

EXCEL project impact

The Cambodians EXCEL project – Eliminating eXploitative Child labor through Education and Livelihoods – works to reduce exploitative child labor in fishing, agriculture, and domestic service in Cambodia by implementing a multi-sector approach that reaches individual children and families while increasing the national level commitment to eliminating child labor. It delivers direct educational and livelihoods services and linkages for 28,000 children and 14,000 households. It also aims to strengthen the capacity of local and national institutions, leverage government commitment to policy change, engage private sector partners, and improve research to provide reliable data on child labor, especially in the informal sector.

Impact on children and families

Many children in Cambodia grow up without the chance for education and needing to work to help support their family. The latest study reported 429,400 child laborers (ages 5-17) with over 75,000 of these aged 11 or younger. Many more children are at risk of labor or live in poor conditions due to their parents labor (see box over page).

The EXCEL project has already reached more than 26,700 children to provide direct support to them and their families, working both to support education and improve family livelihood for the long term. The story below has been repeated in many of these families; 11% of households were already showing an increase in household assets after 1 year of active implementation.

School enrollment and success has been increased through working with both children and teachers. In three of the project provinces, net enrollment for the target schools has increased from an average of 81.1% before the project started to 83.3% for the most recently measured school year. Even more impressively, the dropout rate has fallen from an average of 7.7% to 5.1%. This is despite national figures showing a slight overall decrease in enrollment figures for these areas. The EXCEL project provides much needed opportunities to these child laborers and children at risk. Through also working with government and communities, it aims to have a much wider impact on child labor in Cambodia in the medium and long term.

'EXCEL is a large project funded by the US Department of Labor to help eliminate child labor in our country – so as partners to this project, we must support and ensure that the needs of this project are met from our side so it can achieve its plans'

(HE Mr Heang Sene, Under-secretary of State, Ministry of Education, Youth & Sport)

Sarong and her husband used to migrate to work as construction workers in Siem Reap province. As a migrant construction worker, she worked under sunlight and heavy rain, all while she had to raise two young children, who lived on the building site and did not go to school.

In July of 2014 she learned about support from EXCEL. She returned home and received training from EXCEL project in sewing. She can now make from 10,000 to 13,000 Riel per day (around \$3 USD). She no longer migrates from her village and doesn't wish to do so. Her children, aged 7 and 9, are now both in school and have both reached grade 2. "I promise to send my children to school every day," she says.

Sarong is now the breadwinner as her husband has migrated to Thailand and rarely comes home. She makes the money to support the families living expenses and her children's education and also pay for the medical visits necessary because of injuries from doing heavy construction work. Sarong not only enjoys her family life, but she also actively joins the project in protecting and preventing child labor in her village. "I would like to express my deep gratitude to the EXCEL project for coming to support me and my community" she says with feeling.



National level impact

The project has met significant success in influencing national level policy in child labor, engaging high level government support and integrating child labor concerns into both local and national structures.

Engagement of high level government support

The Minister of Education, Youth, and Sports, Dr. Hang Chuon Naron provides personal support to the EXCEL project by regularly attending a project Advisory Committee Meeting and provided recommendations directly on how child labor is a critical issue for the development of quality education in Cambodia. At the last meeting, he recommended that child labor issues should be integrated into the education policy and curriculum, to be broadly shared in both formal and informal sectors. The EXCEL project staff is now working on this with the relevant departments of education.

After extensive advocacy with the Ministry of Labor and Vocational training the National Sub-Committee on Child Labor (NSC-CL) was reorganized and reactivated in January 2015. The committee is presided over by H.E Mr. Ith Sam Heng, the Minister of MoLVT himself.

The NSC-CL is one of the 4 national sub-committees under the umbrella of the Cambodian National Council for Children (CNCC). The CNCC is chaired by the Minister of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth and has the Prime Minister as honorary chairman. The NSC-CL has been

meeting regularly and has now finalized the Second National Plan of Action on Worst Forms of Child Labor, ready for review and approval by the Council of Ministers. In addition it will be upgraded this coming year to a National Committee with increased responsibilities.

Integration of child labor concerns into policy and local structures

Work with the CNCC has included supporting the development of the second National Plan of Action for Children (2014- 2018). The project's involvement and provision of technical input has resulted in the inclusion of child labor concerns in the plan, based on the updated child labor data in the 2012 Child Labor Report. A section called the "Elimination of Child Labor" was included with the following outcome: "3.1: The proportion of Child Labor reduced to a maximum of eight per cent of the total children and fully eliminated worst forms of child labor by 2018. This Outcome would ensure complete elimination of the worst forms of child labor target through promoting children's rights and other affirmative action."

The project has seen excellent success in the development of local child labor mechanisms, with 84% of target communities (project outcome indicator 7) having structures in place to eradicate child labor such as child protection committees or child labor monitoring committees.

Furthermore, the Minister of MoLVT in his speech during the recent national celebration of the 2015 World Day Against CL, advised his ministry to coordinate and work closely with EXCEL to replicate the project in non-EXCEL provinces using government funds. The Department of Child Labor of MoLVT has already requested the copy of the project document so they can better understand it in preparation for replication of the initiatives the project has implemented.

There is strong support for the project at departmental (local) levels, with good engagement from government staff. During the recent World Day Against Child Labor, 9 senior leaders and officials from the MoEYS¹ visited target schools and communities in 3 provinces over 3 days, promoting an awareness of child labor and strengthening local commitment to the project.

'School directors and teachers please be proactive and be ready to support these children beyond the support of EXCEL. Please try to generate resources within the community and plan carefully and well for proposing inclusion of these activities in the government annual budgeting.'

(H.E. Mrs Soeur Socheata, Under-Secretary of State, MoEYS)

¹ One Secretary of State, 2 Under Secretaries of State, Directors of Primary Education, General Secondary Department and Non Formal Education department, and 3 heads of national offices.

Specific initiatives to combat child labor

As well as the above, the project has successfully advocated for strengthening of the law and guidance on child labor in specific sectors.

- **Development of National Guidelines on CL in the Fishery Sector**

Since early 2014, the project has advocated for and engaged the Fishery Administration of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery and the MoLVT to develop national guidelines on child labor in the fisheries sector. The national guidelines are now in final draft and will go through a final national consultative workshop before approval by the Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Fishery. The guidelines will help reduce the issue of child labor in fishing, which together with agriculture and forestry represents over 50% of current child labor.

- **Development of Prakas on Child Domestic Work (CDW)**

Cambodia has not yet ratified the ILO Convention 189 (also known as CDW Convention) and the only mention of CDW in law is a listing as one type of hazardous labor. The EXCEL project used this as a basis to advocate to the MoLVT for the development of a CDW 'Prakas' (a detailed guidance, passed nationally with legal status) since the project started in 2013. The project has supported several workshops and consultative meetings both at the national and provincial levels as part of its advocacy. Recently the MoLVT has called for meeting with EXCEL to discuss the need to develop a Prakas on CDW and asked CDRI (one of EXCEL's local implementing partners) to present the CDW research they've done under EXCEL project. MoLVT has particularly requested the project's support in development of the CDW Prakas and a national stakeholders workshop will be held soon to start the development process.

