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CL
Child Led
Participatory
Action Research

PAR

Almost a Way of Life

Children's research and reflections on abuse, exploitation, violence, and inadequate care

Almost a Way of Life—a title stemming from the comments of a 14-year old girl who took part in this research—is demonstrative of the widespread social tolerance and acceptance of many child protection issues in Myanmar; sadly, even amongst children themselves. “Going up the mountain,” a euphemism meaning to migrate to Thailand for work is referred to so broadly in Kayin state, for example, as to almost be a self-fulfilling prophecy for many young people. Moreover, to listen to children's voices, something as simple as attending primary school seems to almost be a luxury despite access to education being one the most basic of rights.

There is hope in children's research and reflections, however. For the children who conducted this research themselves—almost all of them out of school—we have noted the marked increase in their self-esteem and confidence by taking part in this project. Adults, who children surveyed, were astounded with the professional manner in which children conducted the research as well as their ability to analyse.

Moreover, children are rejecting rationales and excuses for abuse, exploitation and neglect. As a case in point, the idea that children must work at such an early age to support their families is being debunked by

children who have noted that their economic contributions were frittered away on gambling and alcohol. Even for children who want to continue to work, they only want to do so in a non-exploitive environment and be paid fairly for their work. Almost all children noted that completing at least a primary education was of paramount importance. In border areas in particular, many thousands of children are being neglected or have inadequate care; children have noted that many of their peers are impacted psychosocially due to neglect and inadequate care and there is an overwhelming sense of sadness amongst these children. Children's questioning of adults about children without parental care has highlighted the issue and bodes well for strengthening traditional systems of kinship and extended family care. Communities, civil society and duty bearers all bear a responsibility to ensure that all children receive adequate and appropriate care.

This child-led research was conducted in both Save the Children project communities and in non-project communities. We note the higher levels of awareness of protection issues in project communities, which we believe is a reflection of and a strong indicator for having community-based protection systems, groups and

structures. Moreover, protection is even stronger still in areas with coordinated links with duty bearers, such as Township and State/Regional Child Rights Committees, and robust systems of monitoring, reporting and prevention. This bodes well for future collaboration between civil society and government.

In ensuring the completion of this work, I would like to thank the European Union for its programmatic and financial contributions. We acknowledge the technical support for this project from the European Union and for their encouragement in carrying it out.

I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of the entire Child Protection team of Save the Children Myanmar for their painstaking efforts. In particular, the Yangon team—Thanda Kyaw, Kyi Kyi Seinn, Nang Kham Hom and Khin Nyein Chan Win—have been instrumental in the planning, design and implementation of this child-led participatory action research. The teams in Hpa-an, Thaton and Namkhan have equally been inspiring. Lastly, to the many hundreds of children who contributed to this research—as facilitators and participants—we thank you and hope to work in even closer coordination for your best interests.

David Brickey Bloomer

Save the Children
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Background about

Children Researchers and CLPAR

A series of Child Led Participatory Action Researches were conducted in Myanmar starting from November 2011. A total of 126 children (45 from Kayin State, 51 from Mon State, and 30 from Shan State) were directly trained as children researchers with CLPAR techniques. Children were age between 11- 17 years old with equal gender inclusion.

CLPAR is not only child friendly, but also serve as a perfect tool to bring up self esteem, confidence, and meaningful participation of children in communities, training the future leaders in advance.

Each child participants were given role such as note taking, photo taking, video recording, facilitation, observation, translator, in accordance with their personality, educational background as some children were working children and some were illiterate, and language skills.

The CLPAR trainings were designed into 5 parts:

Introducing 5 steps of PAR,

1. Identify Issue together with training on PAR games and tools

2. Preparation for conducting PAR in field for data collection
3. Analyzing data and facts findings
4. Recommendations and Reporting Results
5. Presentation by children researchers to adults about their findings for Taking Action

The CLPAR were conducted in Mon and Kayin States targeting to both children and parents while Nam Kham (Shan State) was conducted with children only due to political instability of that time around there in Nam Kham. While the children researchers used PAR tools to conduct research with children, they used household survey questionnaires in consultation with SCiM staff for establishing questions to ask parents and adults.

CLPAR is fun, useful and provides enormous understanding about the issues in communities. The CLPAR results are very helpful for building effective Child Protection System in the country, as well as promoting Child Rights Governance in the country.

Child Led Participatory Action Research

Hpa-an township, Kayin State ■

Child Led Participatory Action Research on the Life of Left Behind Children in Hpa-an

Background and Summary of Child Led Participatory Action Research (CL-PAR)

People from the villages of the Kayin State, especially those in the working age group, have gone to Thailand to work either for their survival or to gain a better life for almost two decades.

What is driving them to go and work in another country is the scarcity of jobs in the villages and the imbalance between their income and expenditures. One of the attractions that is drawing people to migrate to Thailand is the gap in the income earned on either side of the border.

Caught between the 'push and pull', villagers find it very difficult to survive and with the mounting difficulties, there is an increase in the number of villagers leaving to cross over the border. The situation is such that parents find themselves obliged to work for the future of the children and the family and hence they have to leave the villages. It has been found that, when parents leave to work in distant lands for the welfare of the family, children left behind in the villages are limited in their psycho-social growth and parental advice with a resultant 'negative' effect on their lives.

We have learnt in the discussions with the children that there is an increasing number of children in these conditions. A survey was done in Lun-nya, Kha-nain-do and Kawtka-yairt Villages, villages where Child

Protection Programme is active in and were selected by the children themselves, to find out the exact conditions of children. The survey was led by 15 children in three villages, gathering information from 112 children.

Initially, a two-days training was given to the children to enable them to lead the survey. A second step involving the gathering of information in the three villages was done for two days. Furthermore in surveying the villages for the focused topic, not only were the feelings and emotions of children but also to find out the views and attitudes of the guardians, fifty guardians from fifty households in each village were interviewed. Hence, information for this survey was received from a total of 112 children, and 150 guardians from 150 households.

The majority of the children providing the information received are aged between (10-15) years with either parent or both parents working in another country or children who have had a similar experience in the past. The main objective of the survey is to find out what the effects on children are when parents work in distant places and the feelings of the children. A one-day discussion was held after the information was gathered and recommendations sought from the children.

Findings

100% of the children expressed that they did not like to be separated from their parents. They want to live happily with the family. However, they understand the explanations given by their parents as to why they had to go and work “on the mountain”. (Example: To be able to education the sons and daughters) (“on the mountain” is a local expression used in the Kayin State to say working in “Thailand”)

2% of those families working “on the mountain” are broken families with either the father or the mother remarrying. When this happens and they set up their new families, children from the former marriages receive less support. These children are then taken care of by the grandparents and relatives. When the grandparents and relatives can no longer take care of these children, they are taken to the monasteries.

83% of the parents who work “on the mountain” send their remittances at least once every three months for their children’s education, health, food and clothing. 89% of the grandparents taking care of these children say that the remittances are not enough.

79% of the guardians say that it is good that the parents go and work abroad for the family and children’s welfare while the remaining 21% say that they do not think it is good. 100% of all guardians, taking temporary care of the children, say that growing up together with the parents is best.

100% of those taking temporary care of the children are grandparents and relatives. Although they can look after the physical



growth of the children, they do not know exactly what is good care and support for the children. The general remarks about boys were that they were naughty and disobedient. 82% of those providing temporary care and support say that beating is not practiced as a way of disciplining the children. (The children looked after were children 4 years and below) A 56 year-old grandmother stated, “We can only look after and feed them. They are not our children. We dare not discipline them by beating them. The parents are sad when they hear that their children have been beaten”.

Most of the parents while working in Thailand, if they get children, they will have them for the first three months. After the three months are over, the babies are sent back to the village to be taken care of by their own parents and brothers or sisters. The children are labeled off as “parcel children”.

Although children would like to call their parents who are abroad, only 38% of the children get to call their parents on a monthly basis. 42% of the parents come back home (to the village) once a year to meet the children while 58% come back once every two or more years.



When asked to draw what their wishes and aims were, 58% of the children who had their parents working abroad drew pictures of a happy family having a meal together while 23% drew pictures of nurses and teachers as their aims and ambitions. The remaining 19% drew pictures of a happy village, motor cycles and emo cartoons.

