

Protecting Children in Asia against Child Sexual Exploitation: A focus on Travelling Sex Offenders

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Save the Children Denmark has worked on the issue of protecting children from travelling sex offenders (child sex tourism) since 1997. We have chosen to name this subject sexual abuse and exploitation by traveling sex offenders to reflect the complex and comprehensive nature of the problem, in that it is not only tourists from sending countries that sexual abuse and exploit children. The sexual exploiter comes from different back grounds and may include Business People, NGO workers, Military personnel, ex pats living abroad etc. We should also remember that the vast majority of child sexual abuse and exploitation in destination countries is committed by men and boys from the local community who are generally known to their victims.

This 2 year funded project will combine national and international initiatives that aim to protect children in Asia from sexual abuse and exploitation. It is targeting the demand side of child sexual exploitation by informing Danish citizens who travel abroad about the changed Danish penal code on double criminality. This change means that Danish citizens can be charged in Denmark for sexually abusing children abroad, even if the act is not a criminal offence in the country where the act it is carried out.

According to Finklehors, D (1986) four Pre Conditions, potential sex offenders have to overcome internal and external impediments to abuse a child. The aims of the campaign are to give information to travelling Danes and thereby strengthen the resistance and internal controls of potential sex offenders so that thinking errors (cognitive distortions), so commonly found in sex offenders, are challenged.

The second part of this strategy is to give Danish citizens who witness the sexual abuse and exploitation of children the opportunity to report this potential evidence to the police via the new Hotline. They are therefore also informed about the existence of a hotline that will allow travellers the opportunity to report incidents of sexual abuse and exploitation to the Danish national Police.

This is known as a public health approach to protecting children from sexual abuse and exploitation and has seen impressive results in implementation by the organizations Stop it Now United States and Stop it Now UK & Ireland.

In order to properly target this intervention a mapping exercise on the modus operandi of Danish and other travelling sex offenders will be undertaken in three Asian countries:- Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand. A desk study will be conducted in Denmark which will include an assessment of what the Danish travel industry, business community, law enforcement etc, is doing to prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation carried out by traveling sex offenders.

In order to map the situation of the abuse of children by Danish travelling sex offender's, a field research trip will be carried out to selected areas of Thailand, Cambodia and Burma. The selection of areas will be based on a desk study of existing research and literature and advice from partner organisations, the Danish Travel Industry, the Danish police and relevant authorities in the three countries. Some parts of the reseach may coincide with areas covered by the project Protecting Children in Asia from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, but the research

should not be limited to these areas since the research will have its main focus on Danish travelling sex offenders and the areas most often frequented by these offenders.

The research will use a variety of tools, e.g. literature review, web search, undercover observation, non participant observation and interviews with travelling sex offenders, sexually exploited children, including children who are part of the project, law enforcement agencies, local authorities and social workers in the concerned areas.

The project will also target the supply side of child sexual abuse and exploitation. The strategy towards the supply side is inspired by the framework for national plans of action on the commercial sexual exploitation of children suggested in the Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action. This will be implemented at a local level and as part of an approach which seeks to deal with all child protection issues children face:

- Prevention: including education campaigns on the laws protecting children, community awareness-raising on sexual abuse and exploitation of children, child protection issues, and children's rights; building strong and cohesive communities to tackle these issues.
- Protection: including law reform and strengthening law enforcement, providing safe spaces for vulnerable children and youth, promoting and enhancing access by children and youth to services;
- Recovery: non punitive treatment of children and youth involved in commercial sexual activities, support services for sexual abused and exploited child victims that provide safety, security and wellbeing, assistance where appropriate in re-establishing contact between the child and their relative/s.
- Integration: discrete support to the child or youth during their return to the community, assistance in accessing services, discrete follow-up support.

The project will concentrate on 3 Asian countries which appear to be at different levels in terms of being targeted by travelling sex offenders.

