

CHILD DOMESTIC LABOUR IN CAMBODIA :



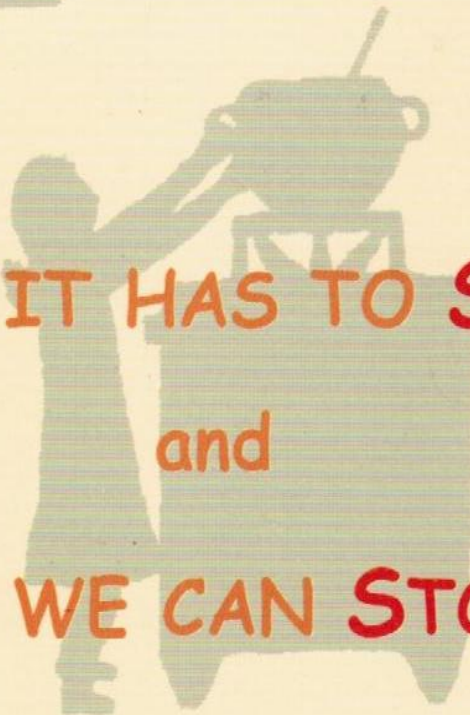
International
Labour
Organization



WHY IT HAS TO STOP

and

HOW WE CAN STOP IT



In Cambodia's capital city, Phnom Penh, one in every nine households employs someone to do the housework.

That someone is a child.

Why does child domestic labour exist in Cambodia?

In Cambodia, child domestic labour has been common for a long time, but it has grown as a result of poverty, rapid population growth, the movement of people from country to city, and a weak education system. Today it is widely accepted by people in all walks of life and often favourably considered.

Many families, especially in rural areas, think their children will find a better life if they go to live with another family (often in the city) and, in exchange, work in their house. Some families think their son or daughter will be sent to school and will just help out at the same time. Some families hope the child will have a better place to live, decent clothes and good food. In some cases this may be true. But it is more likely that the child, especially a girl, will have to sacrifice schooling to get the housework done. And even if the child goes to school, it is likely she will be too tired to study, be regularly absent or just drop out because it is too hard to work and study at the same time. And of course:

child domestic labour is high-risk, because it happens behind the closed doors of a private home and no-one can really know what is happening.

Cambodia is by no means the only country where children can be found in domestic labour. Child domestic labour is widespread across the globe. We do not know enough about children who toil in their own homes as domestic helpers, often for long hours and instead of going to school, but we are beginning to build up a detailed picture of the lives of children who work in other people's homes.

We do not include in this children who just lend a helping hand at home, maybe by washing the dishes after a meal or cleaning their room from time to time. Taking some responsibility for helping out at home is a good thing for children; it helps them to see that they contribute to the family and it teaches them skills and habits they will use as they get older.

Children in domestic labour are in a very different situation.

They are often

- **far from home,**
- **isolated from their family,**
- **forced to work long hours**
- **with no contract,**
- **little or no pay,**
- **no time off, and**
- **few rewards.**

They cannot

- **negotiate terms,**
- **insist on medical insurance or assistance, or**
- **set the conditions under which they toil.**

They are often

- **exposed to hazardous cleaning substances**
- **or equipment that is too difficult for them to use.**

They may have to

- **carry heavy loads,**
- **handle sharp instruments**
- **and hot liquids.**

They often have to

- **care for the children of the household, but are**
- **denied the right to join in their play times.**

They are regularly

- **kept in the house and not allowed to go out,**
- **deprived of the chance to study,**
- **shouted at,**
- **beaten,**
- **humiliated, and are**
- **at risk of sexual harassment and abuse.**

And of course they miss out on the very thing that will help them escape all this: school and the chance to prepare a future that is safe, healthy and in which they will be able to find a decent job, earn money and choose the life they want.

For all these reasons, the International Labour Organization (ILO) considers that child domestic labour can easily become one of the worst forms of child labour. Each individual Member State of the ILO nominates, on the basis of the country's realities, the worst forms of child labour it will move to prohibit and eliminate as a matter of urgency.

The Government of Cambodia has included child domestic labour in its National Plan of Action against the worst forms of child labour.

In 2004, the National Institute of Statistics of Cambodia, as part of a two-year programme of the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), completed the first detailed survey of child domestic labour in Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh. This was an important step in Cambodia's efforts to understand more about the exploited children, their families, the homes they work in and the conditions they face.

This report is based on that survey.

Who are the children in domestic labour?

The minimum working age for children in Cambodia is 15 years. Because Cambodia has identified child domestic labour as a worst form of child labour, though, no child under the age of 18 should be doing it. Nevertheless, the 2004 survey showed that:

27,950 children between the ages of 7 and 17 are in child domestic labour in Phnom Penh alone. This is almost 10 per cent of all the children aged between 7 and 17 in Phnom Penh.