■ Feelings of Children

I love it if it is like this; I want it to be like this; Like it

To parents who have gone faraway to work	To those in the village who are looking after us
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Happy when father & mother love each other ● Happy when father & mother send their remittance ● Happy when you send us food, toys and clothes ● Happy when work is OK for father and mother ● We want to be disciplined by you; to obey when you discipline us; we are happy. We like it when Father & mother come back to the village. ● It is nice to hear you discipline us, tell us that we are good, and we will try to be good too. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We are happy when you allow us to go to school ● Happy when you give us pocket money when we go to school ● If you buy or give us what we want, we are happy ● We like it if the curry is good ● When you discipline us, we want you to say it nicely ● Living together with our grandparents, we are happy if they love us and pay attention to us

I love it if it is like this; I want it to be like this; Like it

To parents who have gone far away to work

- I don't like the separation because father and mother had to 'go up the mountains'
- Children don't like it that mother and father are separate
- Don't want father & mother to remarry
- Don't like it when we cannot phone
- Don't like it when parents forcibly tell us to follow them
- Don't like it when father and mother 'go up the mountains' but do not send the remittance
- Don't want father & mother to quarrel; we want things to be OK for parents
- Don't like it when we don't get parents love
- Because our parents are not around we feel 'small'

To those in the village who are looking after us

- Don't like it when grandparents scold us
- Don't like it when grandparents beat younger brother & younger sister
- Don't like it when father gets drunk and he gets rough & beats
- Don't want to stay with step-father or step-mother; we don't want to be bullied by them
- Don't like it when mother goes up the mountain' while father is drunk all the time & does not look after us
- Don't like it when father mother scold us or beat us
- Don't like it when elder brother and sister are allowed to go 'up the mountain'
- Don't like it when grandfather's drunk
- Not happy staying with relatives They only love their children. They don't love me.
- Don't want parents to gamble; We have had to sell the house because they gambled

Children's Recommendations

We would like you to study more about the psychological aspects of children because they do not know to express themselves

We would like to have more educational dramas and educational programmes for children

We should not let school-going children and those children who study well "go up the mountain" and destroy their ambitions

The communities around and in the villages should protect orphans and those children who are bereft of parental care. Every village should have such programmes drawn.

We must protect children under 18 years of age from 'going up the mountains' because soon after they 'go up the mountain', they get married. We want education to be given on this matter.

Parents who 'go up the mountains' have a role to play also. We would like to ask them if they want their children to 'go up the mountains' and see them become 'slaves'.

Children do not want parents who 'go up the mountains' to get separated and then remarry. We only want to see our parents loving and working.

■ Summary and Conclusions

This survey involved children under 9 years of age from families whose parents had gone out to work and guardians of children whose parents had left the children or those children who had been sent back from outside for them to look after. The survey has more to do with the psychological aspect and because the children did not quite know how to express themselves, the children who collected the data would like another such survey to be done. Grandparents stated that they had difficulties in looking after and raising children because of the differences in age with the grandparents being 'old' and the children being just babies in their infancy. It was observed, however, that the grandparents tried their best to look after the children. Guardians, themselves, expressed that they were unable to look after children of the school-going age. (Example; when the children were reminded to study, they did not

listen and when disciplined, the children did not accept)

When parents remarry and can no longer support their children, when there are no relatives to care for the children and the grandparents, who are the temporary guardians, cannot or are unable to care for their daily living and see to their educational and health needs, the children are sent to the monasteries as a last resort. There are a lot of such children in the Kay-in State whose futures are uncertain and have no aims or ambitions whatsoever.

This survey has revealed that there need to be forces that will help and stand up for such children and at the same time education be given and situations created as to show how children can be cared for and supported after properly.

Background and Summary of Child Led Participatory Action Research (CL-PAR)

The driving forces for people with few employment opportunities within Myanmar to migrate from place to place to work are the changing policies and economic conditions. The number of migrations is increasing daily from places of lesser economic opportunities to places of greater economic growth, from less developed to better developed places not only within Myanmar but also across borders.

Employment opportunities and the daily income of an individual are higher in the Kayin State which is a border state as compared to Central Myanmar. Therefore, Hpa-an, the capital of Kayin State, has become a stopover and also a final destination for migrant workers.

The Child Protection Project, Hpa-an has carried out a child-led survey to study the conditions of children of these seasonal and temporary migrant workers. It was done in three places – Oke-pho-paing, Meeset West and Inn-pyayt-waing of ward 1. The survey was led by 15 working children between the ages of 11 and 15.

Objective of the survey is to find out the conditions of migrant children and how they live and survive, especially with regards to their access to child protection, education, health and basic services.

The survey area is a place where migrants and their families have come from all over to stay and work; some are seasonal migrants while some are migrants seeking greener pastures and have stayed there for



some time. Seasonal migrants come with their families and work in the brick kilns. Those who have been here for quite some time have become daily wage earners working as masons, trishaw peddlers or selling vegetables and fruits.

Most of the children of these migrant workers roam about the city picking plastics for an income. Although they should be at school, they have no educational opportunities and are out of school. They pick plastics, the whole day long, from the city rubbish dump and other areas of rubbish disposal within the city. The urban people look down on them with suspicion as possible 'thieves'. There is an increase in the number of plastic pickers and all of them are children of migrant workers.

This child-led survey was carried out in three parts. First, a two-day workshop was held on the survey activities and the way it would be done and secondly, the actual survey – information gathering was done in one day. There were 46 children who participated in the survey and they were divided into three groups.

Based on the information collected from the children and in order to get information with regards to the views and opinions of parents and guardians, a child-led household survey was also done. 80 house-

holds were surveyed led by members of the Child Representative Groups with the help of elders from the Child Protection Committee.

Discussions were held with regards to the information gathered and recommendations were received from the children about the needed changes

Research Tools

1. Line-up game
2. Daily Life
3. Grouping Game
4. Agree and Disagree
5. Drawing



Findings from CL-PAR

■ Children's Education

- 89% of the children would like to attend schools but they cannot. 8% of the out-of-school children themselves do not want to go to school because they are not happy in school. 38% of the children do not attend school because their parents cannot afford the expenses. 3% of the children are the family's breadwinners. 26% cannot attend school because their parents are migrants. 25% of children cannot attend school because they have to contribute towards the family income and so have lost their opportunities for education. The highest grade a child has obtained in this group is the 5th grade.
- With regards to education, 18% of the parents can read and write and are content about it. 7% of the parents would like their children to finish Primary School. 36% of the parents would like their children to attend up till Middle School. 24% would like the children to attend up to High School while 15% stated that they would like their children to go for higher studies.
- There is a Primary School in the ward where the children live. There is also a night school run by Education Department and UNICEF. Only 4% of the children have access to this night school.

■ Children's Health

- 30 % of the children have access to good health services when they are not well

- 58% of the children get to drink medicines but that not prescribed by doctors. They drink medicines that are mixtures of English and Myanmar medicines prescribed by the shops.
- 80 % of the children have poor personal hygiene
- There are no good sources of water near the places where they live. Hence, 40% of the children have itchiness and sores because of the unhealthy skin conditions.

■ Living conditions of children

- As migrants, they move around and hence live in temporary houses that are sub-standard. 52% of the families live by renting space in other people's compound, at the back or downstairs of people's houses.
- 87% of the houses are not weather proof. There are no roofs or walls, no floors and so the housing conditions are not good
- Based on the location, the rent varies from MMK3000.00 to MMK6000.00. As they have to work from dawn to dusk, their rented places are ideally places for them to lay their backs on at night to sleep.
- The remaining 40% have built huts near the brick kilns and stay there though they are not proper places of abode for the family (for a husband and wife and children to stay together).
- Only 8% of the families live in small houses built on the lands allotted to them temporarily.

