



# FAITH AND POSITIVE **CHANGE** FOR CHILDREN

GLOBAL INITIATIVE ON  
SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

*Case Study*

**UNICEF Cambodia**

*Integrating Faith for Social  
and Behaviour Change into  
Pagoda Structures  
for a Systems Approach  
to Capacity Development*

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*A smiling student during a school break at Samdech Ov Samdech Mae Primary School  
in Prek Village, Sangkat Steung Treng, Steung Treng City, Steung Treng Province.*

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## OVERVIEW

- UNICEF Cambodia and the Ministry of Cults and Religion (MoCR) have a strong level of collaboration, which allows for widespread engagement with the Buddhist education system and pagodas across the country.
- Pagodas across the country represent places of safety for many children, but there is also evidence that violence can occur in these religious institutions, hence the need for a nuanced understanding of child protection in pagodas.
- As an outcome of collaboration with the General Inspectorate of National Buddhist Education, which is part of the Ministry, it is now compulsory for monks to learn about child protection in their training. National regulation has been adopted for Child Protection Policies to be instituted in pagodas across the country, along with training of monks in how to implement these policies.
- In addition to the child protection curriculum, UNICEF Cambodia has begun the production of Social and Behaviour Change resources to stimulate dialogue around reducing violence against children in the community.
- There has also been the production of a child protection resource - a cartoon about a young monk who experiences violence at home called Novice Sokha - that can be used by monks to support their dissemination of information about reducing violence against children in the community.



# BACKGROUND

Religion features prominently in the lives of people throughout Cambodia. The predominant religion in Cambodia is Buddhism, with over 90%<sup>1</sup>, followed by Islam, Christianity, and other religious practices. Religious leaders are a respected voice in society and considered a trusted source of cultural tradition, respect, and morality and people consequently adhere to religious leaders in a manner not seen with others. Religion is also central to the Cambodian education sector - Buddhism has its own education system consisting of 831 schools with 32,533 students.<sup>2</sup>

The population profile of Cambodia is one of the youngest in Southeast Asia. Cambodia has a total population of 16.1 million of which 5.9 million (37%) are children (0–17 years). The child population comprises 1.8 million in the age group 0–4 years, 1.7 million in the age group 5–9 years and 2.5 million adolescents aged 10–17 years. The child population has recently levelled out after several decades of growth (except for the sharp drop in the early 1980s primarily due to the war and genocide). The youth population – 15–24 years, according to the United Nations' definition – comprised approximately 20.6% of the total population in 2016. This young, dynamic, and highly mobile population is poised to enter the workforce and can be a major contributor to economic growth under the right circumstances. There is therefore compelling evidence of a demographic dividend.<sup>3</sup>

Economic growth has reduced the monetary poverty rate in Cambodia significantly in recent years, from 47.8% in 2007 to 13.5% in 2014. Many Cambodians remain highly vulnerable due to a high concentration of the population living only slightly above the poverty line.<sup>4</sup>

The wellbeing of children in Cambodia is challenged from many angles. According to the Multidimensional and Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA), nearly half of Cambodian children are multidimensionally poor, being simultaneously deprived in at least three out of 5–6 dimensions. Fulfilment of rights in each aspect is the key condition for reaching full potential for human development, which in turn contributes to sustainable economic growth. Reduction of multidimensional child poverty is therefore critically important for Cambodian development.

In 2013 the government undertook a Cambodia Violence against Children Survey (CVACS)<sup>5</sup>, supported by UNICEF. The study revealed several findings revealing the challenging situation of children in the country, including that the use of corporal punishment for disciplining children at home or school is a social norm. However corporal punishment is only one aspect of physical violence practices, and over 50% of the children participating in the study had experienced at least one form of violence before reaching the age of 18. The study also found that parents and caregivers have limited knowledge on positive discipline and that parents, caregivers, and other adult family members and teachers are in fact the most common perpetrators of childhood physical violence. Additionally, sexual abuse is widespread – approximately 5% to 6% of males and females reported at least one experience of childhood sexual abuse before age 18. Neighbours, family members, friends, and dating partners were commonly implicated as perpetrators of childhood sexual abuse incidents. Some had experienced abuse within pagodas (5.7% of female respondents who experience abuse, 0% of male respondents), but household settings were by far the most common (42.9% females, and 39.8% males). The research identified that “in nearly all districts, local pagodas, or Wats, were identified as suitable venues for the workshops and focus group discussions as participants and their parents had a high degree of trust in monks and their places of worship in general.”<sup>6</sup>