The survey looked at children in this age range in all seven districts of Phnom Penh: 7 Makara, Chamkarmon, Dangkor, Daun Penh, Meanchey, Russey Keo and Tuol Kork.

Of these 27,950 children:

- **1,902 children are between the ages of 7 and 9;**
- **10,276 children are between the ages of 10 and 14; and**
- **15,772 children are between the ages of 15 and 17.**

Both boys and girls are in child domestic labour in Phnom Penh.

- **There are more girls (1,372) than boys (530) in the 7-9 age group;**
- **There are more girls (10,790) than boys (4,981) in the 15-17 age group;**
- **But boys (6,058) outnumber girls (4,218) in the 10-14 age group.**

This may suggest that boys go to school early and then drop out around age 10, entering child domestic labour but then leaving it when they reach working age. It may also indicate that girls are more likely to be sent into domestic labour, or stay in it, as a long-term option when they reach working age (15).

Most of the children have families living in Phnom Penh but some of the children come from other towns or provinces such as Banteay Mean Chey, Kampong Cham, Kandal, Takaev, Kampong Thu and Prey Veng. A few of the children have families in Vietnam and Thailand.

The majority of the children's families have between one and four children, but almost 40 per cent of the children come from families with more than four children:

10,825 children come from families with between 5 and 9 children.

Most of the siblings are unpaid family workers – often in farming – or students. A quarter of them are in paid work and a quarter work for themselves or do not work at all. It is clear that children in large families are at particular risk of being sent into child domestic labour, not so much because the family needs their income but because the family cannot afford to house, feed and clothe all the children and sending one child (or more than one) into another family is a way of 'passing on' the costs.

Most of the children in domestic labour in Phnom Penh can read and write. Only around 14 per cent of them cannot. In fact, some 55 per cent of the children are still going to school in addition to doing all the work they have to do for their employer. However, 40 per cent of the children are no longer in school and around five per cent of them have never been to school at all. There is big difference between boys and girls:

7 per cent of the girls in domestic labour have never been to school, compared to just 1.3 per cent of the boys;

Almost 68 per cent of the boys in domestic labour are also still going to school, compared to only 46 per cent of the girls.

And while more girls than boys have completed primary education (64.4 per cent compared to 47.7 per cent), many more boys than girls have studied at secondary level (47.7 per cent compared to 26.7 per cent), suggesting that girls leave school earlier and with a lower level of achievement.

More than half of the children surveyed were taken or sent into child domestic labour by someone in their family – 15,940 or 57 per cent of the children said a family member or other close relative found a place in a household for them. Almost a third – 27.7 per cent – said it was the employer who sought them out and asked them to work. A very small number (just 4.7 per cent) said they found the work themselves, or (1.9 per cent) went through a labour supplier.

The family plays a very important role. Children in Cambodia, as in many countries of Asia, are still regarded as very much under the control and guidance of their parents (or guardians, if the child is an orphan). Parents, particularly from poor or large families, may look for opportunities for their children to live in another family – often a family that is considered to be able to offer more to the child – and to provide them with a place to live, food, clothes and schooling.

Parents may truly believe that this is in the interest of the child, but they can have no idea of the risk that their son or daughter faces when living in someone else's home in a position that is seen as inferior to the other people in the household. Helping families to understand this is very important.

When 3,119 families whose children are in child domestic labour in Phnom Penh in 2004 were asked why they sent their child into domestic labour:

- **794 said they could not afford to send the child to school;**
- **606 said they believed the child would get food;**
- **482 said the child had reached the age for work;**
- **405 parents/guardians said the family needed more income;**
- **42 said their child did not want to go to school;**
- **33 said school was too far away so the child should work;**

(757 gave other reasons).

Of these families, 2,527 said that they would stop their child working if they had enough income, and 300 more said they would stop it if they had money to send the child to school. This suggests that the family's income is an important factor in the decision for a child to leave home and enter child domestic labour.

On the other hand, most of the families said they would want their child to stop working if they saw that the hours the child worked were too long and the child was tired, or that school was too far away from the house where they were working.

In fact, most of the parents – almost 60 per cent – say they allowed their child to work in someone else's home because they thought the conditions were not abusive. And by far the majority of parents want their children to continue in school and go on to technical education or higher studies. A huge 97 per cent of parents want their children to finish Upper Secondary School at least, and 40 per cent would like to see their children go all the way to university.

When the parents were asked what they wanted their child to do in the future, most of them said they hoped their child would work for the government, in some other organization or have their own business. Only one in five parents said they hoped their child would work for a private employer.

These are very important facts because they tell us that:

Even when the family is poor and needs to look for ways to raise income, the parents or guardians still have high hopes for their children.

- **They do not want them to be exploited.**
- **They do not want them to miss out on an education.**
- **They send them into child domestic labour because they think that this is a good opportunity for the children to have a better life.**

Sadly, they may be wrong.

What is the life of a child in domestic labour like?

