



# PROMOTING AND PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN: A FORMATIVE EVALUATION OF UNICEF'S CHILD PROTECTION PROGRAMME IN CAMBODIA

SEPTEMBER 2018

## Executive Summary

This independent, formative evaluation was commissioned by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Cambodia in August 2017 in order to generate evidence on its 2016-2018 Child Protection Programme, which was designed to achieve one primary outcome: *"By 2018, girls and boys vulnerable to and exposed to violence and those separated from their family, or at risk of separation, are increasingly protected by the institutional and legislative frameworks, quality services, and a supportive community environment."*

To achieve this outcome, UNICEF has taken a system-strengthening approach to child protection at three levels: national and sub-national institutions, service providers, as well as children, families and communities. A major focus of the Programme has been on safely reintegrating 30 per cent of children living in residential care institutions with their families or in family-type placements by the end of 2018. The evaluation was intended to help strengthen performance and accountability with respect to UNICEF's work with the Royal Government of Cambodia, national and sub-national institutions, provincial authorities, social service providers, commune councils, development partners, international and national non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, religious leaders, the media and other duty bearers. This evaluation also informed the development of Cambodia's new 2019-2023 Country Programme.

### The Child Protection Context in Cambodia

All children have the right to be protected. In Cambodia, the situation is serious, with many children experiencing harsh physical and emotional abuse and, in some cases, sexual assault. There are cases of trafficking, forced work, family separation, and unnecessary placement in residential care institutions. The impacts of this violence can lead to physical injury and emotional trauma and potentially to emotional and behavioural problems in adolescence and adulthood. Family separation is one of the leading child protection challenges and is caused by poverty and lack of knowledge of the negative consequences of placing children in institutional care. Children from broken families are a greater risk of living or working on the streets, where they face an even greater risk of violence, abuse and other negative outcomes. Despite these child protection issues, Cambodia's system is largely underfunded and understaffed, with heavy reliance on donor funding. Though there has been progress made, there is still more to be done to ensure the safety of all children in Cambodia.

## Objectives of the Evaluation

The evaluation was designed to consider the effectiveness, relevance, efficiency and sustainability of UNICEF's programme, and, in particular, to:

- Validate and reconstruct the theory of change of UNICEF's Child Protection Programme;
- Examine the results achieved, what worked well, what worked less well, how and why;
- Assess UNICEF's leadership and ability to leverage resources and partnerships towards strengthening the Government's child protection system at national and sub-national levels; and
- Examine the existing linkages between the Child Protection Programme and Social Governance and Inclusion, Inclusive Quality Education and Integrated Early Childhood Survival, Care and Development.

## Methodology

Evaluators applied a **theory-based approach**, which sought to determine whether, how, and why UNICEF's Child Protection Programme is (or is not) on track to achieve its vision for change. A **mixed-methodology** was adopted to gather rich, accurate and measurable data and to allow for triangulation.

Figure 1: Sample size

<b>Key Informant Interviews</b>	<b>In-depth (life history) Interviews</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 38 at national level</li><li>• 90 in intervention provinces</li><li>• 29 in comparison provinces</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 12 with children (8 girls, 4 boys)</li><li>• 10 with parents (9 women, 1 man)</li></ul>
<b>Focus Group Discussions</b>	<b>Survey</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 18 focus groups with community members</li><li>• 68 female participants (77 per cent)</li><li>• 20 male participants (23 per cent)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 143 children undergoing reintegration (77 girls, 66 boys)</li><li>• 73 carers (67 women, 6 men)</li></ul>

Data collection was focussed on the Programme's **five target provinces** (Phnom Penh, Kandal, Preah Sihanouk, Siem Reap and Battambang). In addition, **four comparable non-intervention provinces** (Kampong Thom, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Speu and Kampot) were included to illustrate how UNICEF's

support contributed to different aspects of child protection prevention and response.

## Evaluation Findings

### Relevance:

The evaluation findings demonstrate a **strong consensus amongst key stakeholders on the relevance of the Child Protection Programme's aims and design**. Taking a system-strengthening approach to child protection, focussed on developing the capacity of the national child protection system, was highly consistent with UNICEF's Global Strategic Plan, Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. It was also recognised by stakeholders as particularly important in the Cambodian context, given the many different players involved in child protection and, historically, the challenges of coordination between them.

