

Supporting community action on AIDS in developing countries



Building Blocks: Asia

Briefing notes for communities working with orphans and vulnerable children

Protection

Acknowledgements

What is the International HIV/AIDS Alliance?

The International HIV/AIDS Alliance (the Alliance) is the European Union's largest HIV-focused development organisation. We were established in 1993 as an international non-governmental organisation to support community action on HIV/AIDS. Since then, we have worked with over 2,000 community-based organisations in over 40 countries, reaching some of the poorest and most vulnerable communities with HIV prevention, care and support and improved access to treatment.

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Background

The International HIV/AIDS Alliance, with funding from USAID, has produced this series of practical briefing notes to assist policy-makers, programme managers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), local government and communities to respond to the needs of children affected by HIV and AIDS¹ in Asia. The briefing notes focus on how programmes can strengthen the capacity of children, families and communities. They do not include general information on HIV and AIDS, as this is available in many other publications. These briefing notes are part of a set of seven, comprising six topics and an overview:

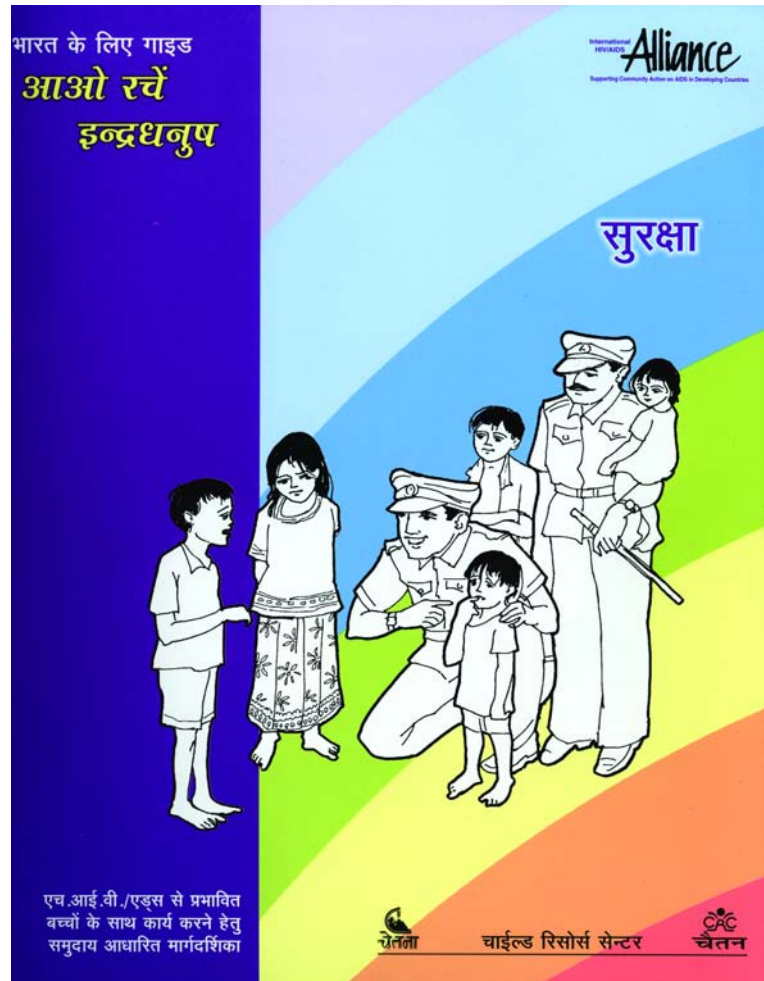
- Health and nutrition
- Livelihoods and economic strengthening
- Education and training
- Care and psychosocial support
- Social inclusion
- Protection

All these areas are important and should be considered together in an integrated response. Each briefing note introduces issues, and provides principles and strategies for guiding the response, while also offering examples of best practice from programme experience. The strategies reflect international good practice and the experience of people working with orphans and vulnerable children in Asia. Some of the guides also include case studies from Africa to illustrate practical actions that can be taken.

