



COSECAM

# Sold Like Chicken:

## Trafficked Cambodian Girls Speak Out

Reported by  
Ms. Sandy Hudd

May 2003



Report No: 006

Project funded by  
The United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Trafficking of Women and Children  
in the Mekong Sub-Region

**CHILD SEX DEMAND FACTORS, A RESEARCH IN CAMBODIA**

**STUDY MODULE 1**

**SOLD LIKE CHICKENS:  
TRAFFICKED CAMBODIAN GIRLS  
SPEAK OUT**

**Child Participation in Planning Project**

**NGO COALITION TO ADDRESS SEXUAL  
EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN CAMBODIA  
(COSECAM)**

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Appendix 1. List of centers in Cambodia approached to participate.

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## **We like to express thanks to supporters of the project:**

Mr. Hang Vannak, Coordinator of the UN Inter-Agency Project on Trafficking of Women and Children, Cambodia

Mrs. Seng Yufin (WVC) and Ms. Peng Sokuntea (CRF), Project Commission Members

Mr. Phok Bunroeun (CCASVA), Steering Committee Member responsible for the Institutional Program of which the project is part

Dr. Poomi Kuma, Head Child Center for Mental Health

## **In particular, we like to express thanks to all involved in the 1<sup>st</sup> Workshop:**

First of all:

all 17 girls who freely told their stories!

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## PREFACE

One of the worst forms of child abuse, next to child soldiers, is forcing young girls to become sex objects. Not only they will lose their chances to live a normal life – with a husband in their community, but they might/will catch terrible terminal diseases and surely become traumatized for the rest of their lives.

Many, although not enough, people aim to eliminate this kind of child exploitation or assist victimized young people to return to a normal life. That these efforts are not always successful and often less efficient is due to the complexity of the problem and flaws in the planning.

The World Conference on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children held in Yokohama December 2001 recommends involving children more in design and planning of projects and activities aimed to eliminate child exploitation. A number of people and organizations were already consulting children, but rarely the victims and even more rarely with the aim to get input for design and planning. Some people claim that these child victims are too traumatized and should be left out of the process – besides they don't have the education needed to comprehend the problem, isn't it?

NGO members of the coalition to address commercial sexual exploitation of children in Cambodia who provide shelter and protection to child victims fortunately think differently and were brave enough to give child victims a try. They don't think that these girls do not comprehend the problem. They wish to listen to the children they serve to hear their ideas for improving existing projects or redesigning plans to become more effective and efficient. This project is called Child Participation in Planning.

A first step in this process is to bring children who are victims but survived, together to talk about why it happened to them and how it could be prevented from happening to their peers. Such a gathering happened in March this year as reported in this document. We have now 'useful input' for rethinking our plans. We need more of such input. A following step should be to include this input in the plans and adjust the projects.

This report is about what girls who once were victims and now are survivors said. What they said is characterized by the title "Sold like Chickens" but also by a poem made during the workshop: "I feel born again".

Let's read the report and listen to what they have to say ....

John Vijghen,  
(Acting) Coalition Coordinator

Really pity the Cambodian children, living in bad conditions, who were sold like chickens and ducks.

Is this the life God provided us?  
"

"The girl who has been trafficked is like the moon in the sky that has no light."

Suggestions from trafficked girls for themes to make posters about child trafficking

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many governments and organizations are now working to stamp out the trafficking of children into brothels, but the opinions of the child victims themselves are often not heard. Whilst committed adults can and should speak out about child trafficking, the discussion will be greatly enriched if the voices and views of victims themselves can also be heard.

COSECAM has developed the Child Participation in Planning Project as a pilot program to give child-victims a chance to be heard. The project aims to obtain experience and skills in involving child victims so that child participation can become a more integral and usual part of program development in the near future. Also, importantly, it aims to learn from children rescued from commercial prostitution what the factors were that caused them to become victimized and what measures should be taken to find solutions for their current problems in order to stop the trafficking and sexual exploitation of children in Cambodia.

All Cambodian centers for young people were surveyed to gauge the level of support for the project and to gather ideas on how it should be organized. As a first result a workshop for girls aged between 13 and 18 years who were victims of child trafficking and currently residing in centers in Cambodia was organized. The workshop was held from 28-31 March 2003 at Sihanoukville with the participation of seventeen girls living in centers in Phnom Penh, Battambang, Banteay Meanchey and Sihanoukville.

The workshop was designed so that the opinions, experiences and feelings of the girls could be expressed freely in a situation where they could feel relaxed and confident that they would be listened to. It was also designed so that adults could not dominate or influence what the girls might say. Although considered, no videotaping was done in order to protect the privacy of the girls.

