



## SELECTED NOTES ON CHILD LABOUR IN CAMBODIA

Steve Gourley, Child Rights Consultant, LICADHO

- ◆ Most “child labour” in Cambodia is family and community-based, and contributes positively to family survival (though other reasons exist). At times the children’s work is combined with schooling and/or provides opportunities to learn useful skills.
- ◆ Therefore, most may not be considered exploitive and abusive “worst forms” needing immediate eradication. This is because immediate and serious threats to health and moral development are often low for most working children; negative effects are more often related to the long-term impact of work such as the children’s lack of access to education and ability to break out of cycle of poverty.
- ◆ Immediate attention needs to be given to the most hazardous and exploitive forms of child labour, as specified in ILO Convention #182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. These include the sale and trafficking of children for forced labour in commercial sex and other industries, drug trafficking, and work which exposes children to serious physiological or physical abuse. LICADHO actively combats these forms through activities focused on prevention, intervention and, in partnership with NGO/GO’s and community-based organisations, rehabilitation for victims.
- ◆ However, over the long-term the needs of the majority of children working in the informal sector (including agriculture) should also be addressed. LICADHO is also responding to this through awareness-raising activities on child labour and child rights, both alone and in partnership with the Ministry of Labour.
- ◆ Because most child labour in Cambodia usually involves working with other family members to provide for basic needs, it is part of the families’ “survival strategy.” Efforts to remove children from work or limit their involvement must be done with extreme care as this is interfering with their means of survival.
- ◆ Interfering with a family or community’s survival strategy may not always be in the best interests of the child. This may therefore be in violation of Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that all interventions must be in the “best interests of the child”.

- ◆ Responses to child labour need to balance Article 3 (Best Interests) and Article 6 (Right to Survival & Development) with Article 32 (Protection from Child Labour). This will help to prevent the type of interventions which are well meaning but which may actually create new and more difficult problems for the children.
- ◆ There is a lack of understanding of the difference between child labour (which has seriously harmful short and long-term effects) and child work (which offers many practical benefits in the short-term yet may hinder long-term development if education is not combined with work). In addition, there is often a large gap between the way working children and their communities see their situation as compared to the way outsiders view it.
- ◆ Each situation of working children should always be determined by careful evaluation with input from the children and parents themselves. This should include discussion of positive as well as negative aspects which they see in their work, allowing a more realistic and balanced view of what the children are experiencing. Seeing child labour from their perspective is also crucial in developing responses which are supported by the children and their families.