The briefing notes were developed through a highly participatory process, guided by an international advisory board. Initial content for the notes was developed during a workshop in Chiang Mai by members of the development group for Building Blocks: Asia, acknowledged above. This was then written up in English by a consultant, Kathy Attawell, and then translated, reviewed and revised in Cambodia, India and Thailand. These revised editions are available in Khmer, Hindi and Thai – see www.aidsalliance.org for more information on these publications. This English edition is based on the original content developed during the Chiang Mai workshop, with revisions and editions based on the country-level reviews and feedback from the international advisory board. Examples and case studies from this process have been noted as coming from a ‘Member of the development group for Building Blocks: Asia’.

¹ The term ‘children affected by HIV and AIDS’ includes children living with HIV as well as those who have lost family members to AIDS or who are living in families or communities affected by HIV and AIDS.

Background



The briefing notes in Hindi

The briefing notes are all divided into three sections:

Introduction

This section explains the topic and how it relates to children and families affected by HIV and AIDS.

Issues

An outline of the impact of HIV/AIDS on children.

Principles and strategies

Guidelines and possible ways of taking action to strengthen support for orphans and vulnerable children.

Introduction

The HIV/AIDS epidemic increases the vulnerability of children to neglect, abuse and exploitation. Poverty and breakdown in families affected by HIV and AIDS can result in children leaving home to seek work. Children who are orphaned or abandoned and children with little education and few skills often end up living on the streets. Children in the poorest families may be sold or trafficked for sexual or labour exploitation. Children of migrants, sex workers and other marginalised groups are particularly vulnerable.

These circumstances increase the chances that such children will in turn be infected with HIV. Without adult care and support, access to information and services or legal protection, children are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse, involvement in prostitution or crime, and abuse of drugs and alcohol, all of which increase their risk of HIV infection.

Programmes for children affected by HIV and AIDS need to develop strategies to improve child protection, including strengthening the capacity of communities, families and vulnerable children themselves to prevent and cope with situations where children are at risk.

This guide is divided into two sections:

Issues

This section considers how the impact of HIV and AIDS increases the chances of children ending up in risky situations, which in turn increase their vulnerability to HIV infection, and explains why programmes need to protect vulnerable and orphaned children.

Issues include:

- Poverty
- Family breakdown and abuse
- Forced migration and trafficking
- Parental and community situation
- Prostitution, sexual abuse and exploitation
- Drug abuse and crime
- Limited access to information and services
- Lack of legal protection
- Low awareness of the situation of vulnerable children.

Introduction

Principles and strategies

This section outlines principles of programming to reduce children's vulnerability, and describes possible ways of taking action to protect children. Case study examples are included to illustrate practical application of some of these principles and strategies.

Principle 1

Protect children from exploitation and abuse

Principle 2

Prevent risky situations

Principle 3

Promote community action to protect children

Principle 4

Strengthen children's capacity to protect themselves

Issues

Many people from hill tribes and the Thai–Burmese border area end up living in the city of Chiang Mai in Thailand. The children of these migrant families, and children living on the streets because they have run away from violent home situations or have been orphaned by AIDS, are particularly vulnerable. For example, one boy aged 11 was sent out to sell flowers by his stepfather and was beaten if he did not make enough money. Eventually he ran away and started living on the streets, where he began inhaling glue.

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Two cases in Thailand illustrate the vulnerability of children. A boy lost both of his parents to AIDS when he was 12 years old. He ended up homeless in Chiang Mai, where he was found by the Volunteers Group for Children’s Development – an NGO that works with children living on the streets – and is now living in a house run by the Volunteers Group. A man aged 20 was homeless from a young age and became infected with HIV. He lost his wife to AIDS, and his young son, who is also HIV positive, is living in a welfare home.

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The NGO Friends Mith Samlanh works with street children in Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia. Many children have ended up living on the streets because of family breakdown. For example, one boy aged 16 years has been living on the streets for four years, since his father went to prison for murdering his mother. He started using drugs a year ago, and earns a living through begging. Another boy left home to live on the streets because of domestic violence and also started using drugs because he felt lonely and hopeless.

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Children end up in risky situations because of:

Poverty

Orphans and children from households affected by HIV and AIDS migrate to urban areas seeking work because of family poverty and unemployment in rural areas. Sometimes affected families end up living on the streets because they have lost their home or land.



Children living on the street

Family breakdown and abuse

The illness or death of a parent or parents may lead to family break-up. Orphaned children who are mistreated by relatives or foster carers may decide to run away. In many cases, domestic violence or sexual abuse is the main reason for children leaving home. Sometimes children end up living on the streets after being abandoned by relatives.