■ Children and the workplace

- 87% of the children are plastic pickers, not by choice. They have no other jobs and it is as a last resort that they take up this job.
- 98% of the adults and guardians do not think that 'plastic picking' is a hazardous job. But 100% of all the children who are 'plastic pickers' clearly stated that it was a hazardous job. Some of the hazards are being bitten by dogs, getting cuts from broken glass or metal shards, being suspected of 'being thieves'. Children, however, do not tell their guardians about these things because the guardians will not bother or pay attention to what they say.
- 90% of the plastic pickers are exploited by the shop-keepers. The shopkeepers are



not honest about their weights and if they should complain, they are told to go and sell their stuff elsewhere.

- The income of the plastic pickers vary from MMK500.00 to MMK3000.00. One per cent of the children earn over MMK3000.00.
- 56% of parents themselves exploit the earnings of their children. Children are told not to come back if they do not get MMK3000 before they leave. If they cannot give the stated amount at the end of the day, they are punished by being beaten or by not getting their dinner. On days when they do not get the said amounts, they do not return home but loaf around the city - begging.

■ **Disciplining Children**

- 100 % of the children are disciplined either by being beaten or scolded by the use of loud, harsh and abusive words daily. 68% of the adults admitted to disciplining by beating or scolded by the use of loud, harsh and abusive words. 21% of the parents said they could think of no other way to discipline the children hence the beating and the loud, harsh and abusive words but 11% of the parents said that they nagged and scolded the children because they did not like beating or the use of the loud, harsh and abusive words.

■ **Children's rights to play and recreation**

- 100% of the children said that they played while picking plastics. On their return home, they are allowed to play after they have helped the parents. At night they watch videos for recreation. There is space to play and they usually play the traditional games. They cannot play in teams, like football because they do not have the ball. As far as parents are concerned, they stated that they let them free once they have finished their duties.

■ **Age of marriage of the children**

- Children have observed that in the migrant wards, there are marriages at the age of 15 for both boys and girls. The commonest age of marriage, for both girls and boys, is between 16 and 18 years of age with 49% of the boys and 62% of the girls getting married then.

■ Children's Recommendations

Children who are plastic pickers, children who work in the brick kilns and all working children should be literate. We want them to go to school. Therefore, we would like to request parents, teachers and the village authorities to let the children go to school and also support them for schooling.

Children should be told to do work that is fitting for their age- we want to help our parents (example: helping in selling cloth, watermelon, boiled peas and car-washing)

When selling plastics, the shopkeepers should have honest scales. We want to report such dishonesty and be reconciled.

Discipline the children nicely so that they become good children but without beating or the use of abusive language

Deal nicely with working children; they should not be shouted at nor accused.

Do not let the children buy alcohol; when parents drink alcohol, do not beat the children when they get drunk

Educational sessions with discussions should be held for both children and parents. There should be weekly sessions because only then will parents come to know and understand and treat their children nicely.

We want to be able to report and take action against step-fathers, stepmothers and adults who mistreat and abuse

We want the orphans and poor children to be supported. (in health, education and daily living – food and water)

There should be no separation of parents and separation from brothers and sisters
We, as children, want a happy family life

Buy playthings for children (as for football and badminton)

Parents and guardians should not force children to do things they do not want to do

■ Summary and conclusion

When we look at children and the way they live, we tend to think they are happy but they have their own difficulties and problems and wants and needs. The environment tends to see the children and their parents as problematic and that they are

physically, verbally and mentally harsh. Up till now, children living in these harsh conditions have very few opportunities to improve their lot in life. There are limitations in what the administrators and those in power can do for these children.

Background and Summary of Child Led Participatory Action Research (CL-PAR)

The Kayin State is a border area. There is an increasing number of people leaving Myanmar to go and work illegally in neighbouring Thailand for their survival, if not a better life, due to the conditions within the country and their localities. People who migrate are from different situations having different aims and ambitions while the remittances they make are useful and supportive for the original localities they come from. There are evidences of improvements on the materialistic side of things. Due to the remittances sent back people have more property and more money for investments. They also have lots of work experiences. Hence, people in the villages, whether they be young or old, single or married, try all the harder to improve their lot in life by going to distant lands to work and the numbers keep increasing day by day.

With the increase in the number of locals, especially the youth and children, migrating to Thailand for work, there is also an increase in the number of problems that are difficult to handle such as human trafficking and other social issues. Although there is an increase in the number of migrants leaving, there are no changes locally as far as local job opportunities and daily earnings are concerned. With migration experiences in the villages for more than a decade but less than two decades, different patterns of migration have also been noticed. But, there is an increase in the number of migrant workers who are under 18 years of age with no guarantees for their safety or security.

In order to come to know about the situation of human trafficking and migration of children under 18 years of age, the Child Protection Project, Hpa-an has held discussions with children and a children-led survey to study the situation in the project areas was undertaken.

Objectives

1. To study the awareness levels with regards to migrant children and human trafficking situation in both project and non-project areas
2. To know the reasons why children under 18 years of age are migrating
3. To raise the awareness of children and adults with regards to safe migration.

First, a two-days training was held for the child representatives who will be involved in the survey on the programme and procedures of the survey. 15 leaders were trained of whom 11 were girls and 4 were boys. Secondly, a collection of data was undertaken in the selected villages – Kyone-pha-yair Village of the project area and Nat-kone Village for the non-project area. One day was taken for each village interviewing children between the age of 11 and 18 that included those who are out of school, working children, migrant children who have returned and those at school. A uniform set of questions were utilized. There were 37 children from Kyone-pha-yair village and 54 children from Nat-kone Village totaling 91 children and they participated actively in the survey. Of the children who participated, they had

at least 2 siblings and as many as 11. Apart from 10 children, all the rest have their brothers and sisters who have migrated for work to another country.

Thirdly, a discussion was held with regards to the collected data and recommendations made. This was for a day.



Research Tools

1. Name Game
2. Line-up game
3. Tree Analysis
4. Agree and Disagree
5. Story-telling

Findings

Factors related to Migration

- 100% of the children have heard about human trafficking and being sold. 73 % of the children in Kyone-pha-yair Village know all about human trafficking while 72% of the children in Nat-kone Village do not know about human trafficking.
- In the Tree Analysis session, those in Kyone-pha-yair Village gave 44 reasons with 26 advantages and 43 disadvantages while the Nat-kone Village gave 19 reasons with 14 advantages and 20 disadvantages. Reviewing this exercise, one can conclude that the children of Kyone-pha-yair Village are more aware of migrating to distant lands for work than the children of Nat-kone Village.
- With regards to the question as to whether it was appropriate for children under 18 years to migrate for work and whether parents should allow it or not, 85% of the children of Kyone-pha-yair Village and 100% of the children from Nat-kone Village agreed that it should not be so. However, 15% of children from Kyone-pha-yair Village stated that children have a right to migration and if they are allowed to work in a safe and secure environment, they should be allowed to do so.
- Children from Nat-kone Village stated - two girls under 18 years of age from Nat-kone Village had been trafficked and sexually exploited. They had returned to the village but there was no one to help them and as a result, no legal action was taken.

■ **The Migration Situation**

- The basic reasons for children under 18 years of age migrating to work in Thailand are similar for both the two villages. Generally, the similar reasons are
- Parents gamble, fall into debt and need money to repay (2) no job opportunities in the village (3) to repay the parents – and to be able to keep the parents fully (not to be in want) (4) support the brothers and sisters education (5) admire those who have ‘gone up the mountain’ and the way they are now OK and I want to be like them too. A difference was noted that children in Kyone-pha-yair Village ‘go up the mountain’ and leave school under pressure from the parents while children in Nat-kone Village leave school and go to distant lands to work without any pressure from their parents.
- Currently, children from Kyone-pha-yair Village leave the village to go and work in another country when they are at least 16 years old while those from Nat-kone Village leave the village by the time they are 14 years old.
- The majority of children under 18 years of age who ‘go up the mountains’ to work are boys from Kyone-pha-yair Village but the majority are girls from Nat-kone Village.

■ **Safe migratory patterns of parents and migrant children**

- With regards to preparations, children from Kyone-pha-yair Village, before they deciding to migrate, they approach those who have migrated before or those who have returned from working ‘on the mountains’ about their experiences, safe routes to take, and the safe work environments. They explain to their parents about these and ensure that they have a phone number to connect with.
- Children from Nat-kone Village, however, just leave when their elder brothers or sisters call them from the neighbouring countries and the parents just find the necessary connections and send the children. They did not give the same answers as those of the children of Kyone-pha-yair Village.
- With regards to help from the parents when they come across difficulties at their destinations, 100% of children from Nat-kone Village stated that the parents would not be able to help in any way while 15% of the children from Kyone-pha-yair village believed that their parents would make the necessary connections and help them.

