

LESSONS FOR PROTECTION

A comparative analysis of community-based child protection mechanisms supported by Plan in Asia

CHILD FRIENDLY
SUMMARY REPORT



INTRODUCTION

Plan International is a child-centred development organisation working in 50 developing countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas. Plan is promoting children's rights, including children's rights to protection from all forms of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation.



Drawing by a child from a community child protection group, Vietnam

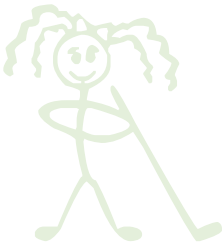


In the Asia region, Plan supported a study that took place from December 2011 to September 2012 to find out more about the ways communities are protecting girls and boys. The study gathered information from children and adults using participatory tools, interviews and group discussions in 13 countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam).¹ A total of 1,313 people were involved in the study (362 men, 435 women, 202 boys and 314 girls).

Community-based child protection mechanisms (CBCPMs) is a term used in this report to describe community-based child protection committees (CPCs) or groups that are working for child protection in communities.

The study was a chance to learn more about CBCPMs:

- the different ways that adults and children are working together in communities to better protect children in villages and towns in different Asian countries;
- the different roles and responsibilities that different people are playing – women, men, girls, boys, teachers, government officials etc; and
- the strengths, achievements, and challenges of community-based CPCs.



Important learning from the regional study is shared in this report. Plan will then use this learning to improve child protection programmes.

¹ With field studies by the research team in five countries: Cambodia, East Timor, Nepal, Pakistan and Vietnam.



Where is Plan supporting CBCPMs?

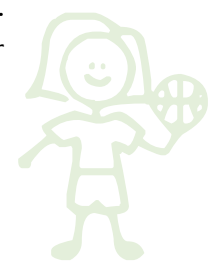
Across 11 countries in Asia, Plan is supporting community-based CPCs in 2,427 communities. Community-based CPCs will be supported in Laos and East Timor in the coming months and years.

Table 1: Numbers of CBCPMs in different countries in Asia

	Bangladesh	Cambodia	China	East Timor	India	Indonesia	Laos	Nepal	Pakistan	Philippines	Sri Lanka	Thailand	Vietnam
Number of CBCPMs	67	129	7	/	1,300	157	/	238	51	387	30	54	27

Most of the child protection committees and groups (89 percent) are supported in rural villages. Only 11 percent of the community protection committees supported by Plan are in towns or cities. Considering that more and more families and young people are moving to towns in search of work, and recognising that girls and boys face many more protection risks in towns or cities, it is important that more community protection work is supported in cities and towns.

Due to the risks of natural disasters in the Asia region (e.g. floods, cyclones, fires, and earthquakes etc) it is important that the community-based child protection groups get involved in emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction activities. Through such activities adults and children can be better prepared to protect children in emergencies.



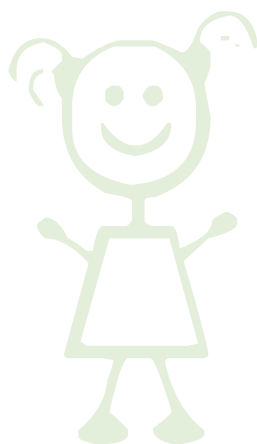
CBCPM structures

The most common structure is the community level CPC. In many countries CPCs have been formed in local communities, especially in rural villages. These committees usually involve 7-20 members, though in some countries there are even more members. CPC members usually include: village chiefs/administrative leaders, teachers, health workers, leaders from existing women's groups, community-based organisations and children or youth groups, as well as other interested community volunteers.

In many countries in Asia, Plan is working in partnership with the local and central government to increase their work on child protection and to make sure governments protect children better. Plan is encouraging governments to increase recognition of, and support for, community-based CPCs.

In some countries Plan also supports different groups and committees linked to specific projects to protect children from trafficking, migration or child labour. However, overall it is most effective for Plan to strengthen government supported CPCs, which usually focus on all forms of child abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation.