Working conditions

Although their families may think they are better off than when they lived at home, and hope that they are going to school and building a better future for themselves:

Most children in domestic labour in Phnom Penh work 7 days a week;

One in every five children works for between 6 and 8 hours a day;

One in every ten children works between 9 and 13 hours a day.

In general, girls in domestic labour work more days a week than boys do. In fact, almost 70 per cent of girls work every day of the week. On the other hand, the boys get fewer hours of rest (maybe because they also go to school part-time). Most of the boys say they get no rest during the day, and even those who do rest only get one or two hours.

In fact, six out of every 10 children get no rest at all.

Long hours of work not only mean a child has no time to play, and little time to study even if she goes to school part-time, they are also a health hazard. A child who has to work and study, and probably also be ready to do any other jobs that arise in the household, will be tired. A tired child is more likely to have accidents when handling heavy pots and pans, using cleaning fluids, doing the ironing or using hot or sharp implements.

And experience shows that, when a child in domestic labour has accidents in the home, she is often scolded for being 'clumsy' and may even be beaten or deprived of food.

Health

When children in domestic labour fall sick or are injured, they may or may not get the care they need. In Phnom Penh, most of the children are able to rest and see a doctor or get medical care. But some are not.

189 children said they have to carry on working when they are sick and are not allowed to rest or get treatment.

110 more said they get treatment but still have to carry on working.

More than a thousand children said they take a rest but still do not get any medical care.

It is also important to remember that the children who were interviewed for the survey were those who were allowed to talk about their situation. There are many more children in domestic labour in Phnom Penh who are not allowed to talk about their lives, to have contacts with other people or even to leave the house. These children are much more likely to have to suffer in silence when they are sick.

We also know that,

when children are denied their rights in one area, they are often also denied their rights in other ways.

So the children who are locked in and kept as virtual prisoners in the household are probably also at risk of scolding and beatings, of working long hours, of poor food and conditions and of being denied the chance to learn. They are hidden from sight and so are also missing from the information we have about child domestic labour.

These are the 'invisible' children whose silent suffering confirms that we must recognize child domestic labour as a worst form of child labour and do all we can to eliminate it.

In 2004, those children who were able to speak about their situation reported many injuries and bouts of illness. Almost 26,000 cases of injury were recorded (in some cases several injuries may have occurred to the same child, so the numbers below may include one child's report of several different injuries):

- **More than 2,000 children were scalded when working with hot water;**
- **More than 2,500 children were scalded cooking with hot oil;**
- **More than 1,000 children were burned by a hot iron;**
- **More than 1,000 children received an electric shock;**
- **More than 3,000 children slipped in the bathroom;**
- **More than 700 fell down the stairs;**
- **More than 1,000 children were hit by a heavy object while they worked;**
- **More than 6,000 children were cut by a sharp implement;**
- **More than 4,000 children got bruises from blunt objects;**
- **More than 2,500 children got sore toes/fingers because they had to use detergents.**

Of the 17,602 children who reported ill health, the biggest number (4,217) said they were exhausted. The children also talk of fear, tension and anxiety. They say they cannot sleep at night and that they have lost their appetites. Beyond the physical hazards the children face, in fact, there are also emotional and psychological hazards that can remain with the child long after a physical injury has healed.

We know from work done in other countries that children who have been exploited in child domestic labour often suffer long-term. They lose their self-esteem because they are treated as inferior. They get depressed and anxious because they are afraid of doing wrong or because they are isolated and made to feel worthless or, at the very least, 'different'. In some countries, children in domestic labour are not even called by their own name but are given a nickname that means 'servant'.

Education

Instead of studying, the children have to do a range of jobs in the house and sometimes in the employer's business too. Most of the children have to do the washing and ironing, wash the dishes, clean the house, fetch the shopping, cook, and wash the car. Children themselves, they nevertheless have to look after the children of the household or do jobs for them. Often children say that this is particularly hard because they see other children having fun but cannot join in. They also have to take the children to school, and bring them home, but may not be allowed to go to school themselves. No wonder they feel different.

Abuse

In return for their labour, the children working in other people's homes may get food and a place to sleep, but they also get things they do not want or need:

- **Scolding – 11,694 children say they are often scolded;**
- **Verbal abuse – 674 children say they are abused with harsh or vulgar words;**
- **Slaps – 1,970 children say they are slapped with the bare hands;**
- **Beatings – 470 report being beaten with objects.**

In the Phnom Penh survey, none of the children reported being sexually abused by the employer or his family, but this is always a risk: not only are the hidden children at risk of all kinds of abuse, even those who do have contacts may not wish to talk about any sexual advances made on them.

What we know from other countries is that parents often send their children into domestic labour because they think their child will be protected in a family home, even if it is not their own family. But we also know that not all employers look upon the child as a family member but instead see the child as their ‘possession’, to be used as they see fit. This can include providing sexual services. Sometimes, also, it is not the employer who abuses the child but someone else in the household, including older children, or a visitor to the home. Sometimes it may even be another employee in the house, for example an older domestic worker. Again, it is the inferior status of the child, and the isolation of her situation, that puts her at great risk of sexual violence.