Forced migration and trafficking

Many children end up in the sex trade: sometimes families sell their children to brothels; sometimes traffickers trick families and children with false promises of high-paying jobs. Other children are trafficked to work in jobs that are dangerous or where they work long hours for very low pay. The children of poor families, those affected by HIV and orphans in rural areas are most vulnerable to trafficking and abduction.

In Cambodia, it is estimated that 30% of sex workers are under the age of 18. At least half of these children are forced into the sex trade through deception or being sold by their families. An estimated 25% of commercial sex workers in Thailand are younger than 18 years of age.

World Vision (2001) A safe world for children: ending abuse, violence and exploitation; Thailand Office of National Statistics, 2002

Migrant children, especially those from ethnic minorities, living in border areas are particularly vulnerable to trafficking for sex work and child labour.

Save the Children UK, 2001. Small dreams beyond reach: the lives of migrant children and youth along the borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand

Trafficking is a significant problem in the Mekong region, especially from Myanmar, which has “exported” over 2 million children and adults to neighbouring countries, including Thailand.

Push and pull factors of child trafficking in the sending and receiving Countries, SEAMEO Secretariat, Bangkok, Thailand

Many girls from poor rural areas of Nepal are trafficked to India to work in the sex industry, while others are lured with promises of jobs as factory or domestic workers. Similar cases occur in other countries. For example, girls in the Philippines are persuaded to leave their villages to work in the city of Manila, where many end up selling sexual services in bars.

Save the Children UK, 1996. Kids for hire: a child's right to protection from commercial sexual exploitation

In Thailand, many street children start having sex when they are very young, with other street children and with clients to whom they sell sexual services. Condom use between street children is relatively low. Condom use with clients depends on where children are from. Children from lowland Thailand are more likely to ask clients to use condoms than children from the highlands. *Member of the development group for Building Blocks: Asia*



Children are vulnerable to abduction

Parental and community situation

Children of migrants are vulnerable, especially if their parents are illegal migrants, because they lack access to education and health care and often live in poor conditions. Community violence or gang warfare is often reflected in violence in the home, where children may be at risk of abuse.

These children are vulnerable to HIV because of:

Prostitution, sexual abuse and exploitation

Children with little education and no qualifications have few employment opportunities, but feel obliged to support their families financially or to help their families pay off debts. For girls, selling sexual services may be the only option. Street children are at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation, or may sell sexual services to survive. Sometimes young street girls and boys provide sexual services to older boys in exchange for affection or protection. Street children have high rates of sexually transmitted infections and are at high risk of HIV infection. Children, especially girls working as domestic servants, are also vulnerable to sexual abuse by employers. Poor children who are living with their families are also vulnerable to sexual exploitation by adults; for example ‘sugar daddies’ or ‘sugar mummies’ or sex tourists.

Issues

In Thailand, the Sex Trade Prevention and Suppression Act has been developed to protect children against sexual abuse and exploitation. However, lack of knowledge about how to interpret the law means that the police often fail to enforce it.

Member of the development group for Building Blocks: Asia (for more information see UNIFEM factsheet in Useful Website list)

Drug abuse and crime

Street children and children who have lost their parents and are suffering from psychological distress, may use drugs or alcohol to cope with their situation. Drugs and alcohol reduce children's ability to refuse unsafe sex or to negotiate in risky situations. Children living on the streets are at risk of getting involved in crime. Children who end up in detention because of drug use or crime are vulnerable to sexual abuse by police, prison officers or other prisoners.

Limited access to information and services

Vulnerable and marginalised children often have limited knowledge about HIV and AIDS, few ways to protect themselves from infection and little access to health information and services. Street children, children of sex workers and other marginalised and vulnerable children often face hostility from health workers. Suitable rehabilitation and support services for street children, children involved in sex work or with drug problems are limited. In many cases, the only option available is institutional care, which children dislike and which is not in their best interests. Children in institutions may be at risk of neglect and abuse by adult carers.

Lack of legal protection

Many children are not aware of their legal rights or of the laws put in place to protect them from abuse. Cases of sexual abuse are rarely reported to the police because children are afraid of the consequences or that they will not be believed, especially if the abuser is a family member or employer. Children in the sex trade are often powerless to report or change their situation because they fear violent reprisals or owe money to their employer. They may feel they cannot leave because they have nowhere to go, and that they cannot go home because of the shame and stigma associated with sex work.