Additionally, **the decision to focus the Programme in Cambodia on the reintegration of children out of institutional care and into family and community-based care was found to be particularly relevant** given the high numbers of children in (unsafe and unregulated) institutional care, and reliance on residential care institutions to meet child protection needs.

### Effectiveness:

Since 2016, UNICEF's Child Protection Programme has **successfully mobilised relevant government authorities to make actionable commitments** toward the development of a national child protection system, and the delivery of child protection response services for both at-risk and separated children.

For instance, **UNICEF has achieved significant buy-in and commitment from the Cambodian Government toward the goal of promoting family-based care for the thousands of children living in residential care institutions across Cambodia**, evidenced by a number of key policy achievements at the national level.

In general, **evaluation findings evidenced the protective benefits of the reintegration programme for promoting children's safety and wellbeing**. However, nearly **one in four (24 per cent)** of children surveyed for the evaluation said that they felt safer when they were living in the residential care institutions.

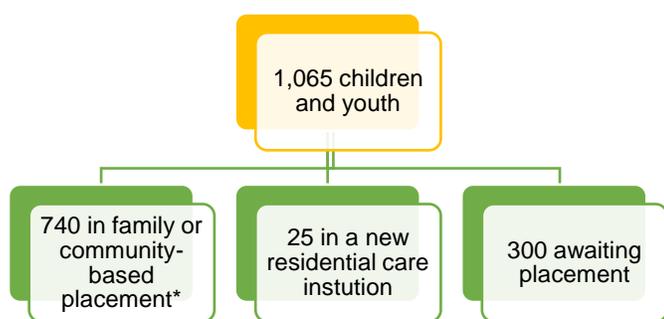
The evaluation **identified a number of weaknesses in the implementation of the reintegration programme**. For example:

- Social workers were unable to locate all children undergoing reintegration most likely because the families had moved or migrated since reunification;
  - Case file reviews revealed that reintegration assessments are very basic;
  - Decisions to reintegrate children often appeared to be driven by the availability and willingness of living parents or other family members to take a child rather than a comprehensive risk analysis and best interests assessment; and
  - Follow-up and support services to families and children to facilitate reintegration were found to be limited and there were no contingency plans for children whose placements broke down or failed.
- Government authorities were found not to be engaged in standardised case management of child protection cases; and
  - Identification and referral of child protection cases is often inadequate, including in cases where children are known to have been exposed to violence.

A major component of UNICEF's prevention programme has been the delivery of services through the Partnership Programme for the Protection of Children (3PC) to individual children and families identified as 'at risk' in target provinces, such as those in poverty, living on the street, out of school children, or families at risk of separation.

In addition to promoting reintegration, **UNICEF has provided significant input to the Government's plans to operationalise child protection services for children at-risk of or exposed to violence.**

**Figure 2: Children and youth undergoing reintegration out of institutional care between January 2016 and April 2018**



\*of the 740, 582 were under 18 years old

The Partnership Programme for the Protection of Children (3PC) **monitoring data on selected interventions suggests that prevention support has been effective in addressing underlying risk factors:** 78 per cent of family businesses that received livelihood support in 2016 were still open after a year of operation; and participants in alcohol support groups reported both reduced drinking (58 per cent high impact and 29 per cent medium impact) and reduced violence in their families (78 per cent high impact and 11 per cent medium impact) in an end of year survey (2017).

The Child Protection Programme has also addressed violence in schools through a Positive Discipline Programme in schools, known as **Positive Discipline and Effective Classroom Management**. This has been implemented in 409 primary schools with baseline and endline surveys showing that the programme has been effective and that there has been a **measurable drop in the levels of violence being used against children, contributing to a far safer community environment for children while at school.**

Evaluation findings reveal that **these plans have yet to translate into a coordinated child protection system**, which is capable of identifying and responding to child protection cases. Rather, the national child protection system (including both government social workers and NGOs) is predominantly focussed on reintegration of children from institutional care and delivery of basic prevention and response services.

