

CHILD SCRUTINY

How to keep tabs on workplaces and keep children out of them



1

THE PROJECT'S OBJECTIVES: Institutionalizing a locally adaptable system that relies on multiple partners and community volunteers for finding children in the worst forms of child labour or other unacceptable conditions, removing them and referring them to appropriate services, and keeping track of what becomes of them through an established provincial database system that also informs national policy planning.

Child labour monitoring and referral

THE INITIAL CHALLENGE: The Ministry of Labour had requested all its provincial offices to closely monitor child labour. However, their ranks of labour inspectors are small compared with the number of businesses. Some labour inspectors have little knowledge of issues related to the worst forms of child labour, labour trafficking and children's rights in general. The prospect of inspecting agriculture or fishing areas as well as the informal and home-based sectors, where the majority of child labourers are found, most often falls outside of the formal channel for workplace inspections.



Because there was no database on child labour for national policy planning and no applicable models for child labour monitoring in Thailand, there was a need to create an appropriate system to systemically maintain data on child labourers and assistance provision. There was also a need to build up a network of partner agencies and volunteers, particularly people within specific communities, to carry out the required monitoring and take responsibility for protecting children's labour rights.

THE RESPONSE: The International Labour Organization'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) targeted six provinces for developing child labour monitoring and referral systems.

A child labour monitoring and referral system typically has five functions:

2

- Trained monitors identify children in improper work situations.
- The workplace is checked to see what types of work-related hazards exist and that the child workers may be exposed to, including children working with family members or in the informal sector. Employers and entrepreneurs are asked to improve the workplace environment as well as the working conditions.
- If children are assessed to be at serious risk, they are referred to responsible agencies and services corresponding to their needs via a network of service providers and an agreed procedure is arranged.
- Vulnerable children are also closely monitored and provided with assistance to prevent them from entering into working conditions, especially the worst forms of child labour.
- Data on child labourers, vulnerable children and assistance provision are maintained and analysed for effective planning and actions.

THE PROCESS: Building on ILO-IPEC training materials on child labour inspection and child labour monitoring as well as lessons drawn from ILO-IPEC's global experiences, the Khon Kaen University's Research and Development Institute took responsibility for designing a child labour monitoring and referral system for use in the six pilot provinces. They worked with researchers from Thammasat University who developed a software package for the database and reporting function. The general system developed by the Khon Kaen researchers was further adapted in a tailor-made fashion for each province. The researchers then assisted the provincial agencies to implement their own system.

Meanwhile, the National Policy and Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labour (2009-2014), which the Thai Cabinet approved in 2009, called for a community-based child labour monitor (CLM) system as one of its primary mechanisms for tackling child labour. It suggested that the CLM be “...established and developed at the community levels with support from local administration offices, community organizations, civil society organizations, etc.” (see the project note on the national policy for more information). It also called for the establishment of a database, data analysis and a reporting system on child labour.

The roll-out of the CLM system in each of the six provinces started after Ministry of Labour officers and selected labour inspectors attended a CLM seminar in May 2009 in Bangkok that the ILO-IPEC project organized.

As part of the roll-out, the Khon Kaen researchers trained representatives from relevant local government agencies, employers, workers, teachers, community volunteers and NGOs in all six provinces on using the system and the process for monitoring child labour.

To help strengthen the commitment of the government agencies at the provincial level under the overall coordination of the Provincial Office of Welfare and Labour Protection (PWLP), an “instruction letter” from the Ministry of Labour created a mandate for their integrating monitoring into their regular activities.

Volunteers were assigned the duty of collecting the data on working children. Strengths and weaknesses of each geographical area were considered when identifying the desired profiles of the volunteers needed for the data collection. The type of volunteers targeted typically were teachers, graduate students and labour and public health officers.

In some areas, however, volunteers, such as the public health volunteers, could not access certain sites because it was out of their responsibility area, such as large-scale establishments, closed farms, and shelters of migrant workers outside their village. Teachers from learning centres and public schools were then drawn in to complement the public health volunteers’ efforts. In some provinces, the labour inspectors worked with a group of volunteers and local administration officers, such as the Tambon Administration Officers, village cluster headmen or village headmen, to inspect workplaces. This process also became a kind of on-the-job training and information sharing, which enabled the local administrators to understand more about workplace safety as well as the child labour situation in their community.