Issues

Low awareness of the situation of vulnerable children

In many countries, the criminal justice system is not supportive of children who are abused or exploited, so children remain in situations where they are at risk of HIV. For example, in cases of the sex trade involving young boys, legal provisions are limited and tourists buying sex may only be charged with indecency. Children who get into trouble with the law may not get legal representation and judicial systems may not deal appropriately with juvenile crime. The police are not sensitive to the needs of children living on the streets, and may perceive them as a law-and-order problem rather than as vulnerable children who need help. In some settings, the police have arrested street children carrying condoms on the grounds that they must be selling sexual services. Many street children view the police as a threat rather than as a source of help.



The police should be a source of help to children

Principles & strategies

UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD STATES THAT:

- Children should be protected from trafficking, forced prostitution, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, drugs and harmful traditional practices that put them at risk of HIV.

In Chiang Mai province in Thailand, government agencies and NGOs involved in protecting the rights of abused children have established a Coordinating Centre for Children's Rights Protection. The Centre has a full-time staff person, and regular working group meetings help the different agencies to coordinate activities and share responsibilities. For example, NGOs conduct surveillance and legal action, while hospitals conduct physical examinations of abused children, help to determine the age of children without official documents, and provide children with support from social workers and psychologists. There are plans to establish similar centres in other provinces, based on experience in Chiang Mai.

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In Cambodia, CARE is cooperating with the police, referral hospitals and provincial departments responsible for women's affairs, religion, social affairs, education, youth and sport. A committee responsible for caring for children and people with HIV has been formed and meets every three months.

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In Thailand, collaboration between the Volunteers Group for Children's Development and the Coordinating Centre for Children's Rights Protection resulted in two successful court cases involving foreigners who had bought sexual services from children. These organisations are also running a campaign, informing tourists that buying sexual services from children violates Thai laws concerning child sexual abuse and that abusers will be prosecuted.

Member of the development group for Building Blocks: Asia

1 Protect children from exploitation and abuse

Children have the right to protection. Programmes should promote protection of children and child rights, and the idea that children are socially valuable.

Strategies for action

- Network and collaborate with organisations working to protect children from exploitation and abuse, such as child rights groups, legal centres, child welfare agencies, trades unions and anti-trafficking organisations.
- Sensitise the police and social workers about child protection and the risks faced by vulnerable and marginalised children.
- Train legal workers on child rights, HIV and AIDS, and child protection issues such as sexual exploitation and child labour.
- Strengthen the capacity of the judicial system and law enforcement agencies to deal with child sexual abuse and exploitation.
- Advocate for laws, or enforcement of existing laws, to protect children from sexual abuse and labour exploitation. Possible actions include to:
 - sensitise local authorities to the risks faced by vulnerable children
 - work with local police to encourage them to enforce existing legislation, to collaborate with communities and NGOs in protecting children from trafficking and to follow up and prosecute cases.
- Promote community awareness of child rights and child protection issues.



Educate communities about children's legal rights

Principles & strategies

2 Prevent risky situations

In Cambodia, the National AIDS Authority has conducted training in cooperation with UNDP for district health officers and members of commune councils to promote awareness of child rights and child protection in communities.

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The Volunteers Group for Children's Development, which helps to enrol street children who want to study in government schools, found that the educational system is not always responsive to the needs of these children and that this discourages children from coming to school. There is also a need to sensitise teachers, some of whom have negative attitudes towards street children, believing that they will adversely affect school standards or blaming them when items go missing or when children quarrel and fight. Some teachers also lack understanding about street children's need to work, and punish them for falling asleep in class or missing school.

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In Chiang Mai, Thailand, different approaches are being used to stop children getting involved in the sex trade or to help them to stop selling sex. Some are being supported to sell other products, such as flowers, while others have been trained to provide massage instead of sexual services to tourists. This is complemented by information about the risks of selling sex and help with setting goals, planning for the future and managing their money.

