



Legal Justice – an ICC Strategic Focus

“No child should be exposed to violence, abuse and neglect. Yet in Cambodia the situation is dire for many children.” According to 2019 data from UNICEF, one in two children has experienced serious physical violence, one in four children has suffered emotional abuse, and one in 20 girls and boys has been sexually assaulted. Many children are trafficked into forced labour, and many are separated from their families and wrongly placed in residential care¹.

The Cambodian government is taking action and has introduced laws to protect children. These laws range from the law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation (2008), the law on Domestic Violence (2005), and the Juvenile Justice Law (2016). The government has also delegated protection of children to sub-national bodies such as Women and Children Consultative Committees (WCCC) at provincial and district levels, and Commune Committees for Women and Children (CCWC) at local level.

In the government structure, both WCCCs and CCWCs have specified roles and responsibilities. For WCCCs, they perform an advisory role, and also recommend, advocate and coordinate services targeted at women and children. For CCWCs, their roles and responsibilities are to prepare annual work plans and budgets, advise and assist the Commune Councils, and raise awareness on laws and other policies related to women and children’s rights.

Earlier this year, the newly started ICC Child Rights project conducted a baseline survey at Svay Rieng and Takeo provinces, with a specific interest in learning about how the WCCCs and CCWCs function. The baseline survey documented that around 29% (or 18 out of 63) of the CCWCs in both provinces do not clearly understand about their role and responsibilities. Moreover, 70% believe that they only have a medium level of confidence to perform their duties, compared to just 30% who have a high level of confidence.

The ICC Child Rights project will use this data as the foundation to be intentional and targeted in their coaching

and capacity building of WCCC and CCWC members, in order for these members to better fulfil their roles and responsibilities in child protection and enforcement of laws and child rights.

After the baseline survey was completed, the Child Rights project has hosted Vision Workshops to the target WCCCs, CCWCs, Village Chiefs, and local NGO partners in both provinces, as is seen in the picture above. These Vision Workshops are done in order to present the purpose and aim of the Child Rights project, and to express the importance of direct collaboration between the project and local stakeholders when fighting for child protection and child rights fulfilment. During one of the Vision Workshops one participant said: *“The ICC Child Rights project has a good program, so even though we are busy, we will prioritise to cooperate with the project, because the project seeks to improve our communities”*.

The Child Rights project team has already provided some training to WCCC and CCWC members, on legal justice and child protection. The project also seeks to facilitate a stronger collaboration between the state sector and the local civil society sector, in order to strive for a greater joint effort in the protection of Cambodian children.

ICC has a zero tolerance stand towards any forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation of a child under the age of 18 years old, irrespective of race, social background, age, gender, skin colour, disability, religion or beliefs. Therefore, it is very important for ICC to be active in combating child abuse, neglect and exploitation in Cambodia, and to promote the enforcement of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The ICC Child Rights project seeks to work towards this goal by direct collaboration with WCCCs, CCWCs and civil society organisations, and so far the team is encouraged by the genuine interest from these groups in working for safer childhoods in Cambodia.

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¹ <https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/reports/child-protection>