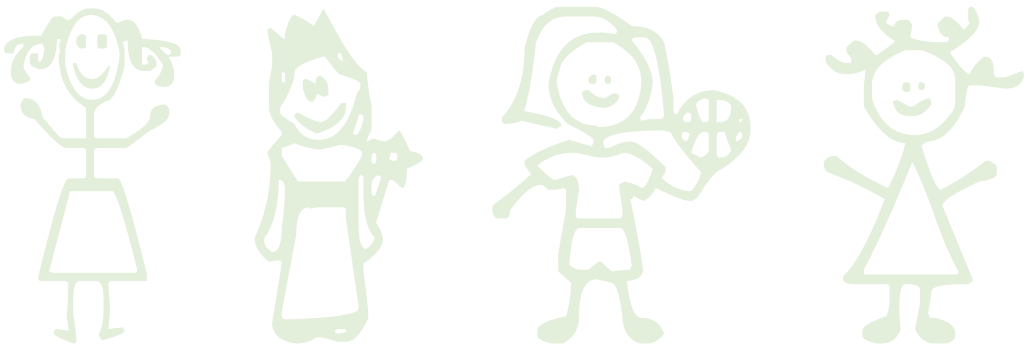
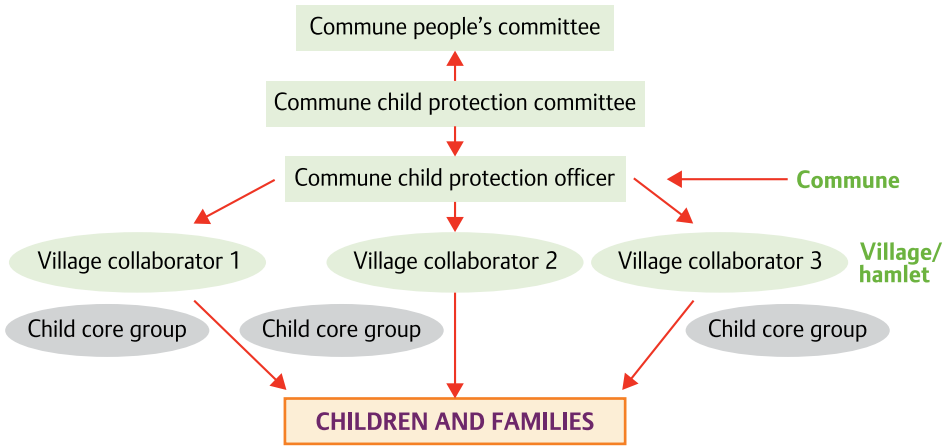
It is very important that local government officials and/or village leaders are involved in the CPCs. However, as the local officials are often very busy with many responsibilities, it is also important to involve women, men, girls and boys who have an



interest in, and the time to be part of, child protection activities in their community. Increased efforts are needed to involve women, men, girls and boys from different backgrounds, including from some of the poorest families.

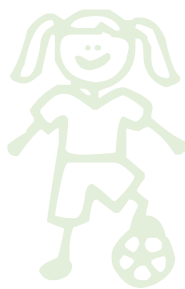
Figure 1: Overview of CBCP mechanism Vietnam

Community-based child protection system organisational structure



CBCPMs functions

The main purpose of most community-based CPCs is to prevent and protect children in the community from all forms of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation.



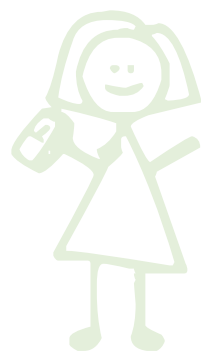
Community-based CPCs have a strong focus on the prevention of violence and harm against children. CBCPMs raise awareness on child rights and child protection among children and adults (parents, caregivers, teachers, community elders, religious elders). In some countries parenting education with parents, and training with teachers is also undertaken to prevent the beating of children. Positive discipline training provides parents, caregivers and teachers with the knowledge and skills to discipline and guide children through communication.

“I have been part of awareness raising and discussions with other parents. We shared our experiences and responded to questions raised among us, so that each of us could help find the solutions. Before the older people used to say ‘spare the rod, spoil the child’, but now we should respect the child as they know their rights and we should respect and guide them.”
(Mother of two children, CBCPS commune)²

In many CPCs the chairperson (who is often the male village leader/local official) has responsibility for linking the committee to the government and other organisations that can help children. Members’ responsibilities often relate to their official

² Shared during ICPREC field study to Vietnam, May 2012.

function as teachers, health workers, or government child protection officers. However, community volunteers (especially women and children) often have more responsibilities for awareness-raising, prevention, monitoring and reporting on child protection.



Participatory research in Nepal

In many countries members of women's groups are supporting community-based child protection work. In the Philippines and in Bangladesh, men's groups are also actively involved in the prevention of violence against women and children. More efforts are needed to increase the involvement of fathers and men in addressing violence against children in other countries. In many countries religious elders also play important roles in raising awareness and influencing child protection practices.