Exploitation

Given the risks that the children are running, the sacrifices they make, and the hard work they have to do, what do they receive in return?

Almost 3 out of every 4 children in domestic labour in Phnom Penh receive no cash salary.

This is because most often the agreement is that the child will work in exchange for food and lodging. But this is not fair on the child and is exploitation. The child cannot buy things she needs and she cannot save for the future. And because she has no money, she cannot leave the employer if she wants to – children in domestic labour may feel trapped and think they have no choice but to remain with their employer, even if that employer exploits and abuses them.

In every way, it is the employer and not the child who profits from child domestic labour.

Who are the employers?

In Phnom Penh, the people who employ children in domestic labour in their households live in single houses or shop houses. Where the family lives in a shop house, they may sell food or groceries on the premises and, in this case, the child who cleans the house and does the rest of the housework may also be expected to help out in the business.

There are 21,966 households in Phnom Penh in 2004 that have children to do the housework. Most of these (17,519) have one child living in child domestic labour, but nearly three thousand households have two children in domestic labour, more than one thousand have three children and 77 households have four children in domestic labour. These 77 households are all in the slum area of Phnom Penh.

Most of the employers work in services rather than in agriculture or industry. Many of them are professional people, and a large number of them are legislators, senior officials or managers.

Unfortunately, many families think that placing their child in the home of a wealthier, professional family will mean that the child is safe and cared for. This is not always the case.

Almost one-third of the employers in Phnom Penh are shop and market workers. There are also plant and machine operators and assemblers, crafts and trades people and agricultural and fishery workers. Almost a thousand of the employers are in low-skilled occupations. More than 600 are in the armed forces and more than 2,500 are not working.

This information is very interesting because, in many other parts of the world, there is a very obvious rich/poor relationship between the employer and the child in domestic labour. In Cambodia, in fact,

even people who are not particularly wealthy themselves may nevertheless employ a child to do their housework.

This is to a large extent because, in Cambodia, many of the children employed in domestic labour do not receive any payment. This means that even a family that is not wealthy can take in a child and exploit her labour, in exchange for just allowing the child to live with the family and giving her food. In fact, only one in 10 of the employers in Phnom Penh said they viewed the child employed in domestic labour in their home as 'a servant in exchange for money'. Many more explained that employing the child was cheaper than employing an adult. And the vast majority said they considered the child to be a part of the family.

This might seem to show that the children are indeed in a safe and protected environment and that child domestic labour is acceptable if the conditions are good. But this is a dangerous conclusion to make. The truth is that some children may well be better off: they may be given enough food, provided with a room to sleep in, looked after when they are sick and even allowed to go to school part-time. But there are two overwhelming reasons why we should this possibility should not blind us to the truth that child domestic labour is a worst form of child labour:

We have no way of knowing the reality of the child's daily life

because the child domestic labourer's 'workplace' is a private home and is not subject to normal labour standards, inspections or the laws that protect other workers;

We have to consider what the future of the child will be

if they are not allowed to take all the educational options open to them, cannot have the kind of training that will give them better opportunities for work and progress, receive no money to save to pay for their future, and effectively have all their choices taken away.

The truth is that ‘helping’ a child by employing them in domestic labour is to take a very short-term view of that child’s life.

Many of the children – the girls in particular – will simply move from being in child domestic labour to being an adult domestic worker. In Cambodia, domestic work is not seen as a worthy occupation, even by the person doing the work. As a result, many people who do domestic work have negative feelings about themselves and the job they do. And domestic workers are generally badly paid despite the important contribution they make to many families’ well-being. Also, because domestic work is carried out in a private home, it is almost never regulated. Domestic workers are generally unable to negotiate the conditions of their work, receive fair pay and entitlements, get insurance or health benefits or pensions. This should also change.

The survey showed that almost 90 per cent of the employers in Phnom Penh would agree to letting the child attend training offered by a non-governmental organization (NGO). But this answer has to be considered with the fact that many NGOs in fact provide the kind of training that will help the employer, as well as the child. For example, they may teach the child to cook or make special kinds of food. Some NGOs even say that employers ask them to train the children because they want them to prepare better food. There is a fine line between helping the child and helping the employer – even where the child is learning useful skills, it may be that this will not help the child in the long term but will help the employer in the short term.

This is sad because, in fact, many of the employers also said that they wanted the children to have a good future. Most of them hoped that the children would be able to read and write, and some said they thought training and education could be considered as a reward for the children who are working. Half of the employers even said that they would pay for the child to go into training if necessary.

Unfortunately, good intentions are not enough. It is too easy to say that the child’s future is important but then make that child work long hours for no pay.

And it is easy to hide behind the fact that no-one outside the household can really see what is happening. Most of all, it is too dangerous to allow child domestic labour to continue when we know that many of the children in fact are not protected or cared for but are subjected to hard work, dangerous conditions and abusive behaviour.