■ Children's Recommendations

The village communities asked if there were means by which migration of children under 18 could be prevented. We replied that they cannot pressure us but because we are under age and there are dangers, they should be on our side and be able to discuss – trainings should therefore be given to them.

Awareness raising sessions should be given to parents and children under 18 years of age and before they travel also

Preventive measures should be taken if the child 'has' to go. Brokers who can be trusted and their phone numbers should be acquired together with their addresses. If it is discovered that the broker has cheated and sold the child who is under 18 years of age, legal action should be taken against him/her and s/he should be severely penalized with either a fine or imprisonment and even the death penalty if the case is severe.

Children under 18 years of age who have 'gone up the mountains', sometimes will not tell the truth and say that Thailand is a happy place with lights on day and night so much so that you cannot say whether it is night or day. These can be statements made to hide the truth. There are those who have been sold into prostitution but they dare not say so that boldly for fear that they may be stigmatized and discriminated against. Help should be given to such people.

Children in the villages have a minimum knowledge about child rights and all they want to do is 'go up the mountains and work'. The parents being poor want the children to 'go up the mountains and work'. They do not get a chance to pursue their studies right till the end. They only have the bare minimum knowledge to read and write and all they care for is to work tirelessly for the house. For changes to occur, there is a need to raise awareness about these conditions and the need to provide support also so that these conditions will disappear.

We also came to know about their ideas while playing games. There is a lot that needs to be done for their daily living, their education and houses to live in.

We need to know the basic needs of every individual child with regards to their food and clothing and living. We need to give them ideas that will impact on their lives through educational dramas.

Parents and village elders should all be told so that children will be enabled to finish Primary School.

To enable children to express their feelings and emotions to adults, adults need to respect and honour children and treat them equally

Parents should avoid doing things that children do not like such as drinking and gambling and live their lives so that children will rely on them.

Summary and Conclusions

There are more children under 18 years of age from Nat-kone Village, the non-project site, who go and work in Thailand than from Kyone-pha-yair Village, the Child Protection project site. Parents from Nat-kone do not bother about any issues but just send their children to work abroad. Hence, migrant children from Nat-kone face problems of being cheated, exploitation that could have been prevented. In Kyone-pha-yair, however, after the project activities, there has been a noticeable decline in the number of children under 18 years of age who go abroad to work and the age limit has increased to 16. Gender-wise, there are more boys from Kyone-pha-yair who migrate for work whilst there are more girls from Nat-kone

Absence of role models in the villages is one of the reasons why children under 18 years of age have wrong ideas about migrating for work. With parents, siblings and peers all migrating to neighbouring country and with no children leaders to guide them in educational and social matters may yet be another reason why children migrate.

Villagers (Children, elders and parents) from the non-project village of Nat-kone have extended an invitation for talks to be held on human trafficking and its prevention amongst children.

Child Led Participatory Action Research

Thahton Township, Mon State ■

Summary about the Research

• Selection of Children (researchers)

Selection was made based on:-

- requests of the children,
- concurrence of CPG and parents and guardians and
- the child's own wishes.

As the school term was still in session, children at school could not be selected.

• Selection of the issue

For the researchers to come to know each other and to familiarise them with the tools, a practical session using the (self-intro, line-up, information tree, grouping games, body analysis and body mapping) games were used. All the children researchers were out-of-school children and 90% of the children are working. Through these exercises, the children's conditions became known. Neglect and denial of their rights were issues that they faced which became evident through the exercises. Common issues were identified beginning from the individual level to the village level and then to three villages level. Assistance was provided towards identifying these issues. A consensus was taken as to the common issues the working children faced from amongst the many issues of the children in Donwon Village.

• Collection of data

Secondly, that everything should run smoothly in studying the conditions of working children in Donwon Village, the children were taken to meet the elders of the village in the afternoon of day two of the survey. On the morning of the third day, the children were divided into three groups and the study done using the following research tools (self-intro, line-up, information tree, grouping games, body mapping). The survey included 41 children. In the evening, the child-led researchers used the investigative method (asking questions) for the study.

• Data Analysis

Data collected by the three different groups were brought together and analysed on the fourth day. Children were tired by this time and were not as active as on other days. Preparations were made for presentations (with regards to the findings) to the elders on the next day (the fifth day).

• Results, report and action taken

On the fifth day, findings of the study was presented to the TCRC and invited elders using the theatre method

Key Findings

The child leaders found that there was exploitation even when work was not suitable for them. Children included in the study ranged between 13 to 17 years of age. With regards to education, it ranged from no schooling up till the 9th standard. Generally, the majority of the researchers did not finish Primary School. 90% of the children earned a daily average of MMK 1000 to 2500 contributing to nearly 25% of the family's daily income. It was seen that the major portion of their earnings were spent on misuse by the guardians – on gambling and alcohol. The worst conditions at work was shared by a boy who worked in a local distillery.

The study involved the use of the following research tools of self-intro, line-up, information tree, grouping games and body mapping with the 41 children divided into three groups. The major findings were:-



Information tree

Children have to sow and reap paddy, herd the buffaloes, sell, wood-cutting fishing and sell alcohol.

“While herding the buffaloes, I fell off a buffalo and was run over by the buffalo.”

“I caught a cold while sowing paddy and was also pricked by a thorn.”

“When trying to catch fish, I get pricked by thorns in the water and get hurt by glass shards very often.”

“One of my friends had to cut wood but he fell off the tree and broke his hand.”

“There is no more grazing ground for the buffaloes.”

Through these comments we come to know of the problems they face at their work sites.

Because of limited job opportunities, children have to work in jobs that are not suitable for their age and for very low payments.

Body mapping

“When I see my friends go to school, I feel very sad. Because my parents cannot afford, I have to work – work that is not suitable for me and work that is very laborious. When my friends play, I cannot play. Looking at my friends wearing pretty clothes, I feel small.”

Myint Moe Oo

“My parents gamble, drink alcohol and when they quarrel amongst themselves, they scold and beat us.”

13 year old Than Htike Aung

“When I return home with only a little bit of money, my mother scolds me and asks me if I have no brains; You have no interest in your work and then calls me names such as prostitute, and a beggar. What will you eat if you do not work while there is time?”

13-year old Hay Mar Than

“When I come back from herding the buffaloes, I am shouted at scolded by the owners if the buffaloes’ bellies are not full.”

15 year old Maung Kaung Myat

80% of the children know that the work they do is not suitable for them, they believe that they have to work for their families

Guardians of the working children:

- 90% of the guardians say that they would like the children to finish school;
- 92% stated that children should start to work by (13-14) years of age;
- 90% of parents stated that children working is a repayment of their gratitude to their parents.
- Parents have a right to manage what the children have earned and it belongs to the parents also.

Majority of the respondents say that children by (14-15) years of age are able to go and work in Thailand.

Parents and guardians do not want to abuse or be cruel to their children but due to lack of general knowledge and information and being influenced by the daily environments they are in, they have reacted to their children in that way.

Boys in the village start drinking alcohol and gambling by (13 – 14) years of age and is an issue of concern.

“I went to work in Thailand six months ago. Mother had to borrow money for the transportation. Because of the floods, I had to come back and now we are heavily in debt. My friends are like me also.”

Ma Khine Thinn Kyi (14 years old)

It is almost a way of life in the village to go and work in Thailand when you are (13-14) years old. The majority of the children also stated that if circumstance permit, they would like to go and work in Thailand.

