



## Social Services of Cambodia Basic Social Work Training



An external evaluation of the course that has been undertaken in 2007 draws a positive result of the piloting phase of the project, whose primary goal was to develop a model course including culturally adapted teaching materials and manuals as well as a pool of trained trainers. The courses have been important entry points for the empowerment of women and girls who have been subjected to gender-based violence and, indirectly, to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS in Cambodia. They are highly appreciated among a network of legal, social and human rights organizations working in the field of gender-based violence. This can be seen not only in a positive feedback but also in the fact that demand from other NGOs by far outstrips available places.

Social Services of Cambodia offers the only high-quality course of its kind in Cambodia. It sets quality standards for other training courses and serves as a model for the Ministry of Social Affairs that also offers training courses,

which are, however, not specifically aimed at gender-based violence. While the development of the course has been concluded successfully, the challenge of the second phase of the project will be to increase the supply of courses without reducing its quality. The evaluation recommends an expansion and eventually a broadening of the courses to a wider range of settings where social workers are engaged in work with vulnerable people.

The experiences of Social Services of Cambodia can inspire social work of other organizations not only in Cambodia but also in other countries where gender-based violence such as commercial sexual exploitation of children is conditioned by an inferior situation of women and girls relative to men and boys, and where sociocultural issues have to be addressed in order to defend the rights of the victims. A further exchange of experiences would stimulate and sustain innovation in the field of social work and gender-based violence.

### Lessons learned

#### Gender-based Violence and Widespread Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Cambodia

Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in Asia. Its recent history is shaped by 30 years of conflict and social breakdown. Today its post-conflict society is attempting to rebuild institutions at family, community and national levels.

Violence is widespread among a generation that grew up during civil war, without parents or in disrupted families, thus lacking a clear code of behaviour. Women and girls continue to have a subordinate status relative to men and boys, but gender-based violence has become more common in Cambodia and ranges from sexual harassment, domestic violence or intimate partner violence to rape, commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking of women and children. Even though the awareness of gender-related violence and the protection of children's rights have increased, a huge gap exists between officially signed conventions and new laws and the day to day behavior of people.

The Mekong Region is one of the world's main areas of commercial sexual exploitation of children. Cambodia ranks second behind the regional centre Thailand. Poverty and violence lead many children (girls and boys) into the sex trade, especially those from rural regions and urban slums. Because of their high vulnerability, sex-trafficked and exploited women, girls and boys face especially high risk of sexually transmitted infections like HIV.

#### No Social Work Training System

Cambodia has no established social work training system. Numerous non-governmental organizations provide a patchwork of services like shelters, legal aid and counseling to women and children who have been subjected to violence and/or commercial sexual exploitation. The demand for professional social workers by far outstrips the availability of adequately trained staff. The skills

deficit of the service providers is often addressed with short, one-off courses, mostly conducted by experts unfamiliar with the Cambodian sociocultural context and unable to take local beliefs, values and learning styles into account.

#### Building Capacities of Local NGOs through High Quality Training of Social Workers and Training of Trainers

In response to the lack of quality training for social workers and with support from GTZ, in 2004 Social Services of Cambodia (SSC), an NGO delivering social services and training in Cambodia since 1992, established the Training Center for Counselors and Social Workers. The goal of the Training Center is to improve the support for women and children affected by gender-based violence, including commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking; it aims to achieve this by strengthening the social work and counseling skills of staff of NGOs providing direct service delivery and support to them.

Social Services of Cambodia offers a high quality basic social work and counseling course of 30 days, delivered five days per month for six months, with intervals of application and self-learning phases. The course promotes a client-centred approach to social support and counseling where the social workers and their clients meet on a level of being human beings of equal value. It also puts emphasis on challenging the social worker's traditional, culturally embedded patterns and beliefs about gender, violence and approaches to helping. Participants learn how to use active listening, effective responding, and other case management tools that help their clients to find a way to achieve a good-enough life. The social worker develops an understanding of the clients' situation and helps her to explore possible strategies and solutions. In this aspect, the course breaks with a traditional approach to helping where victims come to service providers in order to request help and receive advice from the workers.

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[www.gtz.de/nochildabuse](http://www.gtz.de/nochildabuse)

The GTZ convention project "Protection of Minors against Sexual Exploitation" is supporting partner countries on behalf of BMZ in implementing the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

Further information is available from:  
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### Training Course Content - Basic:

#### 1) Knowing Yourself

A social worker's main tool is him- or herself and the relationship s/he can create with the client(s). Therefore a social worker must learn to understand his or her own thoughts, attitudes, values, feelings and behaviour and how s/he came to be the way s/he is. This session includes intensive self-reflection in order to get to know yourself better.