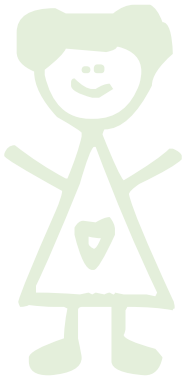
Children's role and participation in CBCPMs

Girls and boys are empowered to voice their protection concerns, to increase their self protection and to protect other children in their communities. Many CPCs include child representatives; and many of them work collaboratively with child groups or child clubs.



Participatory research in Cambodia

Children are playing important roles in raising awareness, identifying risks faced by children and reporting on child protection concerns. Children are also involved in home visits and discussions with adults to prevent and protect children from violence and abuse (e.g. beating, early marriage etc). Children and young people are using creative expression (e.g. drama, music, art) and child-led media initiatives (newsletters, wall magazines, radio or TV programmes) to raise awareness on child protection.



Due to traditions, some adults (parents, caregivers, teachers, community elders) still do not understand the importance of children's participation, and they underestimate girls' and boys' capacities. It takes a long time and a lot of effort to change traditional beliefs about children, where all adults encourage all girls and boys to express their views and to participate in decision making that affects them. This means ongoing efforts are needed to make adults understand the benefits of children's participation.

Many of the existing child groups and CPCs involve school going children aged 10-18 years old. More efforts are needed to reach and involve out-of-school working children, children with disabilities, younger children, children with HIV/AIDS, and/or from other backgrounds.

Because girls and boys are busy with education, household or other work, and leisure activities, it can be challenging to find enough time for children and young people to be involved in child groups and CBCPMs. More efforts are needed to support children's participation at times that suit them. Networking opportunities to support children's groups to learn from one another can also help strengthen children and young people's action initiatives.



Response to child protection issues and case management

Work by community-based CPCs has resulted in increased understanding about child protection. Practices that might have been considered normal, such as beating children, early marriage or heavy child work are increasingly identified as protection concerns.



A girl's drawing of child labour, Pakistan

CPC members are solving some child protection concerns within the community, and they are referring children to available services or to government CPCs at higher levels (e.g. district level).

CPCs often find it difficult to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse cases. Under-reporting on child sexual abuse, early marriage, harmful child work, and emotional abuse within families remains due to sociocultural traditions. In the case of child sexual abuse, secrecy is often maintained because the victim may feel shame. In situations where child sexual abuse is reported, such cases are often settled locally with the abuser paying money to the family of the child. However, this may not be in the best interests of the child. The child should receive psychosocial, medical and legal support. It is a crime to sexually abuse children. Which means if cases are taken to court the abuser may be punished more seriously.

Neglect or children's engagement in work (sometimes because of family poverty) are also hard for CPCs to solve, unless there are livelihood schemes or social protection schemes where cash grants or other practical support is provided.

More needs to be done to support children who experience abuse, exploitation, neglect or violence. Plan should support CPCs to mobilise local community resources and local government funding to support child protection work. Plan should do more to strengthen the government to help support child protection laws, policies and structures at every level (national, province/state, district, community) to improve child protection across Asia.



Linkages



CPCs in different countries are coordinating and collaborating with the local government and organisations. Where national child protection systems extend to district levels, CBCPMs are connected to them, refer cases to them and regularly coordinate with them. While referral mechanisms are fairly well established and used in the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and in some Nepali communities, they remain relatively weak in other country contexts.

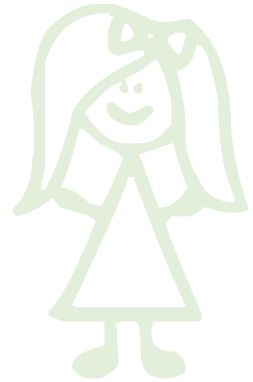


Participatory research with children, Vietnam

Plan needs to engage in more advocacy work and capacity building initiatives to strengthen child protection structures, referral mechanisms, and child-friendly protection services at district, provincial and national levels.



Within Plan country programmes there are strong links between protection and education programmes across the region. The ‘Learn Without Fear’ campaign has helped strengthen child protection mechanisms within schools, and the ‘Because I am a Girl’ campaign has helped prevent and respond to early marriage and other forms of violence against girls. Parenting education programmes supported by ECCD programmes also support child protection work. There are increasing efforts by Plan to integrate disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness into the activities of community CPCs. However, more linkages should be made by CPCs to support the care and protection of children affected by HIV.