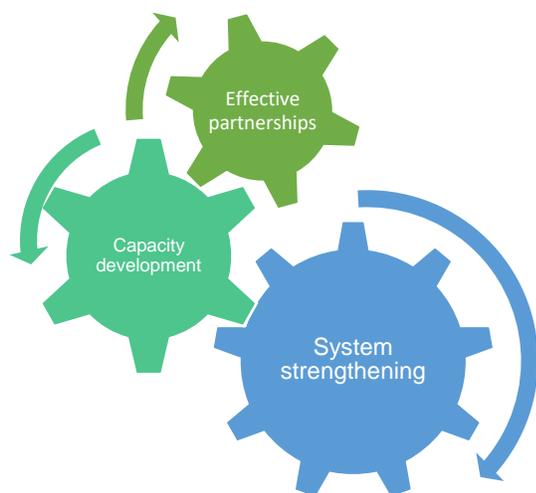
Many beneficiaries expressed appreciation for support provided and, in several cases, support appeared to have reduced the likelihood of violence and separation. In some cases, however, prevention support services were found to have little impact on beneficiaries' circumstances. **The types of support provided were often pre-formulated and had not been tailored to beneficiaries' particular needs.** Furthermore, and crucially, important forms of prevention support, such as social protection services or support to address a lack of free and accessible health and education services, were not provided.

- When a case is identified and receives a 'formal' child protection response, this is almost always provided by an NGO service provider. The nature of services delivered is variable, and whilst some positive child protection work is being done, few cases received an individualised response designed to mitigate risk;

## Efficiency:

Overall **decision-making about where to direct funds and invest money were found to be strategic and efficient**. Of particular note was the **efficient manner in which partnerships were mobilised** to support the safe reunification of children into family care and prevention of further family separation. UNICEF's placement of 31 fully funded and dedicated full-time social workers in provincial Departments of Social Affairs and NGOs has helped to bolster both morale and social work technical capacity. It has also promoted efficiency by allowing the more experienced social workers time to work on issues where they are most needed.

**Figure 3: Key features of UNICEF's Child Protection Programme as highlighted in the evaluation**



UNICEF's efforts to mobilise 'on-the-ground' capacity, through the use of the Commune Committees for Women and Children, were found to be highly efficient: these committees have close connections to communities and a mandate to support vulnerable children and families, placing them in an ideal position to provide assistance for ongoing monitoring and follow-up in reintegration cases and for other 'at-risk' groups of children.

## Sustainability:

**UNICEF's capacity building approach at national level, amongst service providers and practitioners and within communities, is conducive to the achievement of sustainable outcomes.** The evaluation identified areas where the programme had made meaningful contributions to capacity building within the child protection system, namely through supporting the development of social work capacity within the provincial Department of Social Affairs and

contributing to the establishment of basic case management. The programme's contributions are in the early stages, however, and significant work remains to be done to ensure that interventions lead to a comprehensive child protection system owned and implemented by government.



*Photo: A social worker helps a young boy who is in community-based care*

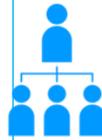
Evaluation findings suggest that **over-reliance on NGOs for the delivery of child protection services may constrain the sustainability of the programme in the long run**. Whilst it may be unrealistic for government to provide social work services in child protection cases in the short-term, it is important to establish a government-owned social work case management system that takes responsibility for basic child protection functions, with cases referred to NGOs for specialised services as necessary. As an interim measure, the provincial Departments of Social Affairs and district Offices of Social Affairs should work closely with NGO social workers, allowing NGOs to take on some of the social work tasks where they have the capacity to do so.

Finally, evaluation findings demonstrate that the sustainability of UNICEF's reintegration initiative is undermined by the lack of family support services and community-based alternative care services. **Cases where children are victims of violence, abuse or neglect rarely receive a child protection response until they reach crisis point, when, in the absence of alternatives, they tend to end up back in institutions (sometimes temporarily, but often not).** At present reintegration of children from institutional to family-based care is absorbing the bulk of the government's social work capacity leaving little capacity for meaningful child protection response work.

## Conclusions



The legislative framework remains incomplete. There is currently no comprehensive child protection law, or even secondary legislation, setting which body is responsible and accountable for the delivery of child protection services. The relatively new Juvenile Justice Law is also not fully implemented.