#### 2) Getting to Know Your Client: Basic Counseling Skills and Attitudes That Are Necessary to Build a Relationship with Your Client and Jointly Explore Her Situation

Developing empathy; developing awareness of our own value judgements and their impact on our work with the client; active listening; observation of behaviour and body language; how to respond to your client.

#### 3) Getting to Know your Client: Understanding the Situations of Clients Who Suffer Domestic Violence, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation

Explore the causes of those situations; the impact on clients, families and the community; clients' needs and ways to support clients' recovery.

#### 4) Problem Solving - Helping the Client to Make Decisions

Working with the client to increase the client's and the social worker's understanding of her situation. Identifying the areas in the client's life that she wants to change and helping her find solutions for her problems or coping strategies to improve her life.

#### 5) Case Management Skills

Methods to plan your work with the client to ensure you work systematically and pay attention to all the important aspects of the client's life. It includes learning about the 'Steps in Social Work' from when you first meet the client to when you finish your work with her; case planning; case presentation; referral and collaboration with other professionals; client advocacy and empowerment; confidentiality.

#### 6) The Overall Purposes, Function, Role and Ethics of a Social Worker

The clients' rights to confidentiality and self-determination (making their own decisions about their lives), and an exploration of the values we hold as professionals working to help vulnerable people.



Source: Jo Wan

An additional intermediate course programme combines classroom skills development with the preparation of a case study and fieldwork supervision. It also includes legal issues, so that social workers can provide their clients with better information about their legal rights. In total, the face-to-face time with trainers amounts to 17 days per trainee over a period of 5 months.

The training of trainers - which takes approximately 18 months to 2 years - is based on the same principles as the basic training course. As there is neither a pool of experienced social workers nor one of social worker trainers to draw from, all applicants are assessed on the basis of their potential, their attitude to learning and their disposition to personal change. The trainers are essentially trained to be both social workers and social work trainers to give them credibility as well as professional experience to draw upon. Training and social work practice - 2 weeks per month each - are ongoing; however, the most significant investment is made in the first year, which the trainers spend in apprenticeship and during which they do not contribute training outputs.

#### Impacts and Lessons Learned

267 social workers from 65 NGOs have been trained through Social Services of Cambodia as of the end of 2008. The final beneficiaries of the course are the girls and women that have received qualitatively better services due to the increased technical capacities of NGOs.

Reflecting on cultural patterns where women and girls are subordinate to men helped trainees to develop an understanding of the social, cultural and economic context of gender-based violence. A better understanding of the reasons for gender-based violence assures that people working with the victims do not reinforce blame towards them or inflict further harm through a wrong judgement of their situation. However, traditional behaviour and deeply rooted attitudes do not change overnight and an initial open-mindedness of participants has been a precondition for the success of the project. But once social workers embraced the new approach

towards gender-based violence, they were able to pass their learning on to their workplaces and become agents of change in their own organizations, sometimes against initial resistance. Those who finished the course were keen to continue learning and to reflect on setting the new tools in practice with feedback from their peers. An Alumni Association was formed in 2007, allowing the trainees of the Centre to meet quarterly to exchange experiences, maintain their relationships, and have the opportunity for further training.

Training materials have been continuously revised and improved and trainers were encouraged to contribute to the design of the course. Because all the trainers are also practitioners, they have a profound knowledge of the situation in the field and the everyday challenges of the social workers, which allowed them to enrich theory with their own practical experiences. During their preparation as social work trainers, the Social Services of Cambodia trainers went through an important personal process in which they learned to trust their own judgements. In the end, this increased ownership and identification of the trainers with the new tools. Rather than using pre-described, ready-made courses for social workers from other contexts, the training materials were specifically adapted to the sociocultural context of Cambodia. All the training material is in Khmer, the language of the people providing and receiving social services.

The staff of NGOs that participated in the courses contributed to its monitoring through ongoing feedback. Trainees have been asked to evaluate the instruction they received and not to accept their trainers as untouchable superior authorities. In this way, the course initiated a process of mutual learning and dialogue between trainers and trainees, which was crucial in achieving a change in mentality and breaking with traditional beliefs. The importance of this participatory approach cannot be overestimated in a society where authorities are often not questioned and leadership lacks accountability.