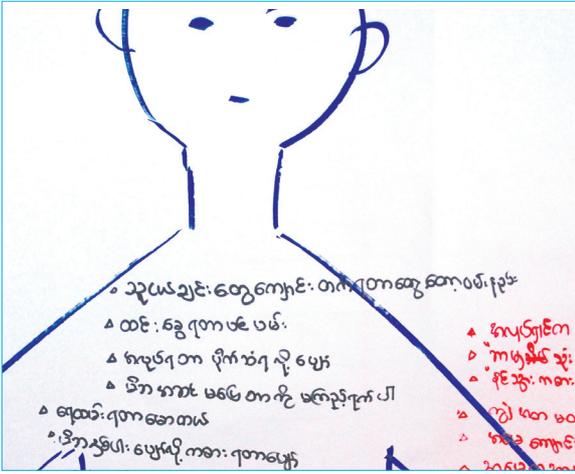


Recommendations

Work children should not do	Work children should do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Selling fish, alcohol, fries, ice-lollipops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cooking rice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Carrying water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Help in the house
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cutting firewood in the forest, gathering leaves and 'morning glory' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Washing clothes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Herding buffaloes, gathering 'dung' catching fish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Baby sitting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sowing and reaping paddy 	

General remarks by the children with regards to the way they would like parents and employers to speak and deal with them

- Adults should care for children; we would like parents to send children to school
- Just as children work to support the family, adults should also fulfil the needs of children
- If you think a child is rude, then the child should have been disciplined when very young
- Parents should not take the earnings of the children as deposits and then gamble and drink alcohol
- Children should be spoken to nicely. (If adults are rude, children will follow their examples)
- The older workers should help the young working children
- Employers should not go around gossiping untruths/ bad things about children
- Adults should give children their suitable rights
- Working children should also be made to study, if possible



- Adults should arrange for children to be able to work suitable hours and receive suitable wages. Poor children should not be discriminated against
- Children should not be beaten by teachers. Things are not Ok at home and arriving at school , when children get scolded and beaten , they only want to leave school and work at a very young age

Recommendations by the researchers

“It will be good for the children if the adults at home and in the village take time to talk like the uncles and aunties here.”

14 yearly old Oo Oo

Some remarks made with regard to the feedback presentations by those attending:-

“I did not notice before that, for all the work they had to do, they received only this much. Now I have come to know more.”

Ma Sabair (Law Officer)

“I have six children and my young son who is 13 years old is working in Thailand. He said his work is not good and when told to come back, he does not want to come back because things are not OK at home. We don’t want to let the children work but we have to let them work because our financial situation is very bad. I feel very sad. I never thought children suffered so much. From now on, I will treat the children kindly.”

A mother

Recommendations made by the children in this research are very practical and adults found that they only requested for issues that could be fulfilled.

Neglected children Summary about the Research

• Selection of Children (researchers)

Of the researchers selected for Donwon Village, the better ones were selected for the study. Also child Group leaders were selected.

• Selection of the issue

For the researchers to know, understand and be able to carry out the study, a practical training on the research tools of self-intro, line-up, information tree, thermovaluator, body mapping, circle analysis, journeys and interview was given.

All of the researchers are out-of-school children. Discussions revealed that all the researchers have been neglected and have had to shoulder family responsibilities, not proportional to their age. Neglected children as an issue for Mayangone was selected by the aid and agreement of 'helpers'. Depending on the locations, there were three groups with the children themselves selecting the members of each group.



• Collection of data

For the children adults and researchers to become friendly with each other, an introduction was done on the afternoon of the first day in each of the three locations.

On the second day morning, the study was done with 15 children in Thayet-taw, 17 children in Hman-gu-kone and 19 children in Bu-tinchaung using the following research tools – self-intro, line-up, information tree, thermovaluator, grouping games, body mapping and journeys while it was the adults in the afternoon.

• Data Analysis

Each group collated the data of the study on the third day. With the aid of 'helpers', all data from the three groups was collated. The researchers, having had a previous experience, were able to collate the data more efficiently.

Presentations of the study findings were given to adults on the fourth day. These adults were selected by the children who participated in the study.

• Results, report and action taken

On the fourth day, research findings were presented to the adults together with the children's recommendations using tools that included dramas and theatre.

Key Findings

All children in the study revealed different forms of neglect within the house, in the village and at work. Ages of participating children ranged from 11 to 17 years. And there was only one child who had been up to the 8th standard. Most of the children in the group did not even finish their Primary School education.

Children earned an average daily between MMK1000.00 to 2500.00 and worked in different work places. Of the different reasons for neglect, one of the main reasons was the parents' financial situation not being alright and lesser chances to acquire knowledge.

Research tools used in Myangone village for 51 children divided into three groups were - self-intro, line-up, information tree, thermo-valuator, grouping games, body mapping and journeys.
The main findings were:-

Information tree

Children shared their different experiences of neglect amongst themselves. Some children have experienced neglect to such an extent that they do not react differently but feel that it is the way adults should treat children – the norm.

“I would like to attend school but things are not Ok for my mother and so she cannot send me to school.”

13 year old Ma Ei Wah



“Because my father and my mother went to work in Thailand, we stay with our grandmother. Our grandmother scolds us when it is not OK for my OK for my parents to send their remittance.”

“Parents don't give me what I want. I will try to buy it myself.”

“Teachers love children whose parents are rich but oppress the poor.”

13 years old Maung Wai Linn

“Because parents scold the children, children become miserable and turn to drinks.”

17 years old Maung Pyi Soe

“The teacher loves children who are smart in class. Because I did not know my lessons, the teacher beat me up and made run round the school without my clothes. I left school after that day.”

12 year old Maung Phyowai Linn

During the rainy season we had to plant paddy. I wanted to rest because I felt very cold but my grandfather did not allow me to rest. Even when I am sick, I am told to go and work.”

13 year old Ma Nyo Myat.

“I want to go and visit my father but because he has remarried my grandparents will not let me go.”

“When I play with my friends in the village, their mother will not allow them to play with me because my father is an alcoholic.”

12 year old Maung Kaung Sithu

“The employer said he’d give me 4000 a day but in the evening, he gave me only 2000 and when I got home, I got a scolding from my mother.”

15 year old Maung Maung Oo

“I live with my mother. When my father passed away in Yangon, my mother remar-

ried. We are 5 brothers and sisters. Two are married and my stepfather scolds me a lot and mother cannot say anything.”

Maung Sithu Aung

“I have a younger sister. I get 2500 a day for picking beans. I live with my grandmother and my father. What I get from picking beans, I give my grandmother and save some for myself. What little savings I had, my father took it away for his drinks. He does not work and only drinks alcohol.”

Children suffer unnecessarily from neglect and they are in an environment where there are very few people who will empathize and listen to them.

Therm-valuator

Reasons for the ‘neglect’ was identified through using this game.

Commonest reasons and most effective are:-

- Parents drink because family financial situation is not OK
- Parents quarrel
- Parents go and work in distant places and leave the children with relatives
- Teachers at school discriminate against the poor children
- Parents lack general knowledge

Less commoner reasons

- Parents gamble
- Children have to go and work in distant places at a very young age
- No workplace standards and few employment choices
- Parents remarry

Least common reasons

- Children not allowed to play with each other
- Only rich children are allowed to lead and participate in local events

Body Mapping

Feelings of children who are neglected

- Feel sad. Because there is no one I can tell, I just cry secretly
- I feel miserable and I don't want to stay in the house
- I am afraid my parents will be angry and leave me
- I feel so small when I see my friends who go to school
- My parents give priority to my young brother who is attending school

- Parents and teachers scold us because we, ourselves, are 'dumb'
- Get scolding in the house; when I go to school like the others, I don't get pocket money and when I arrive at school the teacher scolds me."

60% of the children in the study believe that it is not the fault of the adults that they are neglected but accept the fact that it is because they themselves are at fault. Some children have suffered so much from life that their faces are sad and are unusually quiet for their age.

Journeys

This game was played in order to draw up plans to reduce incidence of neglect and responses to the issue by both children and adults. The adults have approved it also.

Who is watching? (The first step)

The child (him/herself), the abbot, CPG, Members of the Administrative Committee, neighbours, relatives, village/ward elders, those who love children, (U Aung Thein, U Kyaw Naing, U Hla Bo, U Myint Soe, U Tun Min Naing)

How will you monitor? (Second step)

While going about here and there,
While playing, While going to school,
by asking children, selling,
While talking with other children

How will you confirm the information (Third step)

By asking questions in the neighbourhood
Asking friends of children to investigate,

Finding out through relatives, Visiting and watching and, Children having discussions with each other.