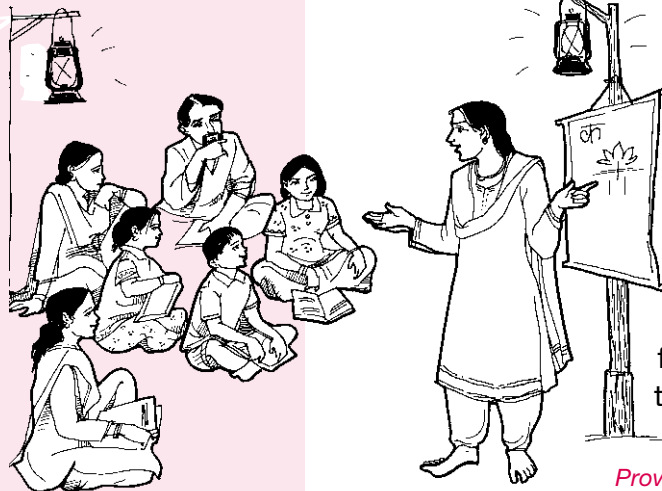
Member of the development group for Building Blocks: Asia

In Cambodia, the NGO Friends runs the Young Migrants project, which provides vocational training for young women who have come to Phnom Penh. For some, developing new skills enables them to go home and earn a living there. *Member of the development group for Building Blocks: Asia*

Targeted support to the poorest and most vulnerable communities and families can help address the reasons why children migrate in search of work. Rural families and children in particular need information about the risks of child trafficking.

Strategies for action

- Advocate for government poverty reduction activities to target rural and border communities where children are particularly at risk of trafficking and migration.
- Strengthen community and family economic coping skills and capacity to generate local income.
- Support orphans and vulnerable children, especially girls, to attend school to expand their employment options.



Provide education at times when working children are able to attend

- Provide training for children who are already living on the streets to enable them to develop alternative sources of income generation to prostitution, crime or begging. This is not easy, since many businesses are reluctant to take on street children, and since children earn far more from selling sexual services than from employment.
- Inform and sensitise families, communities, local authorities, teachers and health workers in rural and border areas about child trafficking and the risks associated with the sex trade.
- Encourage government and donors to provide information about sexual exploitation of children to families and local authorities.

Principles & strategies

In Thailand, former street children from the Akha hill tribe are working with Akha children and their parents who have migrated to the city of Chiang Mai, to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS and the risks of selling sex.

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Also in Thailand, a community campaign to tackle Tok Keo, which means “buying paddies in advance” and refers to the practice of buying girls from their parents while they are still children, has helped to reduce trafficking, although the problem is still significant in border areas. The campaign encourages parents to refuse agents who offer money for their children, and also supports girls at high risk to remain in school.

Member of the development group for Building Blocks: Asia

In Cambodia, Save the Children UK and a local NGO called Krousar Thmey have been working to increase awareness among rural populations of the risks of child trafficking and prostitution, using a travelling shadow theatre and poster campaigns, and encouraging communities to protect children.

Member of the development group for Building Blocks: Asia

In Cambodia, Friends Mith Samlanh does outreach work in communities to prevent children from ending up on the streets. The experience of Indradevi Association (IDA) illustrates how sensitising communities, networking and using legal mechanisms can help to protect children from trafficking. In one case, a girl from a family affected by HIV living in a poor area of Phnom Penh was deceived into leaving home by a trafficker. Her parents reported what had happened to the IDA home-based care team, and IDA staff accompanied them to the commune office to file a complaint against the trafficker. The staff also reported the case to a human rights organisation. Through these efforts the girl was returned to her family and action was taken against the trafficker.