1. Thailand has been associated with child sex tourism (traveling sex offenders) for many years through the attention of the media and work by NGO's to highlight the problem.
2. Cambodia is seen as an emerging destination for child sexual exploitation through tourism and is being increasingly targeted by travelling sex offenders
3. Burma which has been relatively closed does not appear to have the same problems in relation to being a destination of choice for travelling sex offenders.

Due to this difference the interventions in the 3 areas will also vary in order to be adapted to the local context.

In Thailand, where the problem already is acknowledged, the sub-project focus is on identification, care and protection of children, who are sexually abused or who are at risk. This also involves comprehensive systems of awareness and support groups formed at

school, sub-district and provincial level. It also aims at raising awareness on IT related sex crimes. The sub-project will work through local NGO's

In Cambodia the sub project works at the community level to protect children from being exposed to violence, sexual abuse and exploitation by engaging all stakeholders including children in identifying potential risk situations, identifying approaches to prevent expose and promote care within the community.

In Burma the problem of child sexual abuse and exploitation is still not fully recognised and very little information is available about the sexual exploitation of children. Therefore one important strategy is to make the issue more visible and to generate more knowledge into all issues that involve protecting children from sexual abuse and exploitation children. At the same time it is necessary to learn what really works for children in tackling such child protection issues. Overall the sub-project will focus on prevention. This will include :-

- Education campaigns on laws protecting children,
- Implement awareness raising programs to inform local communities about sexual abuse and exploitation
- Child protection issues and child rights in order to build strong and cohesive communities to tackle the issues.
- Protection through advocating for changes in legislation and strengthening law enforcement ,
- Providing safe spaces for vulnerable children and youth
- Strengthening the social welfare services
- Recovery through care and protection of children who have been sexually abused and exploited

It is known that there is a considerable risk that the targeted children are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. The project includes these children in the target group and aim at avoiding discrimination of these children. The project will aim at ensuring that awareness raising regarding transmission and prevention of HIV/AIDS is carried out in the target area. Life skills training will include how to say no to unsafe sex. It will also support the target children in getting access to HIV/AIDS testing and advise, ARV treatment and follow-up. Furthermore the project will aim at ensuring that caretakers (parents or guardians) receive information regarding the road of infection, support affected children, medicine etc.

Based on experience from other countries where Save the Children has experience it has been found important Child rights programming (CRP) is the approach underpinning all Save the Children Denmark's programme work. This ensures a clear focus on children as rights holders, on their roles as social actors, and on holding duty bearers accountable. Child rights programming offers a framework for empowering children and their supporters to demand compliance with the rights of all children, upholding the principle of the best interest of the child.

It is also important to examine the experiences of children who have been integrated after being subjected to sexually abuse and exploitation.

The project will be implemented with the participation of children in order for them to add their voice and ideas. Evidence also shows that peer groups are often better able to reach these troubled and neglected children. The project will also draw on experiences which the partner organisations already have in the three countries and will also draw on Save the Children Denmark's partners' project experiences from Bangladesh.

The project will also feed into the Third World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children that is being planned to be held in Brazil in November 2008, as a platform for the global advocacy campaign. Staff from Save the Children and ECPAT will be attending this congress and will present workshops there.

By the end of the project it is planned that the best practices will be documented so that they can be used for other actors.

The project will start with an inception phase during which period the planning, contractual agreements etc. will be finalized. During the inception phase, the project document will be developed into a more specific tool for project implementation in close cooperation with partners and beneficiary groups.

The project is applying for funding to run for two years. In terms of sustainability this is not a long period of time to implement sustainable changes to child protection systems in three countries. National and local government departments will be lobbied in all three countries so they will be better equipped to work with NGO's and local communities to facilitate change that leads to more effective child protection systems. Save the Children Denmark will work with partner organizations and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ensure that the projects initiated at this stage are further developed and incorporated by local communities and national governments. It is vital that ownership of the projects is transferred to communities, local and national governmental organizations in the long term. This will be achieved by involving them in the projects at an early stage. This will be further elaborated during the inception phase.