When the girls were asked to describe how they were trafficked and what happened to them, they were all prepared to talk. Despite the general idea among center staff that child-sex workers should not talk about their (former) activities, later these girls were to say that they would have liked even *more* time to talk together about what had happened to them.

All girls described situations where they were unable to escape from the brothel because they were watched constantly and were beaten by the bodyguards if they tried to run away or tried to refuse a client. Some were drugged. Some were given electric shocks. They described a hard life where they were always getting beaten, even when they did what the brothel owner wanted. Some were given contraceptive injections to prevent pregnancy but some were worried constantly because many clients refused to wear condoms. None received any salary – the brothel owner or pimp took all of the money. If they had to go to the doctor for medical help, the owner paid the bills but then added the cost to the amount “owed” for “expenses”.

The girls also gave their opinions on the centers they were staying in and on what should be done to help prevent child trafficking.

The enthusiastic participation of the girls in the workshop demonstrates a number of things. Most strikingly it demonstrates that these girls who had been trafficked *want* to talk about what happened to them. They want to tell their story and to be listened to. Rather than being traumatized by this, they feel helped and *empowered* by being able to talk about what happened and to have their opinions listened to. They want to talk about their experiences so that they can help other girls who have been trafficked or stop girls from becoming victims. They have opinions about the law, about how the media can be used and about best practice in the centers. By describing exactly what happens to children in the brothels, they can help adults, organizations and governments to understand the issue better and therefore to be more effective in interventions.

As a result of this first workshop several recommendations are made for further action:

- 1 Center staff should discuss within their own center and with staff of other centers how they relate to this group of girls at the moment and how they might be able to improve their work with these girls.
- 2 Staff should particularly try to overcome ideas that girls should not tell anyone that they have been trafficked and not talk about what happened to them.
- 3 Center staff should discuss whether there are policies within their centers that should be changed in the light of some of the issues raised by the girls.
- 4 A second workshop should be organized with the same girls who attended this workshop. There is much that they have to share and contribute to our understanding of the problem of child trafficking – the first workshop has just been the start of hearing what they have to say.
- 5 Such a follow-up workshop should include discussion of how the girls can further contribute their ideas regarding programs to prevent the trafficking of children.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND TO CHILD PARTICIPATION

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child includes articles about the rights of children to be protected from sexual exploitation as well as their rights to express their views about their future. Governments and others working with children have responsibilities to ensure those rights are implemented in practice. The trafficking of children into brothels and child prostitution is a serious violation of those rights.

Whilst many governments and organizations are now working to stamp out this practice, the opinions of the victims themselves are often not heard. Committed adults can and should speak out about child trafficking but the discussion will be greatly enriched if the voices and views of victims themselves can also be heard.

For this reason, the World Conference on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children held in Yokohama December 2001 recommended involving children more in planning and activities.

COSECAM, a coalition of non-government agencies working in Cambodia to address the commercial sexual exploitation of children, has taken up this challenge with its project Child Participation in Planning. The Workshop reported here is a first result of this project.

## 1.2 THE CHILD PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING PROJECT: AIMS AND PROCESS

Given the limited experience in involving child-victims in planning and implementation of activities, the Child Participation in Planning Project was developed as a pilot program. The project aims to obtain experience and skills in involving child victims so that child participation will become a more integral and usual part of program development in future. Also importantly it aims to learn from children rescued from commercial prostitution what the factors were that caused them to become victimized and what measures should be taken to find solutions for their current problems and to stop the trafficking and sexual exploitation of children in Cambodia.

There are a number of centers now in Cambodia that especially care for trafficked and sexually abused young people<sup>1</sup>. They are run by various non-government organizations. Appendix 1 lists the centers that regularly or occasionally care for csec-victims by organization and location. All except one have a mixture of residents – trafficked children, sexually abused children, homeless children, children who suffered from domestic violence and children who have been raped. Almost all centers provide accommodation for up to six months, in exceptional cases longer, but one center has a policy to provide longer-than-six-months accommodation. Centers make attempts to reunite the residents with parents or relatives or if necessary, help them to be able to live independently. At most centers vocational training is emphasized, with often the centers themselves providing training in sewing, hairdressing, basic agriculture, weaving, literacy and so on.

Virtually all centers for young people operated by local organizations were surveyed to gauge the level of support for the project and to gather ideas on how it should be organized. On the basis of the survey results, a workshop was planned for girls aged between 13 and 18 years who were victims of child trafficking and currently living in centers in Cambodia. The workshop would be held at a beach resort and would include girls from all over Cambodia. A consultant was identified to give direction to the project and to work with COSECAM project officers.