Who will you inform (Fourth step)

CPG, the abbot, and those who love children

How will you respond? (Fifth step)

Will meet and discuss with the offender (Road repairing, cut the grass, whitewash the pagoda, wash the toilets of the monastery – these are some of the ways in which villains are punished in the village. If a teacher, will request for a transfer. If offences are severe, will see that legal action is taken against them.

These are some of the responses children drew against abuse and neglect. Although adults say that they discipline the children because they want them to be good, the reasons were found to be - the difficult circumstances they face each day - little or no education, lack of knowledge and information.

Recommendations

A collection of the way the children want to be treated by their employers and parents included:

- speak nicely to the children; parents should let children go to school
- adults- do not drink alcohol and quarrel
- do not love one child more than the other
- do not take your child's earnings only to gamble and drink alcohol
- parents should not gamble and play cards
- Don't want parents to go to faraway places to work leaving young babies at home; want to stay in the village together
- Do not beat the children; listen to what the children have to say
- Spend more money on the children (keep them in school, buy their clothes)
- Adults should give children their due privileges
- Don't send children, at a very young age, to faraway places to work
- Teachers do not put down students who are poor
- Teachers – please smile
- Do not scold students who are late in remitting their fees
- “Get scolding in the house; when I go to school like the others, I don't get pocket money and when I arrive at school the teacher scolds me.”

These recommendations were presented to the elders.

Recommendations by the researchers

“Now that I know there are lots of friends/people like me, I do not feel so insecure anymore.”

14 year old Khine Thin Kyi

“I am lucky to get this opportunity to lead and speak in front of children from another village although I am not so educated. If I tell my mother, she will not believe me.”

16 year old Chit Yin Htoo

“I have formed a child club in my village. When we gather, we usually spoke about anything but now we will talk about children, we will get together and give our help where needed.” – 17 year old Thair Thair

Remarks from those who attended the fourth day's feedback

“I am surprised at what the children have done. When they came to the house yesterday and asked some questions, they were really very polite. I must tell the ones at home to be like them.”

Mother from Mayangone

“Because of the financial situation in the village, parents just take it out on the children and beat them up. Previously I thought it was enough looking after the children at home but after watching the children’s drama, I came to understand and realize that I am responsible for all the children in the village too. If they are treated unfairly, I will ensure that action is taken according to the agenda that has been drawn.”

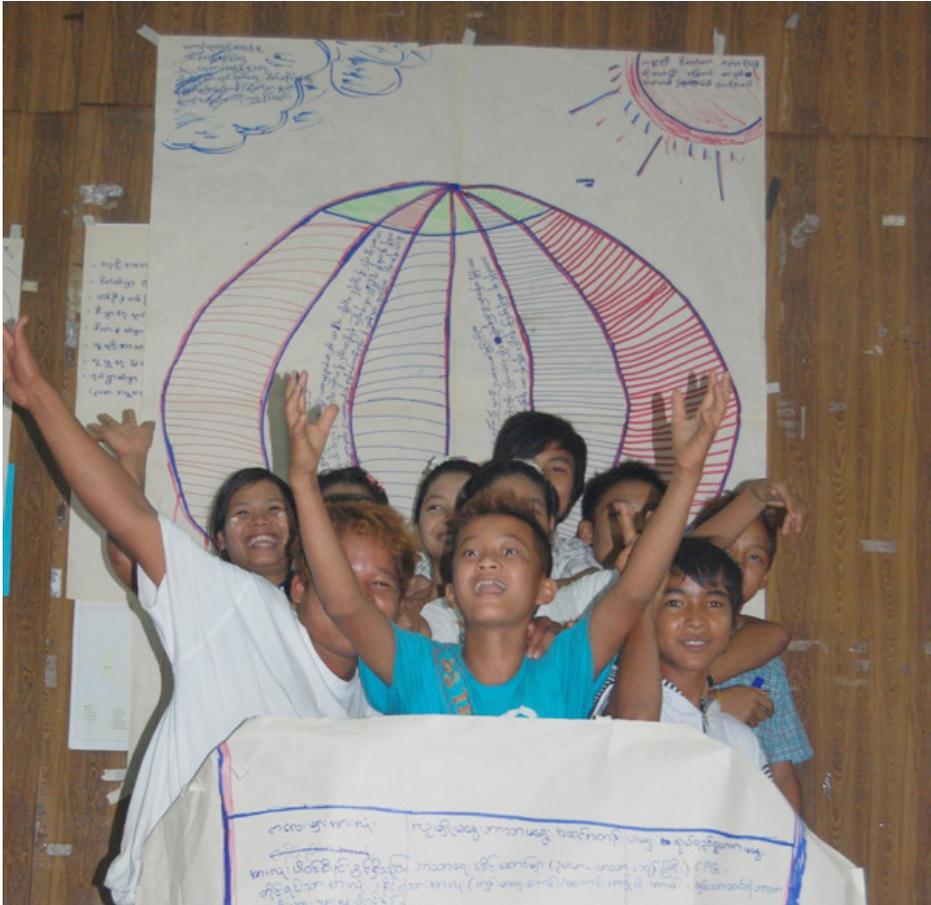
Chairperson of the Village Maternal and Child Welfare Association

“Just last night we talked about forming a Child Club in Hman-ku-kone village. The leader of the young men from the village also encouraged us.”

A child

Researchers and children from Mayangone Village who participated in the study were able to establish a friendly relationship within just a few days. Adults saw that what the children have requested for is not impractical but can be really fulfilled.





children participated in the conducting the research

• Selection of the issue

For the researchers to be able to carry out the study in Sakhangyi Village, a practical training on the research tools of self-intro, line-up, information tree, thermo valuator, grouping games, body mapping, journeys and interview was given.

It was decided with the aid of ‘helpers’ that of all the issues faced by children in Sakhangyi, conditions of returnees (children who have gone out to work and returned) was an issue to be considered. For the study, the researchers divided themselves into three groups.

• Collection of data

For the children adults and researchers to become friendly with each other, an introduction was done on the afternoon of the first day in each of the three locations.

On the second day morning, the researchers or the child leaders carried out the

study in the different locations with 16 children in Ywa-lair-paing, 12 children in Ywa-ashayt-paing and 11 children in Ywa-a naut-paing using the following research tools – self-intro, line-up, information tree, thermo valuator, grouping games, body mapping and journeys while the study on adults was done in the afternoon

• Data Analysis

Collation of data was done by the researchers on the third day with assistance from the ‘helpers’. Preparations were done for the fourth day in the afternoon. Children who participated in the study selected the adults who should be invited to the presentations of the study findings.

• Results, report and action taken

On the fourth day, research findings were presented to the adults together with the children’s recommendations using tools that included dramas and theatre.



Key Findings

Most of the children in the study knew at least one person or even had someone within their own family who had left the country for work. Ages of participating children ranged from 12 to 18 years. Only one child in the group had studied up to the 8th standard. Over 90% of the children in the group had finished their primary school education.

80% of the children in the study earned an average daily wage of between MMK1000.00 to 2500.00 and did seasonal work including agricultural work and rubber sap collection. This work is not regular. One of the driving forces that compels these children to work overseas is limited job opportunities in their home communities. The main reason why children who return face difficulties in the village is their lack of knowledge and information on how to access rehabilitation and reintegration services.

39 children included in the study were divided into three groups the study was done using the following research tools of self-intro, line-up, information tree, and thermo-valuator, grouping games, body mapping and journeys.

The main findings were:-

Information tree

Main Reasons for children returning home

- Difficulties at the workplace
- Cruelty from employers
- Low pay
- Recent Floods (Thailand)
- Exploitation from employers

- Homesickness
- To contribute to their home communities—civic and charitable work

“I did rubber sap collection in Thailand but the pay was very low. The money I received was just for my food and as the work was very tiring, I came back.”

15 year old Minn Ngwe Hlaing

What they did on their return home and its consequences

- With the money I brought back, I just wasted it by eating and drinking.
- I was miserable because of the huge debts.
- Came back and now I'm selling goods.
- Came back to buy land.
- Work in the village is too tiring and I cannot work anymore.
- Just drank alcohol excessively.