Training on CLM, its system and the questionnaires was very intense and frequent in all six provinces throughout the June 2009 to January 2010 period.

Because the Khon Kaen monitoring model was in line with the national policy prescriptive, a mid-term evaluation workshop was organized to promote it for national pick up. The two-day workshop brought together 80 representatives from government agencies, workers’ and employers’ organizations and NGOs at the national, provincial and local levels to discuss the status of the project’s systems in each pilot province and to share experiences on how to make them more sustainable and effective. The participants concluded that the CLM systems should be linked to the Operation Centres for Providing Assistance for Women and



Child Labourers, which were re-established in each province (they operated under another name for a previous project) as well as at the national level through a Cabinet decision in February 2010 to ensure their sustainability.

Beyond the ILO-IPEC project, the Khon Kaen research team will facilitate information exchange between the pilot provinces, documenting good practices and effective approaches on CLM and linking their findings with national officers.

Chiang Rai province

An adapted version of the generic CLM system was piloted in 11 villages of Huay Krai subdistrict (Maesai district), considered as having a large number of working migrant children, in collaboration with the Provincial Office of Social Development and Human Security (PSDHS). The Khon Kaen researchers provided technical support and guidance. The Chiang Rai Provincial Operation Centre for the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking (the “operation centre” under the PSDHS) coordinated the CLM activities. The operation centre is a multidisciplinary unit involving social workers, health officers, police officers, legal officers, labour volunteers, community workers and NGO officers.

Two community volunteers were selected from each village for training in child labour monitoring. The training focused on equipping them with the basic knowledge of child labour and its worst forms. They were

also introduced to the referral mechanism within the operation centre. The database was established within the domain of the operation centre.

A pilot survey was conducted to identify working children and those at risk. The data was sent to the subdistrict level for verification. Then it fed into the operation centre's database and eventually into an action plan. Children identified as in a worst form of labour were withdrawn and through the referral system were directed to appropriate rehabilitation and reintegration services.

Samut Sakhon province

Representatives from PWLP and the Provincial Office of Labour selected Bangyapraeg subdistrict (Muang district) as the project pilot site. After the training session for the public health volunteers on the CLM system and on using the CLM questionnaire, the field survey was carried out in late October 2009. The provincial governor appointed the Committee of the Operation Centre for Providing Assistance for Women and Child Labourers. As in other provinces, the operation centre functions as the referral mechanism for the CLM system; members review the field surveys and agree on the appropriate action needed. The first meeting of the committee took place 8 February 2010.

Songkhla and Pattani provinces

Officers from the PWLP for both provinces selected Ban Na subdistrict (Songkhla) and Laemnok village (Pattani) as the pilot sites. Labour volunteers conducted the child labour survey in Songkhla while public health volunteers did the surveying in Pattani, reporting the results to the operation centre. In Pattani, the provincial governor appointed a subdistrict CLM working group to encourage more participation among local authorities and leaders. Based on recommendations from the working group in Ba Na subdistrict, a workshop with parents of child workers and community leaders was organized in Laem Nok village to explain about child labour issues and the need for local participation in protection activities. A meeting with entrepreneurs in Ba Na also was organized to introduce the CLM system and encourage their involvement in tackling the child labour problem.

Tak province

Representatives of the PWLP, the subdistrict administration and civil society groups selected Pob Pra subdistrict (Pob Pra district) and Mae Pa subdistrict (Mae Sot district) as the CLM pilot sites. The two sites represent different child labour working conditions. In Pob Pra, most young workers are in agriculture while in Mae Pa they are found in the industrial and services sectors. Public health volunteers were trained on child labour in its worst forms criteria in preparation for their help in data collection. However, because most of the workers are foreign migrants, the health volunteers experienced communication problems during the interviews. Also, they could not enter the closed farms or the big factories. The Khon Kaen researchers thus trained teachers from learning centres and public schools in the area to help with data collection.