UNICEF and the Cambodian National Council for Children conducted a study on the Impact of Migration on Children<sup>7</sup> in April 2017. Findings indicated that 82% of children are left with grandparents (usually a grandmother) when the parents migrate. In some cases, however, parents have reported placing their children in institutions or in local pagodas, which are perceived as safe places. In 2016, around 16,500 children were living in 406 residential care institutions across the country. 79 percent of 13–17 year-old children in residential care homes have at least one living parent<sup>8</sup>. Buddhist pagodas are a strong existing faith-led institutionalized mechanism for community engagement on social services including health and education and are trusted and utilized by Cambodians for child-related needs. Some of the larger

1 Wat Sagkahak Komar Policy, the Ministry of Cults and Religion, 2018.

2 Statistic as of June 2014 by the Ministry of Cults and Religion.

3 “A Statistical Profile of Child Protection in Cambodia.” UNICEF Cambodia. <https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/reports/statistical-profile-child-protection-cambodia>.

4 “Overview.” World Bank, [www.worldbank.org/en/country/cambodia/overview](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cambodia/overview).

5 “Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children 2017–2021.” UNICEF Cambodia, n.d. <https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/reports/action-plan-prevent-and-respond-violence-against-children-2017-2021>.

6 Ibid., 202.

7 Creamer, Olga, Mia Jordanwood, and Setka Sao. “Executive Summary Study on The Impact of Migration On Children.” UNICEF Cambodia, May 2017. <https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/reports/executive-summary-study-impact-migration-children>.

8 “A Statistical Profile of Child Protection in Cambodia.” UNICEF Cambodia. <https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/reports/statistical-profile-child-protection-cambodia>.

pagodas even serve as an alternative to the government education system for extremely poor families. Cambodia has nearly 4,872 pagodas with almost 69,199 monks<sup>9</sup>, of which approximately 50% are children.

Television remains the main channel that reaches the highest number of people, but communication technology is rapidly on the uptake among Cambodian adolescents. Television remains the predominant media with 84 percent of households equipped with a TV set at home. In terms of viewership among Cambodian adolescents, 72 percent reported access to television in their household and only 8 percent had no access to a TV in their home or neighborhood.<sup>10</sup> Mobile access in Cambodia is on the rise, with four out of five adolescents now owning or accessing a phone and one out of five Cambodian adolescents now owning a smartphone. Adolescents using the Internet primarily connect via their smartphone (91 percent of Internet users connect with a smartphone)<sup>11</sup>. Almost half of Cambodians (48%) claim to have accessed the Internet or Facebook, and five of every six respondents in this group have their own Facebook accounts. In 2016 Internet/Facebook became the most important channel through which Cambodians access information (30%) — surpassing TV (29%) and almost doubling radio (15%) — and it is expected to continue gaining market share yearly.<sup>12</sup>

Buddhism has multi-media interventions/channels/platforms that have been used to promote behaviour and social change with faith-based organizations (FBOs) (e.g. edu-tainment programmes); debate and call-in programmes through mainstream radio and TV; community radio; participatory video; mobile phones etc. The programme on “Buddhism and society”, a programme of the Ministry of Cults and Religion (MoCR), contributes to harmonizing Cambodia society through promoting the understating on Buddhism Dharma links to social development. The programme engaged key Buddhist monks to discuss different Dharma reflecting Cambodia society. The programme aired on 22 TV and Radio stations at different times.

## What is the central intersection of child wellbeing and religion that requires a C4D approach?

Violence is widespread in childhood, with over half of all children in Cambodia experiencing at least one form of violence before the age of 18.<sup>13</sup> Violence against children in the home tends to be deeply rooted in social norms and traditions, and the most common perpetrators of physical violence are parents followed by teachers. Corporal punishment is practiced with the belief that children will only learn through punishment. While children are commonly exposed to violence at home, at school, and in the community, victims generally do not disclose abuse. Additionally, children learn from experience, meaning at a young age they learn to use violence as a way to negotiate differences. Parents and families find it difficult to change their behaviour when the norms and behaviours that prevail in their wider communities remain unchanged. Pagodas and monks are highly trusted spaces and individuals within communities. There remains some danger for children with pagodas, but they are mostly regarded as a safe place. There is a need for change in both internal capacity to increase child protection knowledge within pagodas for monks, as well as within the broader communities for parents, caregivers, and other community members. Monks can reach out to the broader communities because of the positions of trust and authority that they hold.

