

## Bridging authorities and civil society



*Violence and abuse against children exist in every country in the world, across culture, class, education, income and ethnic origin. Cambodia is no exception. More than half of all Cambodian children reported some form of physical violence; one-quarter of Cambodian children are emotionally abused while growing up; 26% of children reported emotional violence by a parent, caregiver or other adult relative; and 5% of both females and males aged 13 to 24, reported some form of sexual abuse prior to age 18.<sup>1</sup> Action is needed, and it is encouraging to see that groups of local people in local communities are stepping up for child protection. The power of a united people, who share a common passion for child protection, cannot be ignored. An example of such people working in unity is the Child Protection Committee (CPC), where children, youth, parents and religious leaders come together working to combat child abuse and neglect.*

The ICC project "Voice Of The Children" (VOTC) has since 2012 been working to equip and empower its target church leaders related to child protection and child rights, and now these church leaders are ready to mobilize their own villagers and resources for child protection via CPCs.

It is a challenge to change an old mindset and traditional ways of practice, which is the same related to child protection. It requires time and effort to help villagers and local authorities to understand the power of people working together for child protection. Therefore, it was encouraging for the VOTC team to learn that target church leaders had a passion and vision to start up CPCs in their own villages. These church leaders were able to select competent and committed CPC members from their villages, but at the same time they needed recognition of their CPCs from local authorities. First they had to seek permission and support from their village chief. This is not always so easy, as not all village chiefs think positively about the role of a CPC in their village. Some church leaders had to spend much time and involvement in order to enable village chiefs to see the bigger picture of CPCs. The VOTC team supports and assists target church leaders to make sure each CPC serves the best interests of children, and that the village chief will actively support them.

One village chief was very negative at first about the plan of a CPC in his village. He said it was impossible for his villagers to spend their personal time and resources to be part of the CPC. He also expressed that his villagers would not join this CPC unless they received some kind of benefit. However, the church leader in this particular village did not want to give up his CPC plan. Instead he invited his village chief to join a CPC meeting. The meeting helped the village chief to understand why it is necessary to have a CPC in the village, and he started to change his old way of thinking about his villagers, and began to be more active in order to support the CPC plan.

Now this village chief feels very proud of the CPC, and he often reports and shares about the CPC activities to local authorities at commune level, and during quarterly commune meetings. He keeps sharing about his experience with the CPC, and he has inspired and motivated other village chiefs and commune chiefs to be supportive of CPCs and their role and function within villages and communes. As a result, the current 10 CPCs formed in Takeo province have been officially approved via signatures of village chiefs and commune chiefs during a ceremony - as seen in the picture above.

<sup>1</sup> The Economic Burden of the Health Consequences of Violence Against Children in Cambodia (year 2014)