Each center was initially contacted by telephone to discuss the project further and to determine how many girls in the target group were at the center. The COSECAM project officer and, sometimes, the consultant then visited those centers with girls eligible to join the workshop. An information sheet was given to the center staff (Appendix 2) and to the girls (Appendix 3). At an earlier stage it was intended to organize a

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<sup>1</sup> A COSECAM survey during 2002 found that at that time there were 10 centers which had residents who were victims of child sexual exploitation.

debate at each participating center among the csec-girls prior to and after the workshop, but due to the fact that all but one of the participating centers had only a smaller proportion of its residents being csec-victims implementing this idea was not feasible. Instead the team met with the staff at the center and discussed the issue. After this they met with the girls, either in a group or individually. They explained the project to the girls and asked if they were interested in attending the workshop. They also asked each girl to tell them a little about how they were trafficked and rescued.

Responses from the girls to the idea of the workshop were enthusiastic. Several said that they wanted to talk to other girls in a similar situation and that they wanted to tell people about their experiences if this would help to stop other girls from being trafficked. It was also encouraging that they seemed quite prepared to tell the project officer and consultant about what had happened to them.

Responses from centers were more varied. Most were supportive and agreed to send girls under the charge of a staff member to the workshop. One NGO with child-care centers for csec-victims refused any cooperation despite the center staff being in favor of participating and despite repeated requests from the team. Another NGO declined participation for their policy that girls were not encouraged to tell others in the center that they were trafficked. Although most center staff showed at least some level of concern that talking about their experiences would further upset or traumatize the girls, this didn't hamper their support and joining the workshop. The fact that the project had taken measures to deal with possible problems and enlisted the services of 3 professional psychosocial counselors from the Child Center for Mental Health was probably a decisive factor both for center staff and NGO management<sup>2</sup>.

Eventually 17 girls aged between 13 and 18 years joined the workshop. They were coming from six centers in Phnom Penh, Battambang, Banteay Meanchey and Sihanoukville.

### 1.3 FORMAT OF THE WORKSHOP

The workshop had to be carefully designed so that:

- the opinions, experiences and feelings of the girls could be expressed freely;
- there was a situation where the girls could feel relaxed and confident that they would be listened to without judgment;
- adults should not dominate or influence what the girls might say;
- there should be a lot of recreational fun time besides the discussion sessions.

The program outline was developed by the consultant incorporating both large group and small group discussion. As the majority of the girls were illiterate, no written exercises were included. A national female moderator was identified to run the actual workshop with three group leaders to assist in the small group discussions.

Each participating center did send one staff member for the duration of the workshop who was responsible for the girls from their center during recreational periods and overnight. After much thought it was decided that the caretakers would not be included in the formal workshop sessions so as to keep the number of adults to a minimum. (Later it became clear that the girls would have liked them to observe the sessions in order to know how they feel).

Similarly, it was decided not to video sessions, so as to both help the girls feel relaxed and also to protect their identities.

The formal workshop was designed to focus on the following areas:

- Exploring the child trafficking issue – girls describing their experiences and identifying the factors that lead to girls being trafficked;
- Services – what services are most appropriate to assist trafficked girls;
- Prevention – what can be done to prevent this happening to other girls?

(The detailed program is listed in Appendix 4).

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<sup>2</sup> However, not one girl required the counseling skills of these three professionals during or after the workshop and so the 3 staff of CCMH were also enlisted to act as small group leaders, a task which they performed very capably.

## 2 WHAT THE GIRLS SAID

*One girl said in her poem: “Really pity the Cambodian children, living in bad conditions, who were sold like chickens and ducks. Is this the life God provided us?”*

### 2.1 ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES

Before the workshop, there was some uncertainty about whether the girls would feel confident and safe enough to speak about their experiences with other girls and adults whom they had just met. However, when the girls were asked each in turn to describe how they were trafficked and what happened to them, they were all prepared to do so. Some were hesitant and some had tears in their eyes but all contributed. In fact later they were to say that they would have liked even *more* time to talk together about what had happened to them.

#### **Their Situations and Experiences<sup>3</sup>**

##### Tricked into Brothels

Chrib is the youngest of five children. A Japanese woman promised her a job in a café and her parents agreed to this. However she found that there was no job in a café and that she had been tricked. She was locked in a room in the brothel and injected with drugs.