9 Wat Sagkahak Komar Policy, the Ministry of Cults and Religion, 2018.

10 Media Habits and Information Sources of Youth in Cambodia. [www.undp.org/content/dam/cambodia/docs/DemoGov/Media%20Habits%20and%20Information%20Sources%20of%20Youth%20in%20Cambodia.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/cambodia/docs/DemoGov/Media%20Habits%20and%20Information%20Sources%20of%20Youth%20in%20Cambodia.pdf).

11 2017 Media Index, Understanding the Communication Touchpoint in Cambodia, Indochina Research, June 2017.

12 Phong, Kimchhoy, Lihol Srou, and Javier Solá. “Mobile phones and internet use in Cambodia 2016.” The Asia Foundation (<https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Mobile-Phones-and-Internet-Use-in-Cambodia-2016.pdf>) (2016).

13 Barron, Laignee, and Sen David. “Child Abuse Rampant in Cambodia: Report.” Ucanews.com, 23 Oct. 2014, [www.ucanews.com/news/child-abuse-rampant-in-cambodia-report/72235](http://www.ucanews.com/news/child-abuse-rampant-in-cambodia-report/72235).

# C4D OUTCOMES

## UNICEF's Global C4D Outcomes

**Outcome 1: Increasing Knowledge and Demand for Services**

**Outcome 2: Improving Caregiving Practices**

**Outcome 3: Addressing Social Norms, Attitudes and Public Opinions**

**Outcome 4: Improving Community Engagement and Social Mobilization in Humanitarian and Development Settings**

The intended outcome of UNICEF Cambodia's child protection programme is that **by 2023, girls and boys, including adolescents, living with families and outside of family care, are increasingly free from violence and exploitation whether in homes, schools, communities and institutions, including during humanitarian situations.** The programme output is that parents, teachers, religious leaders, communities and adolescents have enhanced knowledge, skills and attitudes to protect girls and boys from violence and exploitation through the scale up of Positive Discipline, Positive Parenting and Cambodia PROTECT child protection programmes. Regarding C4D with religious leaders and faith-based organizations in Cambodia, the following outcomes are particularly targeted:

## Individual/family level

- Girls and boys including adolescents, living with families and outside of family care, are increasingly free from the threat of violence and exploitation in their homes, in their schools, in their communities and in institutions, including during humanitarian situations.
- Individual monks, children, and adults identify safe places and engage in non-violence with peers.
- Parents and caregivers increase their knowledge and adopt positive behaviour that protects children from violence.

## Interpersonal/community level

- Communities provide enabling environment support to protect children from violence and support vulnerable families to protect children or to access necessary services.

## Institutional/FBO level

- Effective implementation of the Pagoda Child Protection Training Curriculum for the monks to increase awareness in the community as well as create a system for integrating the concept of non-violence against children and unnecessary family separation in religious schools.
- Buddhist monks in pagodas have increased awareness of violence against children, adopt positive parenting, practice non-violence with young monks, and children positively benefit from their engagement in pagodas.

## Policy/system level

- Effective implementation of the Pagoda Child Safeguarding policy.
- Effective implementation of the Pagoda Child Protection Code of Conduct.

## C4D STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES

Under UNICEF Cambodia's 2019-2023 programme, as agreed by the government, the UNICEF Child Protection and C4D teams have continued to work closely with the Ministry of Cults and Religion (MoCR), religious leaders, and other stakeholders, to promote the role of religious leaders in protecting children vulnerable to and exposed to violence and those separated from their family, or at risk of separation.

### Target groups

Buddhist monks are the focus of communication around promoting child protection systems from the angle of religion, based on the unique views of community members through religious practice and tradition. The life-cycle focus of the programme focuses specifically on adolescent monks aged 10-19, Buddhist monks in pagodas countrywide, and adults, parents residing in areas surrounding the pagodas.