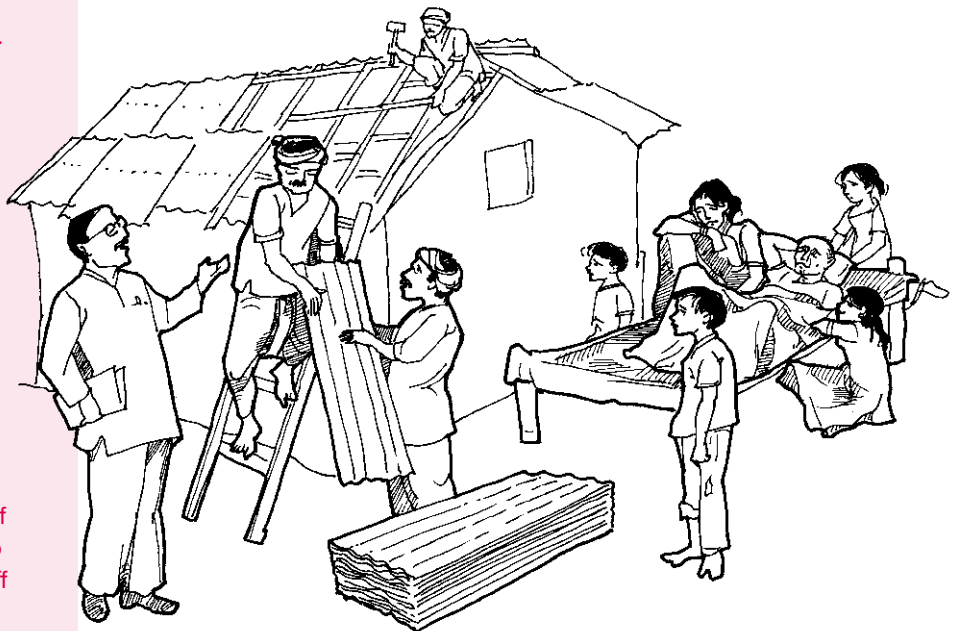
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3 Promote community action to protect children

Families and communities are key resources in fighting abuse and exploitation of children. Programmes need to build the capacity of families and communities to protect children who are at risk and to support children who have experienced neglect, abuse or exploitation.

Strategies for action

- Increase community awareness of child protection. Possible actions include:
 - Promote open discussion of the problem of child abuse and exploitation.
 - Work with women’s groups, youth groups and children to publicise the impact of community and domestic violence on children.
 - Promote gender awareness and efforts to tackle the low status of girls and women.



The community can help families to stay in their homes

Principles & strategies

In Nepal, the NGO Maiti Nepal has worked with girl returnees, lawyers and the police to raise awareness in rural communities of the risks to young girls trafficked across the border to India. The NGO spreads messages using traditional Nepali tunes and also provides training for alternative income-generating activities. Community committees have been formed to publicise, control and report on trafficking. The project has led to increased vigilance and assertiveness by families and better police cooperation. *Save the Children UK, 1996. Kids for hire: a child's right to protection from commercial sexual exploitation*

In Thailand, Phoen Keo (which means "good friends"), an association of charity organisations, has established a national telephone hotline service for abused children. Children can call free of charge to ask for help and advice. Staff answering calls coordinate with organisations that are able to provide assistance and protection. *Member of the development group for Building Blocks: Asia*

Also in Thailand, the Children's Protection Foundation provides care and protection for children who have been physically or sexually abused, offering temporary accommodation while court cases against abusers are in process, and helps to rehabilitate children so that they can go back home when this is feasible. *Member of the development group for Building Blocks: Asia*

In India, the Child in Need Institute, together with local youth club, runs a drop-in centre for children of sex workers in Kolkota. The centre offers protection, recreation and educational opportunities. Also in India, the Committed Communities Development Trust (CCDT) runs project Ankur, a day care centre for children of sex workers. The centre provides non-formal education to prepare children to enter mainstream schools, vocational guidance and skill training, education about rights and issues such as hygiene and health care, and helps children to develop the skills to protect themselves from abuse. CCDT also runs a night shelter for girls aged 6–14 years. *Member of the development group for Building Blocks: Asia*

- Encourage the community to protect children. Possible actions include:
 - Work with community groups, health and education systems, civil society and religious organisations to protect children from abuse and exploitation.
 - Work with local police to monitor the trafficking situation and develop strategies to deal with traffickers.
 - Train community committees on child rights and child protection.
 - Establish community child protection groups to monitor and protect children at risk.
- Provide practical support for children at risk and victims of neglect, abuse and exploitation. Possible actions include:
 - Set up free telephone helplines for children to report abuse or request advice.
 - Establish places of safety or 'safe spaces' for children and community safety nets for abused children; for example, a trusted member of the community can be available for children to turn to for help.
 - Identify and train community counsellors or trusted adults to whom children can talk about their situation.
 - Organise temporary accommodation for abandoned children and children from abusive homes.
 - Encourage community members to help neglected and vulnerable children in partnership with home-based care teams.
- Promote community approaches to rehabilitation of children who have been exploited or abused.
- Identify strategies to reintegrate children, where appropriate, into their families and villages, and to help them readjust to being with other children and being back in school.

