

PROVINCIAL POWER

How public and private agencies work together against child labour



THE PROJECT'S OBJECTIVE: Fortifying local and provincial capacity through collective concentration on intolerable child labour.

Collaboration for the prevention and elimination of hazardous child labour

THE INITIAL CHALLENGE: Samut Sakhon, 30 kilometers from Bangkok, has become the country's largest fisheries-related industrial hub, housing a variety of small to large seafood processing facilities for both domestic consumption and export. A very large number of migrant workers from various parts of Thailand as well as from neighbouring countries, particularly Myanmar and to a lesser extent Lao PDR and Cambodia, live in the province. In 2008, the Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour, estimated that there were more than 125,000 migrant workers in the province, excluding dependants and those who have not registered themselves (when they are factored in, the estimated number is more than double). According to the Samut Sakhon Labour Protection and Welfare Office (as of April 2006), there were 4,715 child workers aged 15-17 years who are registered. More realistically, there are at least 20,000 Thai and migrant child workers, according to the Labour Rights Promotion Network Foundation (LPN), an NGO working in the province.



The Asian Research Center for Migration within the Asian Studies Institute, Chulalongkorn University, in collaboration with the International Labour Organization and LPN, surveyed child workers in two districts (Muang and Krathumbaen) of Samut Sakhon in 2005. Among the sample of 643 Thai and migrant child workers aged 9-17 whom they surveyed, 111 worked in the fishing sector, 303 in subcontracted fishing-related industries, 109 in agriculture and 120 in domestic work. Their study found that 495 of the children sampled were migrant or stateless workers (76.8 per cent); 263 were younger than 15 (40.9 per cent), and 182 were identified as working in inappropriate (hazardous) employment. The majority of the children were ethnic Mon, followed by Thais, ethnic Burman and Thai hill tribes. Child workers aged 9-12 were mostly employed in the agriculture and domestic sectors, whereas the older child workers were mostly in fishing and fisheries-related industries. There was a need to build a systematic approach to finding children who legally should not be working and to remove any child from a hazardous situation.

THE RESPONSE: The ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour and its Project to Support National Action to Combat Child Labour and Its Worst Forms in Thailand (the ILO-IPEC project) worked with the provincial government and NGOs to establish what has become a committed and industrious multidiscipline provincial operations network (subcommittee) to address child labour issues. The Provincial Subcommittee on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour is in line with the action plan of the national committee of the same name.

The multidiscipline subcommittee's members set themselves up into five working groups to draft strategies and action plans that dealt with the local context of child labour, mobilized resources and improved the monitoring and labour-inspection systems.

THE PROCESS: The provincial governor and the Provincial Committee on the Administration of Irregular Migrants in Samut Sakhon already recognized the importance of migrant workers issues years ago. They issued a comprehensive administrative policy on undocumented foreign migrant workers in 2004, followed by another policy on the provision of education for stateless children in 2005. The policy opened up the proper registration process for employers who want to employ migrant workers and their dependents, beginning a new era of improved labour management.

In addition, the provincial authority provides public health services for the children of migrant workers, and legal and social services for child workers and women who have become victims of human trafficking. It supports the training of migrant workers in the workplace and promotes a friendly coexistence between the Thai and migrant populations.

Thus at the start of the ILO-IPEC project, the receptive governor and vice-governor in charge of labour affairs in Samut Sakhon were consulted on the programme's new level of interventions to encourage more collaboration of partners. The governor followed with the appointment of the Provincial Subcommittee on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour that included agencies and organizations with similar mandates. A Memorandum of Understanding on Combating Child Labour was signed in April 2008 by the 30 public and private agencies and NGOs who joined as members.

The Provincial Office of Labour (POL) and the Provincial Office of Labour Protection and Welfare (PLPW) were designated as the secretariat for the multidiscipline subcommittee to coordinate the network activities, oversee the integration of child labour issues into the provincial development strategies and to develop indicators.





Lead agencies

4

During the first subcommittee meeting, the network partners agreed on seven lead executing agencies. For example, the Education Area Office (EAO) took the lead for activities on surveying migrant children and mobilizing schools to enrol them. With ILO-IPEC project support, the lead agencies coordinated with other similarly mandated partners to develop work and monitoring plans, which were submitted to the secretariat for the governor's approval. The POL allocated a budget to the lead agency and monitored the reporting compliances.

These executing agencies consist of the PLPW, the EAO, the Provincial Office of Employment (POE), the Non-Formal Education (NFE) Office, the Provincial Public Relations (PR) Office, the Region 7 Occupational Safety Centre and the Asian Research Centre for Migration (ARCM) of Chulalongkorn University.

The multidiscipline subcommittee members then established the five working groups to focus on the specific objectives of the ILO-IPEC project: The five working groups related to: i) the systematic enrolment of migrant children into educational facilities, ii) awareness raising, iii) a provincial database on child labour, iv) a non-formal education curriculum and v) a competition for good-factory status. Working group meetings took place on a monthly or twice-monthly basis in which members discussed the implementation processes and the challenges to and solutions for the different activities.

Activities

To start the project off, the PR Office conducted a one-day sensitization workshop for 70 media professionals also in September 2008 with the intent of expanding the coverage and quality of reporting on child labour and the situation of migrant children in the province. The PR Office produces its own television programme called “Samut Sakhon on Air” and after the workshop began including relevant topics on child and migrant labour. In addition, the PR Office produced and distributed booklets, factsheets and a video on child labour.

Also among the first activities, the multidiscipline subcommittee was a series of training workshops for entrepreneurs of fisheries-related businesses and migrant worker volunteers (who would take on child labour monitoring) from around 150 factories in November 2008. It was followed by a second series of trainings a year later. During the workshops, the participants were sensitized on child labour issues and discussed how to improve conditions for young workers or refer those too young to a school or learning centre.