### Partnerships

UNICEF Cambodia Country Office has a well-established partnership with the MoCR, which coordinates with all religions in the country. The structure of Buddhism in Cambodia means that Buddhist education throughout the country is organized through the General Inspectorate of National Buddhist Education, which is part of MoCR. Since 2007, through the Buddhism Leadership Initiative (BLI), UNICEF has assisted the MoCR to support Buddhist monks in protecting children and their families who were affected by HIV and AIDS.<sup>14</sup> This was primarily done through training to promote the role of faith leaders in reducing stigma and discrimination among people living with HIV/AIDS. A BLI evaluation 2008-2012 recommended capitalizing on the opportunity to increase monks' knowledge of child protection, as well as increasing the scope for enhancing understanding of serious child rights violations at the senior level, as well as in pagodas.

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*We got the different religious leaders to work together and establish the mechanism on how to protect the children. Because the government works together with different religions who work closely with the children on the ground... The government said to UNICEF in Cambodia that they will support the way we work, the mechanism that we established. Because the Ministry has an agreement with UNICEF, and we make sure we have the same standpoint and the same voice, we are able to work for the success together. The coordination, we start small and then we expand further, not only Buddhism but also with other religions in Cambodia. And we appreciate and need the support from UNICEF, both technical and financial support.*

*Translation from His Excellency Seng Somony, Secretary of State, Ministry of Cults and Religion, Cambodia.<sup>15</sup>*

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In 2013, the partnership with BLI was expanded to focus on violence against children and the benefit of supporting children in families. The aim is to support religious leaders, with their moral authority, to become advocates for children and to support changing social norms and behaviours that harm children. In 2014 and 2015, in collaboration with the MoCR, UNICEF supported inter-faith consultation workshops on child protection, development of information materials, and Cambodia's participation in the World Day of Prayer and Actions for Children (DPAC) laying the groundwork for increased action. In order to gain buy-in from the relevant authorities, the partnership has also included collaboration with the Buddhist sangha (Council) and Buddhist scholars.

The Country Programme (2016 – 2018) came to an end and the new country programme 2019-2023 continuing the previous country programme was signed and approved by the Royal Government of Cambodia in 2018. The jointly set goals on Child Protection were embedded within both UNICEF Country Programmes and in addition the Child Protection Programme facilitated the development of more detailed rolling out of annual workplans with their direct counterparts at the Ministry of Cults and Religion.

<sup>14</sup> “Buddhist Monks Trained to Support Cambodian Families Affected by HIV/AIDS.” UNICEF, June 6, 2007. [https://www.unicef.org/aids/cambodia\\_39935.html](https://www.unicef.org/aids/cambodia_39935.html).

<sup>15</sup> JLI Interview with UNICEF Cambodia Country Office Representatives. Bangkok, Thailand, July 9, 2018.



UNICEF Cambodia has also taken a lead in mobilizing the civil society organizations working with religious leaders to work together with the MoCR to convene joint interfaith workshops as well as to jointly celebrate the world Day of Prayer and Action for Children (DPAC) annually. Other organizations with which UNICEF Cambodia partners are the Buddhist Council, World Vision Cambodia, Danmission, Child Rights Coalition Cambodia (CRC-Cambodia), and the Child and Youth Education Organization (CYEO).

## Strategies and Activities

A key proposal from a 2015 workshop held in conjunction with the MoCR, was the development of a Child Protection Programme for religious settings (pagodas, mosques, and churches). As a result of this recommendation, UNICEF begun programming with a focus on Buddhist pagodas and plans to roll out programming to other major religions in Cambodia based on the lessons learned. The programme design takes into consideration the structures, responsibilities, and activities of the pagodas, as well as those of the MoCR and the Sangkanayika (Sangka Council) under whose leadership they function. In June 2018, the Pagoda child safeguarding policy along with the Child protection pagoda programme was endorsed and launched under the presidency of the Minister of Cults and Religion. UNICEF Cambodia is supporting the MoCR to roll out the implementation of the programme countrywide for the five years programme (2019-2023).

## Formative Studies

Several studies have been conducted with support from UNICEF Cambodia. The first, executed in 2017, was the Study on Alternative Care: Community Practices for Children in Cambodia, including Pagoda-based Care (2017). The findings of the study were used in advocacy with the government with focus on highlighting the costs of non-action in relation to violence (i.e. 168 million/ annum) and this led to several ministries putting into writing their commitment to invest in reducing violence against children.