“She came back pregnant to the village and delivered the baby. When people started gossiping about her, she just left the baby and went back to Thailand.”

15 year old Saw Yan Shin

“People who come back from the Shan Country (Thailand) wear pretty clothes. People admire them and go back with them.”

14 year old Ma Ei Tut

“I stayed in Thailand for 10 months. I had to baby sit and cook. When I asked for money to go back home, the employer gave me money equivalent to about a little over 300,000 Kyats. When I came back home, there is no work for me. I want to go back but my mother will not allow me to go back now.”

15 year old Nan Khin Khin Htway

“There are parents who went to work in Thailand when the children were very young and left them with the grandparents. When they returned, the children did not know their parents.”

17 year old Saw Zaw Shein

“When children are left with the grandparents to look after, the grandparents are old and so they cannot look after them properly. They are unhygienic and just go around.”

17 year old Saw Hsay

“Some go and work in Thailand and remit lots of money. When they return, the elders in the village have spent all their money and there is nothing left. There are lots of them who leave again because they are miserable.”

15 year old Nan Ei Tar

“I have seen two persons who came back mad and drug-addicted. They are dead now.”

17 year old Ye Naing Tun

“There are some who are disciplined. They send back lots of money and they buy land. But these are just a few.”

16 year old Nan Mu Hay

Children know of the difficulties faced by the returnees, but because of the limited job opportunities, many children want to leave and work in these places.

Thermo-valuator

This tool was used to identify returnees who faced difficulties

Those who faced the most difficulties

- Those who get infected with HIV and come back
- Drug addicts/substance abusers who come back and drink excessively
- Those who have huge debts and return, but are unable to repay
- Those who have gone abroad for a long time but never send any remittances

Those who face lesser difficulties include

- Girls who are no longer virgins
- Those who wasted their time and did not work when they were abroad
- Those who remarried while abroad and returned.

Those who faced the least difficulties

- Those who returned and are now working
- Those who were treated cruelly when abroad.

Body Mapping

Feelings of returnees (including children)

- Am happy because I'm back in the village
- Left the children when they were very young. Now we cannot call them and that makes us sad.
- It was miserable there because we were treated cruelly but I'm not happy here either.
- I cannot stand what people talk about me. I want to go back to Thailand.
- I am miserable because people gossip about me.
- I want to take revenge because, even before I returned, there were lies told about me.
- I am angry because they spent all the money I remitted.
- Some children who were left behind would like to see their parents but some do not love their parents any more.



Physical factors about the returnees

- Some became fairer
- Because work was tiring, I became thin
- Lost weight because of HIV
- Some children became pregnant
- Some came back with injuries because the Thai Police mistreated them

Conditions of children who are left in the care of relatives when parents go and work overseas

- They are always unhygienic because guardians are not attentive to their care
- The majority of children do not get to go to school
- They get scolded and threatened when parents do not send their remittances

60% of the returnees go back and work across borders because they find it difficult to survive in the village.



Journeys

This game was played to identify how best to prepare for migration and how to live in the village when one returns.

The first Step – Getting accurate information about working abroad

- Keeping an accurate record of people coming and leaving the village

The Second Step – Preparations to be made before leaving to work abroad

- Get the national registration card number, their telephone number and address of the person who is going to take you
- Ensure you are fit/healthy
- Find out about the road conditions and the work situation

Third Step - How will you treat the returnees

- Offer words of encouragement

- Allow them to participate in the village social activities
- No discrimination

Fourth Step – Means of educating the villagers

- Integrate it in the village meetings
- Include it in the Kayin literacy classes
- Integrate it in the Primary school lessons
- Include it in the local festival shows

Fifth Step – Assisting the Returnees

- Identify those who are able to bring about changes for a better social environment and what needs to be done. Elders in the village accept the fact that when children have reached the age when they can work, they should go out and work in faraway places and when parents become richer, it is to the advantage of children too.

Recommendations

Some of the actions to be taken by adults, parents, friends and the village for returnees (adults and children) to be able to re-settle, as suggested by children

- Speak nicely to the returnees
- When they have to return because conditions have not been favourable, those who are respected and recognised in the village should encourage them

- Employers offer jobs to the returnees
- Create opportunities so that they can participate in the village groups and committees
- Ensure that it is not easy to purchase alcohol in the village
- We do not want parents to go and work leaving children behind. We want families to stay together in the village.

- Do not discriminate or gossip about returnees.
- Encourage parents and guardians not to gamble and drink away the remittances sent by the children and others
- Do not let the children go and work in faraway places at a very young age

Feelings of child researchers

“I was initially scared when I had to ask adults questions. But when they answered very carefully, I couldn’t believe myself that I could do it.”

14 year old Min Min Soe

I am very happy that I got this chance to come and study another village with my friend. I’ve come to know about children in this village.”

14 year old Ma Ei Mon

“I looked down on the Kayin at school. Coming to a Kayin Village, I have come to know more about their honesty.”

15 year old Oo Oo

“Friends from this village only speak in Kayin and they do not understand Myanmar very well but they are very friendly.”

14 year old Su Shwe Kyi

“I have always had to work and I am able to rest for a while only now because I got to come with my friends to this village. I am very happy. I am also encouraged there are children like me also.”

Remarks from those who attended the fourth day’s feedback



“It has become the norm for villagers to go and work in faraway places. I have heard about problems but never heard about it exactly like this and never heard about all the incidents together. Now I can tell the villagers and discuss with the village elders and social groups as to how the returnees who need help can be assisted.” – U Maung Lu Pyo (Village Tract Administrator)

“I will tell the young teachers from the schools where they teach Kayin literature to include these issues. I will also ensure that details about those individuals (who leave the village, those who will take them to their destinations and those who return) are made available in one place.” – U Tin Shwe (Member of the Village tract Administration Committee)

Children who led the study and those children who participated in the study became friendly within a short period of time. Recommendations requested are also practical and action can be taken.

Summary and Conclusion

Although children were keenly aware of the pitfalls and risk involved in migrating across borders for work, most children involved in this research felt as if they had few other options available to them. As in the title of this collection of child-led participatory action research, migration has become almost a way of life for many.

Children were also aware of the neglect and inadequate care of many children who were left behind by migrating parents. Despite their good intentions, many grandparents and other relatives did not have the means financially to care for children nor had little knowledge and/or other support in providing care for these children. Through this research children have made recommendations for communities and

civil society to be more engaged in assisting families with kinship care and other support. Children have also made recommendations on how to help both adults and children who return from work overseas to be more effectively integrated back into the community and to be supported rather than discriminated against and stigmatised.

As in other localities, we note that children who participated in the action research have demonstrated a heightened sense of self-worth, esteem and confidence and have made commitments to mobilise other children about child rights and protection and to continue to work for its advancement.

Child Led Participatory Action Research

**NamKham Township,
Northern Shan State**



Child Led Participatory Action Research on the Knowledge Level of Children regarding Trafficking, Substance Abuse and the impact on children, Neglect and Inadequate Care

Namkham is situated in northern Shan State and is bordered by Kachin State, Man-Wane Village, Ma Bein Township and China. As a border town, the people of Namkham trade in charcoal, tea leaves, bamboo hats, fruits and traditional clothes with the Chinese. The Chinese in return bring in hardware and electrical goods and assorted clothing. However, adults, youth and children from the villages and the mountains migrate to China and work as domestic helpers, in factories, hair-dressing saloons, massage parlours, daily labourers in the fields, or get married. Most of the residents in the Shweli area of China are Shans as in the Muse, Namkham Townships of Myanmar. They are from the same ethnic tribes but residing in two different countries. Most of the girls marry with Shans from the neighbouring country. The Palaung tribe from the hilly regions will marry a Chinese for (2000 – 3000) Yuan. Most of these Chinese will be old, disabled, diseased or deaf and dumb.

Some girls are trafficked, cheated by brokers and sold, some go and sell themselves, parents marry off the daughters, opium/heroin addicts sell off their wives, parents sell their children, and some go illegally and get lost, never to be found again.

There is also a heightened drug issue. Due to drugs, there is violence within the family, children are told to purchase alcohol and opium, children are neglected and so are their education, health and living; women have to work for their living and in so doing cannot look after the children and there is rampant corruption in the area.

