants advised reporting offenders. However, there is a gap between attitudes and action, and the most common responses to incidents of domestic violence involved advising both victims and perpetrators to improve, and reconciling families. This is of concern because reconciliation places women and children at increased risk. Sexual abuse is believed to be under reported, and in this study, only cases of rape were reported. These were addressed by support to access prosecution of offenders. There were almost no services available to rape victims in their communities, and some were sent into shelters. Migration was addressed through awareness raising to promote prevention, and to encourage families to leave children with relatives, and through provision of services to children left by migrants with family members.

The work of CCWCs can be daunting. Most have been insufficiently trained, and lack skills to complete both their administrative duties and their technical duties. Previous funding for CCWC functioning has been withdrawn, and most CCWC lack funds for basic activities (for example money to pay for fuel when CCWC

members visit community members.) There are a large number of unmet child protection needs in the community, and CCWCs are routinely asked to address these needs. There is no national social service network within Cambodia, and most service provision comes from NGOs. The scope of NGO coverage is limited, both geographically and in terms of the types of service available. CCWC members are often unable to link children to the services they require. When CCWCs do provide services, these services may not follow evidence-based best practices, and in the case of domestic violence may place victims at further risk. There is also an over reliance on RCIs and shelters to provide services which, if child protection mechanisms were made available, could be provided in the community.

In response to the findings of this study, the following changes are recommended.

### **Key findings:**

- Child protection services at the village level are underfunded, with no dedicated funding from MoSVY and insufficient funds for CCWCs.
- Commune budgets tend to favor infrastructure projects over social services, and the process to use funds for social services is more complex than other sectors and projects. This may reflect a lack of knowledge on potential services that could be funded by local Commune budgets.
- When NGOs support planning and budgeting processes, the result is increased allocation of the CIP to social services.

### **Recommendations for government:**

- MoSVY should adopt clearer strategies to establish a comprehensive social service delivery system that will increase child protection social services at village and commune levels in the long term, and develop a clear funding request to the Royal Government of Cambodia for adequate budget to implement the system.
- As part of this strategy, funds to CCWC through Mol should be increased with a greater focus on prevention activities, data collection, costs for home visits and responding to cases of child and domestic abuse.
- The Commune process for requesting and receiving funds for social services should be reviewed and simplified.
- CCWCs should educate citizens on social services that can be funded through the CIP.

### **Recommendations for NGOs, civil society and other partners:**

- NGOs should continue to support CCWCs to fulfill their mandated roles according to government policy, including supporting child protection services at the local level, and provide inputs into the development of a national system for social services.
- NGOs should continue to expand support for CCWC and Commune Councils in planning and budgeting processes, and advocate for increased allocation of budgets to social services (at Commune, District and Provincial level).
- NGOs should support citizen participation in influencing and monitoring Commune budgets.

## ACTIVITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES (Programs)

### Key findings:

- Many CCWCs had moved beyond their role described in policy, and were providing child protection services. These services were often inadequate and in some cases placed children at continued risk.
- CCWCs' limited technical capacity results in inadequate response to child protection cases. For example, an overreliance on reconciliation of cases places victims at continued risk; sexual abuse cases other than rape were not always identified; an overreliance on shelters and residential care institutions as the primary response for children who have been raped. The involvement of local civil society groups, specifically parent and children's groups, can lead to increased reporting of child abuse to authorities, and can positively impact CCWC functioning.
- NGOs were often the main providers of child protection services, but these programs were often decided at national level with limited input from CCWCs and do not cover the whole population.
- A lack of faith in the justice system hampered efforts to prosecute abusers, and the justice system is not child friendly, confidential or affordable. Informal kinship care is an intrinsic part of community-based child protection.
- An NGO program supporting social workers who received referrals from CCWCs was effective and successful.

### Recommendations for government:

- Mol should review and amend the roles of CCWCs to bring greater clarity to their responsibilities, including their monitoring function, and the involvement of children, women, social workers and religious leaders in the committee.
- The monitoring function of CCWCs should be further strengthened, supporting CCWCs to use information collected to link with NGO services and ensure coordination of services with local providers.
- Further focus and guidelines on child and youth engagement and participation in CCWCs are required, and ensure their involvement aligns with their best interests.
- CCWCs should promote community based care and prevent unnecessary placement of children in residential care.
- Mol should collaborate with MoSVY to provide further capacity building to CCWCs on:
  - Budgeting for child protection issues,
  - Identification and monitoring of vulnerable children,
  - Ensuring the safety of children when responding to domestic violence or sexual abuse cases,
  - The benefits of linking to community based care programs and the negative impact of residential care on child development,
  - Referral processes to services (either government or NGO).

### Recommendations for NGOs, civil society and other partners:

- Strengthen the implementation of domestic violence laws to ensure prosecution (and incarceration) of offenders and enhance support for victims.
- Reinforce existing laws with Commune Councilors, CCWC members and
- Police to ensure citizens are not required to pay informal fee to try cases and ensure the justice system provides confidentiality and access for children.

- In the medium term, NGOs should expand programs providing social workers/services (for victims and vulnerable children and families) that
- CCWCs can refer to, and support the strengthening of coordination mechanisms between the CCWCs and service providers (including identifying geographic gaps in service provision).
- Further advocate for the allocation of local Commune budgets for social workers.
- Strengthen staff knowledge and understanding of the CCWC roles (as outlined in policy) and ensure partnerships support the CCWCs capacity to identify and refer child protection cases.
- Further support government efforts to reduce residential care by mapping options for community based care and explicitly link new opportunities with CCWCs.
- Support programs and mechanisms that provide opportunities for citizens to express needs to CCWCs, and influence decision making regarding child protection services at the local level.
- Collaborate with sub-national governments at District and Provincial level to ensure referrals and networks between NGOs and CCWCs are well coordinated.
- Continue to evaluate, research and explore opportunities for kinship care in Cambodia and develop viable models.

## ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

### Key findings:

- CCWC members have confusing reporting lines to different Ministries which undermines focus and commitment of members (from the police, health center, school, and to a lesser degree Commune Council).
- WCCCs do not appear to engage with or support CCWCs in a substantive manner.

### Recommendations for government:

- Mol must clarify the roles and responsibilities of the members of CCWCs and build accountability mechanisms. New standards (that can be monitored) should be clearly established in policy. The new standards should also detail the roles, responsibilities, and participation of police, health centres, schools, Commune Councilors, and other government actors. Responsibilities for information sharing (such as police sharing information on child abuse cases reported) should be made more clear, and ensure other
- CCWC members are responsive to their role when information is shared with them.
- Mol should clarify how WCCCs can coordinate and better support CCWCs to fulfill their mandate for child protection; this will require amendments to existing Prakas, or new policies, to detail the timing of interactions, monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and responsiveness of WCCCs to the issues raised through CCWCs for further support.

### Recommendations for NGOs, civil society and other partners:

- NGOs should ensure their programs support the diverse make up of CCWCs and maximize the link to other sectors.

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# Thank you!



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