To ensure that capacity development for FBOs is based on behavioural evidence, UNICEF Cambodia also facilitated a Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) survey of the religious leaders in Cambodia in 2015. The report was not published but was used to design the capacity building of religious leaders. A key finding from the study on **knowledge on violence against children** indicated that while 85 percent of respondents had received training on violence against children, their knowledge of how to address violence against children was very limited. Only one-third of total respondents perceived children as being persons under 18 years

old and the same proportion defined physical violence correctly. With respect to **attitudes and practices on violence against children**, while approximately one-third responded that they do not support violence of any kind, whether serious or light, half of all respondents were of the opinion that light punishment does not lead to injury to children. The study also informed the **knowledge on institutional care** with more than half of all respondents reporting of not having previously received training on community based care and forced family separation. Approximately 80% of participants acknowledged to perceive orphanage centre as a place for orphans, poor children and children with disability and 38 per cent believe that institutional care provides important assistance to children in their communities. These findings helped to inform the development of training material for faith-based leaders.

## Awareness-raising and protection measures in the pagoda

**Pagoda Child Protection Programme or Wat Sangkahak Komar:** This initiative is the cornerstone of UNICEF Cambodia's C4D for Child Protection and aims to create a protective environment by mobilizing Buddhist leaders to take concrete actions towards changing social norms, as well as to act as advocates on children's issues including the establishment of safe places for children within religious settings. The programme is therefore designed to:

1. Promote both the role of Buddhist monks in providing insights and moral support to influence the shifting of social norms.
2. Foster a more caring family environment through strengthening prevention and response to violence against children in pagodas and in the communities.
3. Create a protective environment for children through supporting them in families.

### Policy, Planning and Roll out of the initiative

The programme was developed following lengthy and in-depth consultations with a range of senior Buddhist leaders, monks, academics, adolescents and youth, and MoCR representatives that took place in October 2017 and May 2018. The Pagoda Child Protection Programme was incorporated within the government's Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence against Children 2017-2021. Workshops to disseminate the action plan are conducted at national and sub-national levels, with 16 government ministerial lines implementing the plan.

Three teams were established by the Ministry to support the programme: the management team, the coordination team and the national trainer team, which was trained by specialists from UNICEF. Focal points were also identified and trained at the provincial and district level to be the custodians of the programme.

The programme implementation was rolled out in 27 pagodas in 5 UNICEF target provinces (Phnom Penh, Kandal, Prah Sihanouk, Siem Reap, and Battambang) reaching 2,058 Buddhist monks (1,126 child monks) and 3,533 people (3,302 children) by December 2018. Over five- years (2019-2023), the programme will be scaled to 4,500 pagodas countrywide.

### Establishing Accountability for Upholding Child Rights

The Child Safeguarding Policy is developed based on global best practices and takes into account the specific Buddhist principles and organizational structures in Cambodia. In each pagoda, the Head Monk is responsible for ensuring that all persons residing in or liaising with the pagoda understand what constitutes child abuse and violence against children and that it is prohibited within the compound. They will also inform them of the Pagoda Safeguarding Policy and ensure that all adult residents (including monks, nuns, novices and those in care) and adult non-residents (including volunteers and community members) understand and sign the Code of Conduct. In alignment with the regulation, all Pagodas are required to reassign a child-safeguarding focal point. A Reporting Framework has also been developed to guide the reporting and referral actions required in response to suspected or reported cases of violence and abuse of children in the pagoda.

### Awareness Raising and Recognition of Exemplary Practice

The Head Monk, monks, and laypersons (e.g. Achar and Donjis) will also contribute to increased awareness and understanding of violence against children and its consequences for their development in the context of their regular activities such as English lessons, meditation sessions, and religious ceremonies at the pagoda.

In order to encourage implementation and to recognize the efforts and progress made to make pagodas safer for children, a Wat Sangkahak Komar Certificate and Award Medal has been established. The Certificate and Medal are awarded to individual monks who have proven to be role models, and to pagodas that demonstrate their commitment and concrete actions to improving the protection of children in their pagoda and to mobilizing communities surrounding the pagoda to create a protective environment for children. An official Wat Sangkahak Komar Certificate Committee at national and provincial level is being established by the MoCR and the Supreme Patriarch with the task to monitor, evaluate and approve awarding of the Certificate and Medal.