We have to do something to help these children right away. We cannot leave any child in a situation that is dangerous to their health and well-being. And if we are going to make sure that no child is ever put in that high-risk situation, then we have to move towards ending child domestic labour all together. We simply cannot take the risk that a child will suffer short- and long-term just because we know that not all employers are bad.

What this means is that we have to be precise and determined in our actions. We have to:

- **give the children who are being abused top priority and get them out of that situation;**
- **take steps, at the same time, to begin eliminating child domestic labour completely, so that no children are put in a situation where they might be at risk of becoming ‘invisible’; and**
- **find ways to stop children going into domestic labour in the first place.**

In Cambodia, this work is under way.

What is being done to combat child domestic labour?

A number of important steps have already been taken towards eliminating child domestic labour in Cambodia.

Actions of the government

The Government of Cambodia has made some bold decisions:

- **Child domestic labour is recognized as a worst form of child labour in Cambodia;**
- **It is included in the National Action Plan on the worst forms of child labour;**
- **Cambodia has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;**
- **The government is preparing to ratify the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No.182);**
- **The government is preparing a Time-Bound Programme, with the support of the ILO, to work towards eliminating the worst forms of child labour, and child domestic labour is one of the priorities for action.**

These actions help to build a framework in which other people can also work to combat child domestic labour. They empower local authorities, law enforcement agents, NGOs and ordinary people to act because they represent the agreement of the people of Cambodia to certain fundamental principles relating to child domestic labour.

This is also an important message to all those who think that child domestic labour is a good thing. What the government's actions say is:

- **We have looked closely at the issues around child domestic labour and have come to the conclusion that it must stop.**
- **We are committed to providing support to all those who want to help to eliminate child domestic labour, provide support to children who are in the most dangerous situations as a priority, and to prevent children from entering domestic labour in the first place.**

ILO-IPEC's project in Cambodia

ILO-IPEC has a small team in Cambodia supporting the government's efforts and working with NGOs, municipal authorities, research institutions and others who are contributing to eliminating child domestic labour.

In 2002, IPEC launched a two-year project specifically aimed at improving knowledge and understanding of child domestic labour in Cambodia, identifying the kinds of actions that can be taken not only to eliminate child domestic labour but also to help those children who are currently being exploited in this way, and to identify and help children who are vulnerable.

Understanding the actual situation in Cambodia is vital to any actions that are taken, so one of the first things IPEC did was to work with the Cambodian National Institute of Statistics to produce the first comprehensive survey of child domestic labour in Phnom Penh. The capital was chosen as a priority area because so many children are sent to the city to work.

The survey was important not only so that the true picture of the situation of child domestic labourers could emerge but also to serve as a base for us to measure whether we are making progress in the coming years.

ILO also provides technical help to the Cambodian organizations who are working on the Child Domestic Labour project. This takes the form of regular meetings and visits, as well as contact through a Child Domestic Worker Task Force that was set up to by MDSALVY to bring all the groups together to share information and ideas.

ILO has experience from many countries of working on the issue of child domestic labour. Projects in other countries provide examples of actions and ideas that have been successful, and IPEC works with Cambodian organizations to see if they are useful for the Cambodian situation. At the same time, the lessons that are being learned in Cambodia are shared with other parts of the world so that Cambodia's experience is useful to others.

IPEC's strength in many ways lies in its broad and long experience in working on child labour issues across the globe. The organization has built up a wide and diverse understanding of both the problems of child labour and ways to address these, and has become a valued agent of change. This may be at the level of policy, through work alongside governments as they build stronger frameworks in which child labour can be tackled; or at a practical level, helping grassroots actors to learn from their experience and supporting their work. Ultimately all of IPEC's work is aimed at finding a long-term, sustainable solution to the problem of child labour, in partnership with governments, employers' and workers' organization, and civil society.

Awareness raising

When parents and guardians understand the risk their children face by entering child domestic labour, they stop and think twice. In Cambodia especially, where families still believe that they are giving their children a chance at a better life by sending them into domestic labour, it is important to show them examples of what can and does happen. At the same time, of course, it is important to also help families to find alternatives to sending a child into domestic labour. With its long experience of working with employers and workers' organizations, and in running job creation, vocational training and income-generation programmes, ILO is well placed to help.

Awareness raising is also important to alert people to what they can do if they learn that a child in their community is in a particularly dangerous situation. It helps them to know the signs to look for to identify children who are vulnerable, so that action can be taken to reduce their vulnerability and ensure that they do not enter child domestic labour or another form of exploitation. This kind of awareness raising is backed up with actions to withdraw children from abusive situations and give them the support they need, and with facilities like telephone hotlines that people can use to contact the authorities to tell them when a child needs help.