The POL, PLPW and the POE then conducted a series of consultations on how to establish a provincial information base on child labour by analysing data from migrant child workers who applied to renew their work permit in 2008. With that information, they created a website - www.ilo.itban.com - on the child labour situation in the province. Its overview will soon be publicly available on the provincial website - www.samutsakhon.go.th, which will also link to the forthcoming national website.

The EAO initiated a survey of migrant students in schools that have enrolled a number of Mon and Burmese migrant children and fed that information into a database on child labour (see the project note on child labour monitoring). The EAO also hired teaching assistants for schools that were in need of personnel to teach Thai and in Mon/Burmese in transitional as well as formal education. The NFE and the technical team from Chulalongkorn University organized a series of consultations on the scope of generic curriculum development for learning centres for migrant children (see the project notes on education support for migrant children).

The PLPW started a hotline phone service by designating a mobile phone number to receive complaints or reports on child labour and an annual “Good Factories” contest for the best small- and medium-scale food processing facilities and fish docks.

The PLPW also organized a series of on-site trainings on child labour and the labour law in small-scale factories that employ young migrant workers. During the trainings, the trainers often identified child workers and influenced the employers to formally report their employment.

The Working Group on Promoting Systematic Enrolment of Migrant Children in Educational Facilities coordinated non-formal and formal education activities among members. They agreed that younger children (aged 5-14) would be referred to a preparatory literacy class run by the Raks Thai Foundation and the older workers (aged 15-17) would be referred to life skills training at LPN's learning centre as well as to the Non-Formal Education Office for vocational skills training. The NFE, LPN, Raks Thai and the ARCM jointly developed a series of modules on basic communication, life skills and vocational skills training for migrant child workers. Their draft curriculum was presented to a peer review workshop and field tested with selected partner schools and NGO learning centres.

The PLPW, the Marine Commerce Office, the Marine Police, the ARCM and other agencies developed a pilot model for monitoring seaman's books and departing and arriving fishing boats. In addition, the PLPW organized two meetings to mobilize local employers from 98 seafood-processing enterprises to brainstorm on how to promote the quality of life of their migrant workers.

ONGOING CHALLENGES:

- The hotline for reporting child labour situations is not so popular, possibly because callers have to pay for the call.
- The registration of child workers among migrant children is very fluid because many do not possess any document that certifies their age. As a result, some children who are underage may be registered as an older child in order to work, especially in jobs not open to anyone younger than 15.
- Employers could take a more proactive role in preventing the use of child labour in their respective factories; ongoing awareness raising among owners and managers of micro enterprises and small factories is required.
- Reporting and monitoring of child workers needs to become an integral part of the labour inspection at all levels of the supply chains.
- Referral services of migrant children and migrant child workers are still limited to a small number of schools and NGOs.

OUTCOMES:

- A robust multidiscipline Provincial Subcommittee on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour with 30 members from public and private agencies and NGOs has been working aggressively to confront child labour problems.
- Five working groups established: i) the Working Group on Promoting Systematic Enrolment of Migrant Children in Educational Facilities, ii) the Working Group on Awareness Raising on the Issues of Child and Migrant Labour, iii) the Working Group on a Provincial Database of Child Labour, iv) the Working Group on Non-Formal Curriculum for Young Migrant Workers and v) Young Job Seekers, and the Working Group on Competition for Good-Factory Status.
- Some 1,125 migrant student profiles were recorded into a database to track those who work.

The province has built an exemplary level of institutional capacity to address the issue of child labour collectively. In particular, policy development and public education are moving forward well. Through the multidiscipline subcommittee and working groups, the ILO-IPEC project established an impressive platform for public and private agencies to take a more proactive part in addressing child labour.

The PR office has continued its collaboration with local networks of media. News reports on child labour and the situation of migrant children appear frequently. There are approximately ten news reports per month in the local newspapers, 20 radio broadcasts per month (radio spots and discussion programmes) and a cable TV programme every Wednesday. The issue of child labour has become a relatively common topic in the province due to the work of the provincial PR Office and its media networks.



“The real strength of this multidiscipline subcommittee is that it was the public agencies that gave it tremendous momentum,” says Prof. Dr. Supang Chatavanich, ARCM Director and a subcommittee member. “Typically we see this level of commitment and drive initiated by agencies working on human trafficking, especially civil society organizations. In the context of child labour work, Samut Sakhon can serve as a model of integrated interventions by multistakeholders in addressing the inappropriate forms of child labour.”

Other members see changes due to the work of the multidiscipline subcommittee. Says Sompong Srakaew, LPN Director, “I would say that the public education on child labour issue in Samut Sakhon is spreading quite well. We have seen fewer young migrant children aged 9-12 at work. It seems that local people and migrant parents have become more aware of the unacceptable use of very young children for work.”

LESSONS LEARNED:

- The passing of the National Policy and Plan (NPP) to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labour (2009-2014) in January 2009 (see the project note on the national policy) was very timely for ensuring the sustainability of the provincial subcommittee because the NPP heavily promotes the establishment of such committees at the provincial level.
- Organizing regular committee meetings reinforced the commitment and responsibility of the member agencies as well as ownership of the work.
- Having lead agencies design and implement activities in connection with their mandates proved beneficial for all involved. The lead agencies were responsible for completing the designated tasks.
- Establishing an effective database on child labour and children at risk, including a mapping of workplaces and schools is a valuable tool for raising awareness on the importance of providing protection and social services to migrant children and child workers.