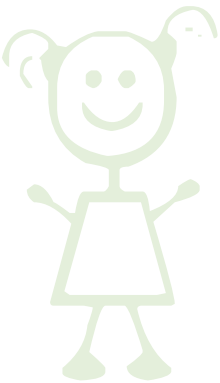
Participatory research in East Timor

Capacity and support to CBCBM's

Support and guidance to community CPCs by Plan (or another child protection agency) in the first few years is important to ensure the quality of child protection work. Training materials on child protection should be adapted and used in local languages. As many CPC members are volunteers, efforts are needed to organise training at times that suit them, and do not interfere with their own livelihood, work or studies.

CPCs should be supported to mobilise local funds to help them carry out their prevention and protection work. Efforts to strengthen referral networks are also needed.

Plan's child-centred community development (CCCD) approach and their Child Protection Policy have contributed to improved child protection practices by Plan staff and partners. However, Plan staff and partners (e.g. local organisations) need more training and support to increase their knowledge and skills to further strengthen child protection system building. In particular, more training is needed on child protection case management to help identification, analysis, planning and response to child protection concerns. In addition, staff need more skills to check on the progress of child protection through good monitoring and evaluation.



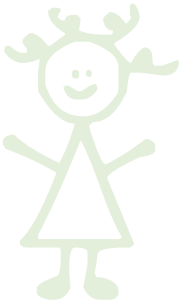
Key achievements through CBCPMs

- ◆ Increased awareness and reporting on child protection.
- ◆ Decreased violence against children in schools and homes.
- ◆ Increased recognition and respect for children and their participation.
- ◆ Increased birth registration.
- ◆ Some CBCPMs have mobilised communities and the local authorities to develop village codes or ordinances to increase local child protection practices.
- ◆ Where they exist, CBCPMs are linking with and making referrals to, government child protection statutory bodies at higher levels.
- ◆ Plan is strengthening the capacity of government officials at district and higher level child protection structures (including the police in some countries).
- ◆ Inter-agency work and advocacy is contributing to improved child protection policies and practices.



Key challenges faced by CBCPMs

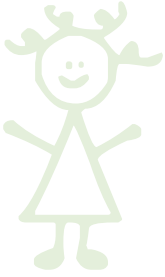
- Preference to solve cases through local settlement and compensation, contrary to best interests of the child principle.
- Lack of sufficient guidance or capacity in CBCPMs to sensitively respond to child sexual abuse cases.
- Time constraints faced by CBCPM volunteers.
- Low levels of community awareness on child protection.
- CBCPMs lack resources to follow up on emergency cases directly; and local governments rarely prioritise child protection when allocating local budgets.
- There are not enough child protection staff, and there is a need for more staff training.



Main recommendations to Plan to strengthen CBCPMs

- Do more to support CBCPM strengthening and to ensure government support to CBCPMs.
- Do more advocacy with governments in partnership with other child-focused agencies to strengthen the child protection system.
- Do more research and analysis to build upon traditional practices which support children's protection and participation, and to change harmful traditional practices.
- Find out more about different concerns faced by girls and boys; and the roles of women, men, girls and boys to improve child protection.
- Ensure inclusive, meaningful and safe children's participation. Make more efforts to reach and empower the most marginalised children.
- Make more efforts to strengthen child-friendly child protection services that support children's recovery and reintegration if they have faced abuse, violence, neglect or exploitation.
- Make more efforts to train social workers with the knowledge and skills to respond to complex and sensitive child protection concerns.





- Develop more ‘multidisciplinary teams’ (like the Child Protection Units in the Philippines or the ‘One Stop Crisis Centres’ in Thailand) where children and family can access psychosocial, medical and legal support in one place.
- Support government efforts to strengthen child protection data collection.
- Improve Plan’s processes for measuring child protection outcomes.
- Strengthen training for Plan staff, partners and CBCP system stakeholders so that all stakeholders of the child protection system are doing a better job of protecting children.
- Develop new or improved training modules on: sensitive reporting and response to child sexual abuse; child protection case management; and advocacy to strengthen child protection systems.
- Learn from existing CBCPM work in urban settings, and to increase research, piloting and scale up of them in urban settings in every country.
- Increase planning, training and support to CBCPMs to integrate emergency preparedness as one of the CBCPM tasks.





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