Several of ILO's partners in Cambodia run programmes to help people to understand the truth of child domestic labour:

- **An NGO called Vulnerable Children Assistance Organization (VCAO) has run awareness-raising sessions for local authority leaders, police representatives, householders and children.**

This project, which has run in the Sangkat Phsar Depo II, Phsar Depo III, Teak Laak I and Teak Laak II districts of Phnom Penh, aims to help them not only to understand child domestic labour but to report any instances they become aware of where children are in particular danger. VCAO's social workers visit homes in the districts regularly to talk to people who are employing children in domestic labour and to persuade them to allow the child to attend classes or training, and to meet with other children. This is an important first step in moving towards elimination, because it allows VCAO and community leaders to see if any of the children need to be urgently removed from the household.

- **WDA focuses its awareness-raising actions on encouraging parents and guardians to understand the importance of sending their children to school and keeping them there.**

At the same time, WDA also provides pre-school centres for very young children, so that the children are prepared early in life for learning. What this also does is free up the parents to do other things, and allows them to find part-time work when they would otherwise be at home looking after the infant. Once the parent is working, it is much more likely that the child will be able to go to school. WDA works with school teachers, too, to help them to understand child domestic labour and to look for signs of vulnerability in the children (for example, if a child loses a parent, especially the breadwinner in the family, or if the child's parents are sick or go overseas to work).

- **The Children's Committee (CC) runs a dynamic awareness-raising project that specifically targets other children.**

They have produced a series of TV programmes that go to air on Sundays at 5 o'clock, when the family can watch them together. The programmes bring teams of school children into the studio to compete in a quiz about child domestic labour and the rights of children. The school teams spend time preparing themselves and so learn about child domestic labour in depth. During the programme there are also humorous sketches featuring some well-known Cambodian actors. And there is even a special theme song called *My child, your child*, to remind people that children in domestic labour have the same rights as all other children.

- **MDSALVY's awareness-raising actions aim to improve the understanding and empower the actions of the authorities at district level.**

In addition to training sessions covering child domestic labour and children's rights, officers at district level also meet regularly in a child domestic labour task force. Through this they can share information and plan future actions.

Grassroots action and coordination

Once people understand child domestic labour better, they want to be able to do something. This is a very important breakthrough, because people who live in the communities and villages among the children are best placed to help them. One way to support this is to help people to come together in groups and support each other. These groups can be of many different kinds and can work in different ways. Some of them might concentrate on keeping an eye on families that are experiencing difficulties, for example poor families or single-parent households where the children might be at risk of being sent out to work instead of going to school. Some might be able to see what is happening inside homes where children are in domestic labour, or they might live close enough to be aware of violent or abusive homes. Some might just spread the word about child domestic labour by talking to others and helping them to understand. Some might become more intimately involved by taking in a child who is rescued from exploitation and needs a temporary home.

- **WDA has been organizing Child Domestic Worker Protection Task Forces (CDWPTFs) to monitor what is happening in villages in Phnom Penh.**

These are groups of about 10 people in the village – just ordinary people – who come together to learn about child domestic labour, share information about families or children who need help, and support organizations like WDA, or authorities like MDSALVY or the local authority if they need to intervene. The CDWPTFs are all volunteers but they are making their communities safer and contributing to a better future for the children.

- **VCAO knows that keeping an ear to the ground is vital if the organization is to know when there are cases of abuse in homes where children are in domestic labour.**

One of the best ways to do this is to work with children themselves, since often children talk among themselves rather than to grown-ups. VCAO has formed Peer Groups among the

children. These children look out for each other, confide in each other and let VCAO know if any children are facing serious problems.

- **CC invited all the children involved in its TV programmes, and others who were watching, to join a Children’s Watch Club.**

This now has more than 800 members, children who are dedicated to understanding child domestic labour, talking about it to others – including their family members, who may be employers of children in domestic labour – and watching out for children in their own homes.

- **MDSALVY has become the logical focal point for many of these initiatives, and has concentrated on bringing the organizations together in the CDW Task Force.**

In regular meetings, the partners share information on individual cases, discuss their programme experience and plan future actions.

Intervening to help a child to go to school

TS is 13 years old. Her parents died when she was 10 and she went to live with her cousin. She has to work. Every day she does the cooking, cleans the house and washes clothes. Not only does she look after the three year-old child of the family, she also has to take care of the grandmother who is 96 years old and suffers chronic high blood pressure. TS has to do all this and also watch the family’s seven year-old son go off to school every day.

When the village chief told the CDW networking group about TS, MDSALVY and members of the group went to visit the family she was living with. They visited on a number of occasions, explaining to the cousins why they should support TS to go to school. With the help of the director of the local school, TS is now in Grade 1 of the public school.

Education and training

It is unrealistic to think that we can just remove children from domestic labour and expect them and their families to cope. The difficulties that prompted the child or family to consider domestic labour as an option in the first place need to be tackled too. Beyond this, we have to consider the children’s future and make sure that they have chances to find decent employment as they reach working age, and that they have a level of education that prepares them for a productive working life and a stable, healthy home life.