### Training Resource Materials

A handbook,<sup>16</sup> titled “Novice Sokha,” has been developed as a tool to conduct interactive awareness raising in pagodas and Buddhist schools, and has two key communication

messages: “Violence against women is unacceptable” and “Children see, children do.” This booklet explains the role of the pagoda and the monks who influence children’s lives and families. It also shows the contribution of Buddhism in building a community without violence. The booklet, which is compact and easily portable, has been designed to allow monks to carry with them when they are in the communities. The content has been converted into an animated video, which is used as an additional tool to enhance the capacities of Cambodian monks to contribute to the prevention and response to violence against children. The material is accessible from the MoCR website and is also for use in the National Buddhist graduate education academy programme.

### Awareness-raising in schools

With UNICEF’s support, the MoCR has incorporated child protection into the education system of Buddhism in Cambodia, making it mandatory for Buddhist graduated school students to learn about “Child Protection” as part of their curriculum<sup>17</sup> and take part in a final exam at the end of the calendar year. To date, 60 university professors have been trained in conducting courses on the material. Training on child protection was also provided to the technical working groups of the committee responsible for developing the textbook for the Buddhist education programme.

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*“Buddhist education in Cambodia is divided into two kinds: the first one formal, and second one informal education. Through the formal education, we produce the roadmap for the teacher or the student, to provide the knowledge to the teacher and student. We set like a roadmap in the curriculum. And then we form one class or subject to write this book that Buddhists respond to again, child violation. This is like preparation for teaching of the teacher. ... When the Buddhist monk studies, they gain the knowledge. When they gain the knowledge, they go to the village through Dharma preaching. This is all the informal education, and every day, at least one or two monks can be invited to preach at the Buddhist ceremony. In all the villages, every village. In Cambodia, [there are] more than five thousand pagoda... So, they try to respond to the use of child violation through the role of the monk, the role of the Pagoda, in cooperation with UNICEF.”*

*Most Ven. Dr Sok Bunthoeun, Director of the Department of Buddhist Undergraduate and Post-graduate Education of the General Inspectorate of National Buddhist Education.*

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16 “Novice Sokha.” Ministry of Cults and Religion and UNICEF Cambodia, 2016. <https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/reports/novice-sokha>.

17 “Buddhism Responses to Violence Against Children.” UNICEF Cambodia. Ministry of Cults and Religion, October 2017. <https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/reports/buddhism-responses-violence-against-children>.

## Advocacy Through Annual Interfaith Events

### Annual Day of Prayer and Actions for Children (DPAC)

With UNICEF support, about 700 religious leaders from Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam have met every year since 2014 to conduct an interfaith workshop that aims to align their efforts around protecting children, as well as participate in the celebration of DPAC. In 2015, the workshop involved the Prime Minister of Cambodia in a historical celebration of the DPAC in Phnom Penh on 14 December 2015. Across the country, DPAC celebrations reached more than 600,000 religious leaders and their followers (of whom 253,401 are boys and girls).

### 16 Day Campaign to end violence against women and girls

UNICEF supports the Adolescent and Youth Reference Group (AYRG) to engage in a 16-day Campaign from 25 Nov-10 December annually. In 2017, 800 students from public schools, as well as Islamic and Buddhist schools, were reached with messages around preventing violence against children. Monks are also members of AYRG, and young Buddhist monks have been actively engaged in the campaign.

## Awareness-raising in communities

Monks and other religious leaders use sermons, prayers, and spiritual guidance using Buddhist precepts and analogies to encourage followers to reflect on the issue of violence against children. They also use religious ceremonies and events that they preside over as a platform to educate their respective communities about forms of violence and its consequences for children and society. They then work to mobilize the community to create a protective environment for children and to appropriately support children in families and visit families in times of crisis to provide advice and moral guidance as well as link them with the relevant social services.



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*[We can] mobilize the community. We take care especially of parents, some parents do not understand how to take care of their children so we build the capacity for them to take care of their children, through the dharma delivery, the sermon preaching, we try to building capacity for the parent... Buddhism in Cambodia we can mobilize community especially the parent and the community as well.*

*Most Ven. Dr Sok Bunthoeun, Director of the Department of Buddhist Undergraduate and Post-graduate Education of the General Inspectorate of National Buddhist Education.*

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Monks and other religious leaders are also instrumental in several critical activities executed in conjunction with the Commune Committee for Women and Children (CCWC), including conducting mapping of the risks to children in the community; planning community events to address violence against children and the benefits of supporting children in families; and on campaigns such as birth registration, equal rights for children with disabilities, and other issues relevant to child protection.