Though it is stated that there is a lot of trafficking in Shan State, it is difficult to obtain official statistics. As a border area, trafficking survivors are being transported due to a government to government exchange, the governments not being aware and little information and knowledge on procedures and protocols. Some people



who are trafficked are from Lower Myanmar, Southern Shan states and other townships. The Township Child Rights Committees are not yet firmly in place and, therefore, data collection is difficult.

It is very difficult to earn one's living in the hilly regions. Most of the families have large numbers of children, many are drug users and, hence, survival is a problem. Most of the children need protection because of rampant substance abuse and drugs trade in the area. Children are neglected, treated violently and beaten and many are emulating the substance abuse habits of adult males. drugs problem. Many children want nothing more than to leave the area as quickly as possible, which makes many fall victim to the approaches of traffickers and brokers or encourages them to undertake risky migration of their own accord.

The main children's issues selected for this research include: neglect, drug use/substance abuse, underage marriage and 'being sold'.

Objectives

- (1) To find out about Child Participation
- (2) To ascertain difficulties that children come across and to be able to present back to adults
- (3) To be able to provide more protective measures for children in the villages.

First, ten children from each of the 3 village CRGs were selected and a one-day training given on Child Led Participatory Action Research (CLPAR). With children's consent issues were chosen on trafficking, the impact of drug use/substance abuse on children and protection, early marriage and neglect and inadequate care. Survey villages/communities include: Ward 3/4, Naung Kaung Village, and Pein Sar Village.

Secondly, the children conducted the survey in the targeted villages. The research was led by the 20 children for half a day including in and out of school and working children using PAR tools.

Thirdly, the CRG and the 20 children presented and discussed the research findings with adults.

Research Tools

- Information tree
- Best and worst
- Balloon Games
- Journeys
- Art painting
- Story telling
- Image theatre
- Drama show

Children's Findings

Problems of parental neglect of children and drug usage

- 80% of the children said they had heard about human trafficking and about being sold.
- Problems they faced were identified through the use of the information tree tool. These included: parents not being able to make time for children; everything was sorted out in terms of monetary considerations; children were blamed and threatened; beatings and corporal punishment; discrimination among ethnic groups; "moral decay" of children; not interested in school work; desire to go to another country based on perceived ideas of having more opportunities; lots of people dealing with drugs in the area; not being able to deal with brokers on human trafficking.
- Children know the advantages and disadvantages of these problems. Children want the adults to know and address these difficulties. They mention their rights. They want to grow up in an environment which promotes having a "good character."

Reasons

- Wards 3/4 are in town and parents spend their time earning money (various odd jobs) and are not aware of the children's health and other matters. Children spend their time attending the Myanmar School, Chinese School and tuition classes. Parents provide money but do not pay attention to the children.



Children are given from MMK 2000 to 5000 a day. Boys spend their time smoking, drinking stimulants and playing video games while the girls spend their time "beautifying" themselves. Children cannot follow their lessons in classes and want to quit school.

- There is opium being sold in the neighbourhood and the parents themselves use opium. Children follow the examples of what they see. There are no police around to take action.
- Some have heard about trafficking, but no action has yet been taken.
- Child Protection Groups are not active.
- The ward is quite a big area with people who have migrated from many different areas living in it and there is also an increase in the population.

Children' Recommendations

Children were informed about parental neglect, inadequate care and usage of drugs through pictures, cartoons, storytelling and drama. This programme had an audience of 90 children (40 boys and 50 girls) and 65 adults (15 men and 50 women).

- We know the houses where opium/heroin is sold but we dare not report. We are scared. Opium/heroin users come to the stream and buy and use. We see lots of hypodermic needles too. Some opium/heroin users are very thin. After taking opium/heroin, they threaten the children. "I dare not go near the stream."

- We want parents to know that they are neglecting their children
- We want to distribute the recorded tapes (from surveys and other events) in the community to raise awareness on the issue
- We want action to be taken regarding our recommendations.
- Ward and village rules and regulations and children's rights should be obeyed.

Children's findings and recommendations from Naung Kaung Village

Children's Findings

Problems of parental neglect and drug usage

- 90% of the children know about/have heard about child protection. Children in the village are active and able to express themselves well.
- Some children live with their grandparents because their parents are separated. Common reasons for separation include the father being an alcoholic and an opium/heroin abuser. Because parents frequently quarrel with each other, children feel depressed and are not interested in going to school. As children grow up they would like to migrate elsewhere to work.
- Previously, parents and grandparents used to beat, scold and threaten their

children. Children do not like this form of "discipline" and being treated in this way.

Reasons

- Parents and some people from the village have migrated to the Chinese border and even to Thailand.
- Many people from the Shan ethnic communities have had limited inputs on child protection. It is noted that there is a more basic understanding of child rights and protection within many smaller ethnic communities.
- Substance abuse and drug use is rampant among the male population; many men are not working and within families, many mothers are working and providing for their households income.
- Many children are emulating substance and drug abuse that they encounter on a frequent basis.

Children' Recommendations

Children were informed about parental neglect and usage of drugs through pictures, cartoons, storytelling and dramas. This programme had an audience of 90 children (40 boys and 50 girls) and 65 adults (15 men and 50 women).

- We must let our peers in the village know about child protection and mobilise them
- Now we are included in the adult Child Protection Group meetings and they take action against items we put forward. There is a house in the village where the children are beaten up badly. When we reported the matter to the CPG, they went to the house.
- Our village is not like before now. Children are now participating and adults are now beginning to see the results of child participation. There is less beating, scolding and threatening in the village now and people have come to notice the children's group and our contributions to the community
- Measures should continue to be taken for Child Protection and for reductions in domestic violence. Child rights groups will continue to educate and raise awareness during mass gatherings and seasonal festivals.

Children's Findings and Recommendations from Pein Hsar Village.

Children's Findings

Problems of parental neglect of children and drug usage

- 80% of the children in the community have heard about human trafficking.
- It is common for village males/fathers to ask children to do things against their will—most commonly, purchasing alcohol, cigarettes and cigars
- It is common for both parents and teachers utilise corporal punishment as a form discipline

Reasons

- Villagers/parents spent little time and/or cannot make time for their children because they are daily wage workers and farmers
- Awareness of positive parenting, discipline is limited in the community as is general knowledge levels on protection rights.

Children's Recommendations

Children presented their findings about parental neglect, usage of drugs, and corporal punishment through pictures, car-

toons, storytelling and dramas. This programme had an audience of 90 children (40 boys and 50 girls) and 65 adults (15 men and 50 women).

- Children want the Child Protection Groups to lead on more education and awareness raising sessions in the community.
- Child rights groups are still inexperienced in leading activities although this

Summary and Conclusion

Generally, knowledge of human trafficking was high amongst children in the three CL PAR villages although, at the same time, these villages do not appear to be as impacted by human trafficking as other locations in the township.

Child neglect and inadequate care appeared to primarily stem from parents—in particular females—being engaged for many hours with securing work and daily wages, adult males substance abuse issues and by association, lack of concern for children. Incomes seem to be higher as compared to other regions of the country where neglect and inadequate care has been noted and many parents resort to providing pocket money to their children as a sign of their “care” and concern for their children.

Local ethnic children do not seem to understand the CL PAR process, which led to more time being devoted to completing the surveys and analysis. This is also a re-

also reflects the higher number of children attending school as compared to some other more rural communities. Children have recommended more summer recess activities.

- CPGs were, in many cases, able to solve the problem of children buying alcohol and cigars. Children would like for CPGs to engage more in promoting adequate care for all children.

flexion of ethnic communities’ limited access to such opportunities in the past. Many community members attended the feedback session when children presented the research findings to the village elders and CPGs and an educational session on PAR tools was provided.

The Child Protection Groups and the village administrators made commitments to take action upon the agreed upon village rules and the based on informational/education posters and other outreach materials on child protection. The village rules will also be distributed to the other villages. Moreover, video documentation will be disseminated to all target villages and the Township Child Rights Committee. It was learned from children that in the CL PAR villages, monitoring was conducted and it is discerned that there has been slight decreases in rights violations and other protection issues. Children have established a complaints “post office,” however; no complaints have been received to date.