The governor appointed a CLM committee at the provincial and two subdistrict levels. Representatives from the two subdistrict administration offices and a PWLP officer were trained on using the CLM software. The completed questionnaires were sent to the subdistrict offices for data entry and report preparation. The database was later transferred to the PWLP, which serves as the secretariat of the provincial CLM working group. This way, the survey results are first reported at the subdistrict level and prevention measures and other needed responses are considered there, closest to the problem. For example, members of the CLM working group visited factories and entrepreneurs in Mae Pa subdistrict where the health volunteers could not enter. Based on recommendations from the Pob Pra CLM working group, the Khon Kaen team joined the monthly district meeting to introduce the CLM programme to village headmen and representatives of relevant agencies. The CLM provincial committee met twice to hear the survey findings and to discuss the CLM work plan.

Udon Thani

Representatives of the PWLP, the Provincial Labour Office and the Office of Social Development and Human Security selected Nong Bua municipality (Muang district) as the pilot site. Cluster leaders and health volunteers collected the first batch of child labour data. A staff member in the Nong Bua municipality office and one from the PLPW were trained on how to use the CLM software. The provincial operation centre committee was appointed and first met on 30 April 2010 to discuss the national policy and plan regarding the worst forms of child labour and the progress report on CLM interventions. The committee insisted that the Khon Kaen University's Research and Development Institute and the PLPW disseminate information about child labour to the general public and relevant agencies. The PLPW requested that agencies and organizations submit project proposals for tackling the worst forms of child labour within April as preparation for drafting a work plan of projects and activities from all partners.

ONGOING CHALLENGES:

- Child workers move frequently and maintaining updated records on them is difficult.
- The issue of child workers is sensitive and the situation of foreign child workers is more complicated.
- The knowledge and understanding of officers and the public about the worst forms of child labour is limited, which eventually obstructs their participation in CLM activities.
- Accessing some factories is difficult for volunteers.
- The establishment of a partner-agency network in some provinces is still very new, making referral services somewhat weak and limited. The CLM mechanism requires more time and continuous support to help the system work effectively by itself. This is particularly the case for migrant children who, in practice, have fewer choices than Thai children. Migrant children have limited access to social services. Current assistance provided to migrant children depends largely on NGOs and community-based services, which sometimes are insufficient or unavailable.



- Ongoing monitoring requires travelling sometimes and, in particular for the agriculture areas, to remote areas. The local partners have limited budget for travel, which in turn puts limitations on the regularity and frequency of monitoring visits.

OUTCOMES:

- Provincial child labour monitoring and referral committees have been established in each of the six pilot provinces of Chiang Rai, Pattani, Samut Sakhon, Songkhla, Tak and Udon Thani. In Chiang Rai and Tak, subdistrict committees in the targeted sites also have been established. Meetings of the committees were organized, with CLM interventions introduced.
- Tools for child labour data collection - an individual interview form, a standard observation form and CLM software - were developed.
- Pilot surveys were conducted in all six project provinces through the involvement of local volunteers - the public health volunteers, graduate school volunteers, teachers of learning centres and public schools, cluster and community leaders as well as worker volunteers.
- Officials from related agencies, such as the subdistrict administrative organizations in the pilot sites and the PWLP, were trained on how to use the CLM software for data entry and report preparation.

The two subdistrict workshops in Songkhla and Pattani provinces proved quite successful, with villagers asking for more of that type of activity.

Says Sinee Chuangcham with the Research and Development Institute at Khon Kaen University, “We have been quite successful in receiving good cooperation from various government agencies, which allows the volunteers to participate in child labour monitoring and referral exercises and work together with the Government in an integrated way. This then has enabled us to reach out to children across several economic sectors.”

LESSONS LEARNED:

- Intensive awareness raising on child labour issues at the community level is critical for reducing child labour.
- Intensive and continuous support for a community-based CLM system establishment, data-collection strategy development and capacity building for data analysis is required.
- Government officials have many limitations in reaching child labourers, making a community-based network an imperative. The involvement of NGOs, civil society organizations, academic institutes and especially the private sector and entrepreneurs are crucial in the monitoring of child labour.
- The subdistrict CLM working committees and working groups have proven to be the most active because they are closer to the problems and eager to seek proper solutions. However, a clear allocation of necessary resources and provision of support measures are needed to strengthen the participation of local authorities.

