

# Strong Women Strong World

**About 3.3 million people in Cambodia (nearly 23 percent of the population) live in extreme poverty—on less than \$1.25 per day (UNICEF).**



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*Ruse\* was only 13 when she accepted an offer from a brothel owner to sell her virginity. The brothel owner said it was worth a high price, and Ruse was desperate to earn money to help pay for treatment for her chronically ill mother.*

*Ruse was exploited in several brothels in Phnom Penh. Eventually, a police raid freed about 40 girls, including Ruse, who was referred to World Vision's Trauma Recovery Center. There, she received counseling, medical care, and vocational training, along with compassion and care from the staff.*

*Eventually, Ruse became a nanny. She said, "I dream of having a family and marrying a good guy who doesn't discriminate [against] me because I have a bad past." Ruse also hopes that she can help girls who were trapped as she was. "I really want to help other girls who work as prostitutes because, for some girls, they have no choice and they are forced," she said. "I hope I will become a person who would rescue those girls."*

*\* Not her real name*

## CHILD PROTECTION IN CAMBODIA

Women and girls around the world suffer extreme trauma and hardship in the face of gender inequity. In Cambodia, risks include violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The Child Protection Program in Cambodia works to equip women to advocate for, defend, and protect themselves, their children, and one another from these dangerous, often life-threatening situations.

Cambodia is well-known as a source, transit, and destination country for forced labor and sex trafficking. Girls in their teens and even younger are sold into prostitution. Labor and sex trafficking often result in survivors being physically and emotionally traumatized—an impact that lingers well beyond removal from a brothel.

Once exploited, adolescents and children often face discrimination and further abuse. Trauma can be intensified for survivors during police investigations or legal proceedings. Because of the lack of government and community-based restoration services, survivors need intensive restorative care before being reintegrated into their families. Survivors may need intensive counseling, medical treatment, shelter, and vocational training. This level of service is in limited supply in Phnom Penh and across the country.

## PREVENT, PROTECT, RESTORE

Through the Strong Women, Strong World Cambodia Child Protection Program, World Vision works to empower women and girls with the tools, information, and resources they need to be safe at home, work, school, and throughout their communities. The program has three core objectives: prevention of harm, protection of the vulnerable, and restoration of child survivors of exploitation and abuse.

The interventions we focus on are critical, community-based, and sustainable. We strive to increase public awareness of trafficking and abuse, help communities identify perpetrators, rescue victims, improve services for traumatized individuals, hold government agencies accountable to implementing laws with integrity and compassion, and teach children how to stay safe.

## Program Goal and Outcomes

The goal of the Cambodia Child Protection Program is to reduce the vulnerability of girls to sex trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and sexual abuse. We work to improve the overall capacity of the Cambodian government and civil society to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse of children, protect children, and restore those who have been harmed. The budget for fiscal 2014 is \$1,430,845. We are working to achieve these outcomes:

- Strengthen civil society and government structures and mechanisms that prevent child sexual exploitation and abuse and respond to child survivors
- Protect child survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse from further abuse, exploitation, or trauma in the community
- Facilitate restorative care and community transition and reintegration for child survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse

## Objectives and Strategies

The Cambodia Child Protection Program tackles trafficking and abuse in a comprehensive way—from stopping exploitation to helping survivors heal. We work to create safe families and communities in which children can grow and thrive.

Complementing our prevent-protect-restore objectives are key strategies that we employ to enhance the well-being of children we serve, including the following:

**Encouraging and reinforcing community-based child protection** World Vision wants children to be protected where they live. To achieve this, we work through and with local systems and partners. We recognize that communities have assets and resources that can safeguard children, and we want to build from those.

**Enabling children to grow up in a family and community** Our programs help equip families and communities to be loving and protective. We want children living in families that are nurturing and secure.

**Restoring children to family and community life** When children have suffered trafficking or abuse, our goal is to reunite them with their families. When that is not possible, we help integrate children with foster families or other loving, family-like households.

**Strengthening systems that exist to protect children** A child protection system is a set of coordinated formal and informal elements working together to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children. A systems-strengthening approach—which is what our Cambodia program uses—addresses child protection holistically, emphasizes prevention, and reinforces the roles of those responsible for protecting children (families, churches, local leaders, schools, hospitals, police, courts, and government).

**Advocating for effective child protection laws** World Vision has a responsibility and the capacity to influence action. Working with partners from government and the international aid arena, we advocate for laws, regulations, and plans recognizing child rights and strengthening protections for children, and we help ensure their adoption and enforcement.

**Empowering children** This is a significant component of the systems-strengthening approach and also an important part of World Vision's development framework. Through child protection programs, we help children understand their rights, how to protect themselves, and how to be a voice for themselves and their peers.

## Recent Accomplishments

During fiscal year 2013 (October 2012 through September 2013), highlights included the following:

- 935 youth club members learned personal safety and other life skills
- 311 police and other officials were trained to investigate abuse complaints while protecting children from further trauma
- 236 child survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse were admitted to restorative care
- 250 child survivors of sexual abuse and exploitation were assessed, with 236 admitted to shelter care
- Of those transitioning out of residential care this year, the vast majority—203—were able to return to their families. Five survivors married and are happy to be starting their own families.

### CAMBODIA CHILD PROTECTION PROGRAM

BENEFICIARIES BY SEPTEMBER 2015

193,533

FIVE-YEAR BUDGET

\$ 7,097,669

FISCAL 2014 BUDGET

\$ 1,430,845



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**Perhaps the most far-reaching challenge—one with potential for long-term impact—is to help change the environment (where children can be exploited easily) and systems (which are inadequately equipped to respond to cases of abuse). If we help communities fill gaps in prevention, protection, and restoration, we can make significant progress in building a safer world for Cambodia's children.**