Education and training are the keys to this. Children need to go to school, if possible, and to stay in school long enough to be fully prepared to be able to get the job they want and to live the life they want to lead. Schooling is free in Cambodia, but the education system is rather weak and teachers are not paid very much. As a result, many teachers supplement their salary by making the children pay for photocopies, materials or extra classes. This means that even when child goes to school, there are expenses for the family and some families cannot meet them. In these situations, the child is very likely to drop out of school. It is very important, therefore, to help the family to raise enough income to keep all the children of the family in school. Parents need to be able to work and older brothers and sisters can also be helped to find suitable employment when they are of working age.

Vocational training can help adults and young people about to enter the workforce to upgrade their skills so that they have some choice in the kind of work they do. For children who have had to leave school already, or who have never been to school, non-formal education can help them to learn to read and write and to do basic maths so that they are better able to cope with the world of work. Sometimes children need a combination of vocational training and non-formal education to equip them for decent work. Sometimes non-formal education might be the

solution to helping children to catch up on schooling they have missed and so be ready to go back to school. For older children, vocational training might help them to move out of exploitative or high-risk work and into employment that is better paid or just safer.

Training for a better life

SM would have liked to stay at school but had to leave when she was 13 years old. She has three brothers; two of them are younger than her. When her father died in 2003, it was clear that the family could not live on just the money her older brother brought home. SM became what we know as a 'vulnerable child' – vulnerable to being forced to start work to earn money; vulnerable to being exploited because her family was in a desperate situation; vulnerable to being sent into child domestic labour so that she would be fed and housed.

But a group of people in SM's community had been trained to look out for vulnerable children and see if anything could be done to help them. They contacted a Cambodian NGO called Women Development Association (WDA) who work with the community protection groups. WDA offered SM the chance to learn hairdressing, along with five other girls who were thought to be vulnerable. WDA not only arranged classes for the girls, they also contacted all the hairdresser shops near SM's village to ask if they could offer work when the girls finished their training.

Now SM is 18 and works in a hairdresser shop near her home. She does not earn a lot of money, but she is able to contribute to the family. "Now I have money," she says, "I can feed my mother and my brother. I am very happy". SM loves her work. She says one day she will get married and raise her own family, but she is not ready for that yet. And the woman who owns the hairdressing shop is pleased to hear that, because she says SM is a very good hairdresser.

- **WDA and VCAO both provide vocational training for children who have been removed from abusive child domestic labour or who are at risk of entering domestic labour.**

The communities these organizations work with help them to identify the children who need to learn a skill so that they can find decent work. Girls who have left rural areas to enter child domestic labour in Phnom Penh often want to train to be hairdressers or beauticians, because these are skills they can sell back in their home villages, where such skills are in high demand for festivals, weddings and other celebrations. The organizations offer other courses too, in motorcycle repair, for example, and basic computing.

- **VCAO also provides non-formal education for younger children who cannot be immediately removed from child domestic labour but who are missing out on school.**

These children will need to be able to read, write and do simple sums so that they can return to school when they exit child labour or can find safe light work. Persuading the employers to allow the children to attend these classes is a huge challenge and VCAO social workers may have to make many visits to the home before the employers agree.

Withdrawal and support

Sometimes the employer will not allow the child to leave the house, keeping her virtually in slavery. This is a warning sign that the child is in a particularly dangerous situation. There may be other signs: sometimes a neighbour will hear shouts or sounds of beatings. Sometimes a neighbour or someone else in the community – often another child in domestic labour – will see cuts or bruises on the child, or the child may tell a friend that she is being badly treated. It is important that people know who to turn to when they want to report these situations.

- **MDSALVY runs a telephone hotline service with a number that people can call to report cases of child abuse or other crises facing children.**

Making sure people know the number is also a part of awareness raising programmes, and MDSALVY also distributes key rings with the phone number on them as well as the numbers of the NGOs working on child domestic labour.

- **CC also distributes key rings to the children who participate in its programmes, so that they too know the numbers they can ring.**

CC also designed a t-shirt that has a picture telling the story of child domestic labour but also reminding people who they can ring.

- **VCAO is one of the organizations that provides support to children who are removed from situations of child domestic labour.**

They work closely with MDSALVY, local authorities and the police, and are often called in to help a child who has been helped to leave the abusive situation. This child may need help to return home and someone to check up on her to make sure she is well received and not vulnerable to being sent into labour again. The child who has been beaten or otherwise suffered physical violence, including sexual violence, will need medical attention as well as psychological support. Children will also need to be helped to cope with low self-esteem, depression and fear. And if the police decide to act against the employer, then the children may need legal support in case they are asked to give evidence.

From misery to luck

A young orphan boy went to live with his grandparents in Phnom Penh and suffered 11 years of abuse and beatings. Eventually a neighbour reported this to the authorities when the boy nearly died.