Principles & strategies

In Cambodia, Friends tries to reintegrate street children with their families, negotiating with the family and addressing the reasons why children left home in the first place. World Vision runs a centre for girls who have been sexually exploited. Where appropriate, they reunite the girls with their families. Where this is not feasible or desirable, the girls are supported to live in small group homes or independently in the community. A key part of the rehabilitation process is restoring the girls' self-esteem, using creative activities as well as developing literacy and vocational skills. *Member of the development group for Building Blocks: Asia*

In Thailand, the Volunteers Group for Children's Development tries to reintegrate street children into their families through negotiation and efforts to address the problems that made them leave home. This is easier when a child has not been living on the street for a long time or when the problems are not too complicated. The Group tries to persuade children to stay at the reception house instead of on the street and to tell their story, and at the same time tries to contact the family. When families are ready, children are asked if they are willing to go back and visit. Some children decide to stay at home permanently after going back, but they are provided with information about how to contact the Group if they experience problems.

Member of the development group for Building Blocks: Asia

4 Strengthen children's capacity to protect themselves

Provide children with the protective mechanisms and support they need to protect themselves within their own environment. It may not always be feasible or in the best interests of the child to remove them from their environment. Ensure children are involved in making decisions about their lives. Children should be involved in programmes designed to help them. This will help to ensure effective and appropriate programming. For example, different strategies are needed to address the various situations of street children. Some street children are living on the streets with their families, some without families, and some spend time on the streets but go home.

Strategies for action

- Increase children's awareness of their rights. Possible actions include:
 - Establish and support networks for the protection of children's rights, or strengthen links with existing children's rights organisations.
 - Use formal and non-formal education to increase children's knowledge of their rights, and use participatory approaches to develop materials about children's rights.
 - Organise workshops for children about their rights.
 - Make sure that children know where to obtain legal support and where they can go for help in cases of abuse and exploitation.
- Help children to develop a sense of self-worth and a positive attitude to life, and to plan for their future. This can take a long time, especially for children who have been abused or who have been living on the streets.
- Provide children with information and skills. Possible actions include:
 - Educate children in rural areas and migrant communities about the risks of trafficking.
 - Encourage schools to teach life skills, including analytical and risk assessment skills.
 - Pay particular attention to activities to empower girls.
 - Conduct outreach and peer education with children who are not in school.
 - Teach children self-defence techniques.
 - Discuss the risks of sexual abuse with children and what to do if they are abused, as well as how to deal with potentially exploitative situations.

Principles & strategies

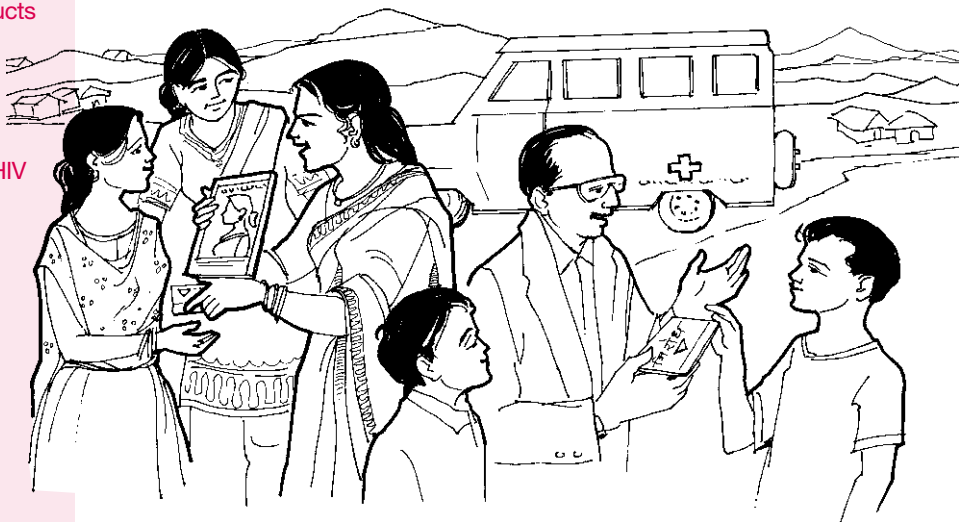
In Thailand, the Volunteers Group for Children's Development runs the Core Youth Leaders Project. Street youth are provided with information and training in communication skills, so that they can educate their peers about HIV and AIDS, drugs and harm reduction. These young people also help to link street children to agencies providing a range of services.
– *Member of Asia Guides development group*