## Faith Media Engagement

Using media outreach, a Buddhist Dharma programme also airs on 22 TV and radio stations at different times. This is seen to be a key gateway for future communications for development as it reaches a large number of people. The Cambodia PROTECT communication strategy produces communication material for mass media, such as the Buddhist Dharma programme.

@UNICEF Cambodia/2019/Sea Sokhon:  
Venerable Chheang Choukly, 17 years old, sitting next to his monk master Venerable Nhem Vuthy, 52 years old, who is a Core Trainer and the Child Safeguard Focal Points of Wat Kamsan.

## PROGRESS AND RESULTS

While the programme is still in its early stages of implementation and results are, as yet, forthcoming, UNICEF Cambodia has initiated a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system to assess the programme's progress and results moving forward. The M&E plan includes specific roles and responsibilities at national and subnational levels.

Key issues to be monitored and evaluated include:

- Quality of training conducted by the National Training Team and by district actors.
- Progress in implementing the Pagoda Child Safeguarding Policy, including all components (e.g. appointment of a Child Safeguarding Focal Point; awareness of the Policy by both adults and children; signed Code of Conduct by all adults; basic understanding of types of violence and abuse of children and of how to report).
- Implementation of community awareness activities and involvement of CCWCs.
- Record-keeping of children residing in the pagoda and those at risk in communities.

To achieve this, the following indicators have been established:

- Number of monks trained on child protection.
- Number of pagodas applying positive discipline and positive parenting practices.
- Number of pagodas with signatures of all adults on the Code of Conduct.
- Number of pagodas where the majority of residents and persons liaising with the pagoda know about the Pagoda Child Safeguarding Policy and how to report suspected cases of abuse, including young novices.
- Number of pagodas with a functioning reporting and referral system on child protection, demonstrated by the number of incident reports.
- Number of actions taken by monks and laypersons (Achar and Donjis) in communities to promote violence prevention and to support children in families.
- Number of Monks recognized as Role Models and pagodas awarded the Wat Sangkahak Komar Certificate.

Monitoring and Evaluation of the Programme is to be the responsibility of a number of actors, most notably the MoCR at district, provincial, and national levels. The role of the Department of Buddhist Affairs of the MoCR is to help to guide and support the process of report gathering and M&E. UNICEF staff is to be responsible for coordinating monitoring visits with MoCR staff and the Monk Council Secretariat, which will monitor all aspects of programme implementation, serve as a communication liaison between MoCR and UNICEF, and work closely with the Sangkaikay Council Secretariat. The MoCR's primary responsibility is to report progress on implementation of the Pagoda Child Protection Programme to the government, with a copy to Sagnkanikaya Council and UNICEF.

The work towards formative research has been particularly successful as it has proven the size of the issue and the urgent need to tackle child protection and child rights, including the CVACs report and the "Economic burden and health consequences of violence against children in Cambodia" report.<sup>18</sup>

The programmes have also proved to be successful in their promotion of increased collaboration, internally within UNICEF as communications and education specialists have come together to provide technical support, and then externally with the MoCR and its links throughout Cambodia to pagodas.

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*The Buddhist monks traditionally have the role of educating the people, educating the children, they have this school in the pagodas to stay together and provide education. So they have the role, they have the tradition, we just equip them with more knowledge and then they can go on with that successfully and very quickly.*

*Translation from His Excellency Seng Somony, Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Cults and Religion, Cambodia*

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<sup>18</sup> "The Economic Burden of the Health Consequences of Violence Against Children in Cambodia." Government Commitment to End Violence Against Children Cambodia, 2015. [http://www.togetherforgirls.org/wp-content/uploads/CVAC\\_Cambodia-Full-Report\\_EN.pdf](http://www.togetherforgirls.org/wp-content/uploads/CVAC_Cambodia-Full-Report_EN.pdf).



## Challenges

Violence against children is not recognised as an issue in pagoda settings when evidence has shown that it occurs, even if at a lesser rate than in other settings. Moreover, religious leaders are not always willing to change traditional forms of discipline (e.g. physical punishment) or participate in capacity building around child protection issues. It has taken time to advocate towards certain religious leaders that this is an important issue for consideration and to be part of their additional training.