The Municipal Department of Social Affairs, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation (MDSALVY) went with the local authority to negotiate with the grandparents, who said they would hand over the boy in exchange for three million riels. When the authorities told them they could be arrested for what they had done, the couple said they did not care because they were old and would die soon anyway.

MDSALVY used a permit to take the boy from his grandparents. He stayed in the commune office for three days to give the grandparents time to think. In the end, they agreed that the boy would have to leave them, although they complained that they would have no-one to do the work in the house any more. MDSALVY decided that the child's safety came first and, since the grandparents were uneducated, they were not prosecuted but received counselling instead. If it had been a younger couple, MDSALVY would have called in the police.

As for the boy: he now lives with a foster family and has returned to school, where he is in grade 2. He has changed his name. His old name meant 'miserable' but his new name means 'lucky'.

WDA, VCAO, CC and MDSALVY, as well as the National Institute of Statistics, have been ILO-IPEC's partners in the first two years of its programme to combat child domestic labour. They have helped thousands of children to take a different path to domestic service. They have supported dozens of children who have been helped to leave domestic labour. They have mobilized community groups, improved the understanding of people in different walks of life, and worked in cooperation with each other to learn about child domestic labour and plan how to deal with it.

In 2004, IPEC will begin a second two-year project to combat child domestic labour in Cambodia.

This will be based on lessons that were learned in the first two years and will build on these experiences. It will include partners from the first phase and some new partners.

In this new phase, the positive experiences of the first two years will continue but there will be an emphasis on preventing children from entering child domestic labour and on children below the minimum working age.

Some important successes have already been achieved, but there is still much work to be done before child domestic labour is eliminated in Cambodia.

What can you do to help?

We can all do something to ensure that child domestic labour eventually disappears and, in the meantime, that children are protected from abuse and exploitation. If you live in a country where children are employed in domestic labour:

- **Help your family, friends, neighbours and the people you work with to understand that child domestic labour puts children at risk;**
- **Help people to understand that the key to a better future for the child and also for the community is education – sending your child to school is the best thing you can do for her/him;**
- **Spread the word that child domestic labour is not good for children and not good for the country because it holds children back from making the most of their potential;**
- **Do all you can to make sure that any child already in domestic labour is protected and able to enjoy her/his rights to education, play, good health, a family environment and safe, decent work that is appropriately compensated;**

Above all:

- **Respect children and help them to enjoy their rights as children: they need to be able to play, to learn, to be healthy, to have a stable family life, to be free from exploitation, violence and fear.**

If you learn that there are families in difficulty and therefore children at risk, or if you know of children who are vulnerable to exploitation for other reasons (for example because they have left the family home and are living with friends, or on the streets):

- **Let the local authority or social services know that the child may be at risk of exploitation – report this through a telephone hotline, or on the Internet if a suitable website is available, or by calling into the local authority office;**
- **Organize neighbours or other people in the community to watch over the child or family in case there is a need for an emergency intervention;**
- **Call the police if there is a crisis;**
- **Consider organizing emergency care within the community, for example temporary accommodation or a small fund to help feed or clothe a child.**

Often it seems that a problem that is right in our midst is beyond our reach. We feel helpless and wish we could do something to help.

In fact, there are many things that we can do to play our part in eliminating child domestic labour and helping children who are in domestic labour or who are emerging from it.

To support government initiatives and make sure that the laws and regulations of our countries provide a suitable context for combating child domestic labour, we should all:

- **Urge governments to ratify the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No.182) if they have not done so;**

- **Urge governments to ratify the ILO Minimum Working Age Convention, 1973 (No.138), set a minimum age and then check that employers respect this, even if the work is done in their own home;**
- **Advocate for child domestic labour being included in the list of the worst forms of child labour if it is not yet there, because it is such a high-risk occupation for children;**
- **Support governments as they implement National Plans of Action on the worst forms of child labour;**
- **Urge governments to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child so that all children enjoy all of their rights.**

We can also move to keep children from domestic service by making domestic work a respected, professionalized occupation for adults. For example, we can:

- **Call upon ministries and institutes of education and training to provide training courses in domestic work – for example, house management, child care, elderly care, catering, sewing and other skills that might be required, so that domestic work is seen as a skilled occupation;**
- **Support adult domestic workers to claim their rights as workers in terms of pay and conditions, holidays, insurance, social services and the right to organize themselves into unions or associations;**
- **Support calls for the private home to be considered a legitimate workplace if a domestic worker is employed there, and then to make it subject to labour inspection and monitoring.**

Contacts

ILO-IPEC in Cambodia – to learn more about IPEC’s work worldwide

Please provide street address and phone number

Website: www.ilo.org

WDA – to learn more about their work or make a donation

Women Development Association
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Email: Wda@forum.org.kh

VCAO – to learn more about their work or make a donation

Vulnerable Children Assistance Organization
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CC – to join the Child Watch Club or learn more about their work, or make a donation:

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NIS – for copies of the Child Domestic Worker Survey

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