In Cambodia, through the Lost Child Project, Friends has developed a play called *Poverty meets the cheat* with a group of children who live on the streets. The play is about their situation and vulnerability to exploitation and sexual abuse, and is performed for other street children and for children in villages, to increase awareness of the risks faced by children on the streets. Friends also conducts awareness-raising among street children, especially boys, about drug abuse, and outreach work to identify children newly arrived on the streets and explain about the risks of sexual exploitation, including HIV infection.
– *Poverty meets the cheat, 2002. Mith Samlanh/Friends and members of the development group for Building Blocks: Asia*

In Thailand, street children themselves have been involved in developing posters, leaflets and stickers and distributing these in tourist spots, as part of the campaign to stop tourists from buying sexual services from children.
– *Member of the development group for Building Blocks: Asia*

In Sri Lanka, an NGO worked with children to develop activities to reduce their vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation by families, employers and tourists. They used street theatre to raise community awareness of the risks they face, including developing a play to highlight the role of alcohol in sexual abuse by fathers. Working together allowed these children to have a voice and to influence community attitudes. Support was provided to establish children's clubs, offering a safe place for discussing their problems and experiences. Realising that others share the same difficulties helped the children to feel less isolated.
– *Save the Children UK, 1996. Kids for hire: a child's right to protection from commercial sexual exploitation*

- Involve children themselves in developing policies and programmes to protect children and guarantee their rights, and in developing strategies to reduce their vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation.
- Help children to give each other peer support. Possible actions include:
 - Establish support groups, clubs and drop-in centres where children can meet.
 - Provide space where children can talk to their friends and share ideas about how to solve problems.
 - Work with young people themselves to link children with counselling and other services; for example, older street children can advise new arrivals about where to seek help.



Outreach workers can provide education as well as mobile health services

- Support children's access to general health services as well as to sexual health services providing family planning, antenatal care, counselling, condoms, diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases. Possible actions include:
 - Train and sensitise health workers to provide child-friendly and youth-friendly health services.
 - Run mobile and outreach clinics.
 - Encourage health centres to offer special sessions for street and working children, with opening hours that are convenient for the children.
- Provide comprehensive services that reduce children's vulnerability and address their priorities.

Principles & strategies

The Volunteers Group for Children's Development involves volunteer nurses, who provide basic health care for street children in Chiang Mai in Thailand.

Member of the development group for Building Blocks: Asia

Friends Mith Samlanh has developed a range of activities in response to needs expressed by street children. It provides children with a safe place to stay, runs a drop-in centre that provides counselling and health services, helps children to stop using drugs, and offers training to develop skills; for example, in motorcycle repair.

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In Thailand, the experience of the Volunteers Group for Children's development shows that it is important to provide ongoing support for street children to help them establish a secure life. One young man needed assistance and encouragement at various times over many years to help him finish studying, keep a job and stay off drugs as he went through good and bad times. – *Member of the development group for Building Blocks: Asia*

In India, a YWCA project aims to reduce the vulnerability to HIV of girls aged 10–19 years who are working and living in the slums of Delhi. These girls have low literacy, and many of those involved in activities such as rag-picking are migrants from Bangladesh. They are vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation, and have little family support to protect them from abusive situations. The project empowers these girls through literacy, life skills and livelihood skills education, and reduces their risk of sexual and other exploitation through awareness-raising and counselling. Life skills education is conducted in small groups, using methods such as games, videos, discussion, role play, songs, stories and picture books. Group work also helps to promote peer education and support. In addition, the project provides one-to-one counselling, operates Safe Space Centres in the community, and offers health care and recreational activities. YWCA is also sensitising parents and the wider community, training community health workers, organising foster care and providing family counselling.

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Children can support each other

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International HIV/AIDS Alliance
Queensberry House
104-106 Queens Road
Brighton BN1 3XF
United Kingdom

Tel +44 1273 718 900
Fax +44 1273 718 901
Email: mail@aid alliance.org

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