One issue is that of attrition and the need to engage with new monks, sustain resources for the initiative, and also provide for those pagodas that do not have a school attached but still need the associated materials linked to the Child Protection Programme. However, by working through the government and aligned Buddhist structures there is the hope of strong sustainability for this new programme as it is now mandatory for all those going through Buddhist education to learn about child protection, which will provide a basis of knowledge for the next generation.



## CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The cooperation between UNICEF and the Ministry of Cults and Religion has allowed for a widespread engagement with Buddhist education systems and pagodas across the country. Initial success in engaging with religious leaders on HIV/AIDS has now led to systematic engagement on child protection. The ability to communicate directly to religious leaders through Buddhist education and the pagoda system means that a large number can be reached. Tools to help monks then spread this knowledge and practices to the wider community have also been developed, such as the animated story of Novice Sokha and his quest to end violence in the household, having experienced it as a child, which now exists in a cartoon booklet and as an animated video.

The results from various studies – including the study on the prevalence of violence against children in Cambodia – are being used as an evidence base to both advocate for attention towards child protection as well as to inform the design of C4D strategies. The findings of studies convinced the government to engage and religious leaders are increasingly convinced. Given some religious leaders' unwillingness to acknowledge violence against children as an issue and to change their practices, (i.e. corporal punishment), strategies to mitigate these challenges have been developed and include consultations, presentations of examples from other religious settings, discussions of cases reported in Cambodia media, and discussions to unpack the issues. As incorporating the subject of child protection into Buddhist graduate programmes has been successful thus far, the country office will continue to support MoCR's efforts to incorporate the child protection subject into the primary and secondary programmes of the Buddhist Education programme.

### Lessons learned

- Embedding commitments on Faith engagement within UNICEF Country programmes is an important way to move beyond ad hoc, project mode faith-based activities to a longer term more strategic and at scale approach to partnership.
- The design of FBO engagement within established structures must take into consideration the roles, responsibilities, and activities of the government and religious institutions under whose leadership they function. At the same time capacity development content, informed by evidence is where UNICEF can leverage great influence over these very structures.
- In countries with highly structured religions, the institutionalisation of best practices for child wellbeing (such as child protection training in seminaries) can ensure not only widespread dissemination of messages to religious leaders but a structural change that will promote overall shifts in practice for the entirety of the next generation of religious leaders.
- In countries with religious institutions that are either embedded in or affiliated with government structures, the governance structure can support the systematic roll out of policies, codes of conduct and capacity development that can facilitate a coordinated and sustainable approach towards influencing the change in attitudes, norms and practices.
- Collaboration with other partners focusing on inter-faith work is important for replication and scaling up of the faith engagement strategies. In Cambodia this includes: the Buddhist Council, World Vision Cambodia, Danmission, Child Rights Coalition Cambodia (CRC-Cambodia), and the Child and Youth Education Organization (CYEO).

## Strategies for the future include

- Continued strong monitoring and evaluation is needed to learn the impact of these recent projects with the rollout of the pagoda programme. It will be interesting to learn more about the cascading effect of trained trainers and the education programme bringing child protection to all new monks. The opportunity for sustainability is strong because of the existing governance structures, but monitoring and evaluation will help demonstrate if there is a substantial impact.
- There are also more opportunities open for engaging with other religions and their structures in the country, as well as further expanding opportunities in the realms of television, radio, and other media.

## Acknowledgements

Commissioned and directed by UNICEF Communication for Development Section and Civil Society Partnerships Unit and prepared by Dr. Olivia Wilkinson, Stacy Nam, and Maya Casagrande of the Joint Learning Initiative for Faith and Local Communities (JLI).

UNICEF Communication for Development Section (C4D) in the Programme Division, Civil Society Partnerships Unit (CSP) in the Division of Communication, the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) and Religions for Peace (RfP) initiated a partnership in 2018 called Faith and Positive Change for Children: Global Initiative on Social and Behaviour Change. The partnership aims to understand how to more systematically engage with faith actors to enhance child wellbeing across all areas of UNICEF's work and in all of UNICEF's programme countries. We gratefully acknowledge the support from Kerida McDonald (Senior Advisor, UNICEF Communication for Development), Caterina Tino (Communication Specialist, UNICEF Civil Society Partnerships), and the UNICEF Regional and Country Office representatives as well as faith partners for their input to the case studies.