Effective institutional frameworks for child protection are also lacking. There is no delineation of which body has responsibility for which aspects of child protection or for referrals. In addition, there are no referral protocols. Further, there is insufficient clarity as to which level should intervene to protect a child.



It is not possible to say that there is currently a supportive environment for child protection. The lack of budget at commune level and the shortage of trained and skilled staff makes it exceedingly difficult to provide such an environment, even with the best efforts of the Commune Committees for Women and Children.



There is a lack of economic investment by the Government in child protection and an almost total reliance on NGOs to provide services. Without further investment, it is unlikely that the ongoing problem of institutionalisation of children can be addressed effectively, as this remains the major form of alternative care available.



Overall, there remains a lack of trained, skilled and experienced social workers in the government service to manage the complex child protection problems that arise, and an inadequate budget to meet the needs of children and families.



The reintegration of children with their families or into community-based alternative care is to be welcomed, but there are some important lessons to be learnt from the experience of children returned to family care who have not been able to successfully reintegrate.



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Photo: Child protection services seek to create a supportive community for all children in Cambodia

## Key Recommendations

**1. Legal framework:** UNICEF should prioritise legal and organisational reform, working with the Government to review Sub-Decree 34 (and continuing to work on Sub-Decree 54), and to develop either detailed working protocols or standard operating procedures for the delivery of child protection.

**2. Organisational framework for the delivery of child protection:** The Commune Committees for Women and Children should be the front-line service for child protection and should support children and families in need of other forms of family support. In the case of at-risk children, a referral should be made to the provincial Department of Social Affairs (or to the district Office of Social Affairs if social work capacity can be increased and improved), who should be responsible for all stages of the child protection response.

**3. Organisational framework for the Cambodian National Police:** It is recommended that crimes involving child abuse should be referred immediately to the Anti-Trafficking Police Unit, who will function as a specialist unit for child protection cases and who will refer any crimes involving child abuse to the provincial Department of Social Affairs (DoSVY) and district Office of Social Affairs (OSVY). When crimes involving domestic violence against women occur in households with children, a referral should be made to the Commune Committees for Women and Children, who will refer on to DoSVY/OSVY where child protection intervention is required.

**4. The Positive Discipline Programme:** The results of the Positive Discipline Programme are encouraging and it is recommended that this programme be continued into the next Country Programme, and be expanded to cover all provinces, if possible. It is also recommended that Level 1 (universal 'light' parenting support for positive parenting) of the positive parenting programme should be offered and delivered to parents and care givers at the same time as the positive discipline programme.

**5. Social work case management:** It is recommended that a social work case management system should be introduced as a matter of urgency, and that case files should be opened and kept by the body responsible for the child protection response, including for children being offered a service by an NGO. It is also recommended that UNICEF continue to support social work posts and advocate with Government for their employment, and a progressive increase in the numbers of social workers nationally.

**6. Reintegration:** While continuing with safe reintegration, the new Country Programme 2019-2023 should focus on building up family support services and the expansion and use of community-based, alternative care settings (especially foster care), with more rigorous monitoring in place. It is recommended that all children still resident in residential care institutions at the end of 2018 should be subject to a rapid assessment early in 2019, to determine whether reintegration is feasible.

**7. Training:** It is recommended that the district Office of Social Affairs' social workers receive more practice-based training and coaching, including training on family assessment and risk analysis. Training on recognising and identifying child abuse should be offered to the Commune Committees for Women and Children staff, and training is also needed for NGOs working with street children and for health and education professionals.

**8. Budget:** It is recommended that UNICEF use its influence and leverage with national and sub-national Government to set a dedicated budget for child protection over the next Country Programme.

**9. Planning:** It is recommended that UNICEF encourage the provincial Department of Social Affairs to engage with NGOs to draft a bi-annual Child Protection Services Plan. This should set out the needs of children in the province, the existing services capable of meeting those needs, the needs which remain unmet, and how the district Office of Social Affairs, NGOs and other bodies are planning to fill the gap in services highlighted in the report.

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FOR THE COMPLETE REPORT, PLEASE VISIT: [https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/results\\_for\\_children\\_25266.html](https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/results_for_children_25266.html)