Srey Tuoch’s father was very ill and despite injections from the doctor, he died. Someone came to the house and asked her mother if Srey Tuoch could go with his daughter to sell flowers. He promised her a lot of money. She went but she had been tricked and was sold by him in Thailand. She was there for three months. At first she had to sell flowers in bars, then he wanted her to become a beggar. She also worked as a servant.

Thourk is now 18 years old. As a result of being trafficked into a brothel, she is HIV-positive and has a young baby.

Any is now 17 years old. She was trafficked into a brothel. She was locked up in a room with other children. It was dark and she was injected with something. When she woke up she wasn’t sure what had happened.

##### From Center to Brothel

Srey Pech is now 18 years old. She has no brothers or sisters. Her parents died and she went to live with other relatives. They mistreated her and so she ran away. She went to live with someone else but the house burnt down. Srey Pech then went to a center where she had a boyfriend. One day her boyfriend cheated her and took her to a brothel in Sihanouk Ville. She eventually escaped because she met a policeman who helped her.

Yuen is now 17 years old. Her mother died of cancer. When her mother was still alive another family came to stay at the house. After her mother died, this family hit and mistreated her and took her house. She went to a center. One of the girls there always had lots of money and persuaded Yuen to go with her to Takeo and then Phnom Penh, both places where she ended up in brothels. She was drugged whilst there.

##### From Bar to Brothel

Sinuon is now 17 years old. She often skipped school and went to a bar or karaoke place with her friends. She ended up becoming a prostitute.

Srey Peu is 18 years old. She has 12 brothers and sisters. Her parents are alive. Someone told her she could get work in Kompong Som. She left home without telling her parents. However the work was in a brothel. The police helped her to escape. Now her parents know about her experience but haven’t visited her in the center.

##### Sold by Family

Vanny is 17 years old. Her stepsister promised her a good job and lots of money. At first her mother didn’t want her to go but then her father became ill and the family had no rice to eat. She was taken

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<sup>3</sup> Names have been changed to protect the girl’s identities.

to a hotel. An old man came into her hotel room and had sex with her. She was then taken to a karaoke bar for two months. They didn't give her a salary but she borrowed money from her boss to give to her parents.

Diep is 16 years old. She hated her stepfather. She was raped by her neighbours. She was taken to work at a massage parlour and after that to a brothel. Because her mother was very ill, she borrowed some money from the brothel owner. In the beginning the brothel owner didn't make her have sex with men because she was too young, but this changed when she became older. She was rescued after someone took her to the police station.

#### Sold by Nun

Srey Mouch is 16 years old. She has 7 brothers and sisters. Her parents were very ill and didn't have any money. A Buddhist nun asked Srey Mouch to live with her. She promised to pay her a salary and to regard her as a grandchild. One day the nun told Srey Mouch that she wanted to visit a relative at the Thai border. However there was no relative there, only a brothel. The nun came back alone with money that she obtained from selling Srey Mouch to the brothel.

#### **Causes of Trafficking**

Many of the girls described situations where their parents were very poor. Some had parents or relatives who physically abused them. Often someone they trusted deceived them by telling them they would have a good job in a shop or restaurant when in fact the job was in a brothel. Surprisingly two girls ended-up in a brothel after they were taken into a center – lured away by another victim!

The girls were asked as a group to list the reasons that they thought led to girls being trafficked. These are their reasons:

- Parents being poor and needing money (identified by them as the most important factor)
- Illiteracy (second in importance)
- Wanting a job and immediately believing someone who promises a good job (third in importance)
- Having no parents alive; having a step parent who mistreats you; being on the streets
- Wanting to help your family; Parents being sick
- Girlfriend or boyfriend cheats you
- Materialism – wanting nice clothes and nice things.

All of these factors can be seen in the girl's stories. Illiteracy is an interesting one – they feel that if girls could read, it would be harder to trick them into prostitution. They would also be able to stand up for themselves.

#### **Forced to Stay**

Common threads also emerged when they described their experiences in the brothels. All girls described situations where they were unable to escape from the brothel because they were watched constantly and were beaten by the bodyguards if they tried to run away or tried to refuse a client. Some were drugged. Some were given electric shocks. They described a hard life where they were always getting beaten, even when they did what the brothel owner wanted. Some were given contraceptive injections to prevent pregnancy but others were worried constantly because many clients refused to wear condoms. None received any salary. The brothel owner or pimp took all of the money. If they had to go to the doctor for medical help, the owner paid the bills but then added the cost to the amount that the girl "owed" for their keep and expenses.

#### **Gang-rape**

None had been beaten by clients but the girls described the worst situation for them being when one man paid for their services but then took the girl outside to where four or five other men were waiting.

#### **Virginity**

In the midst of these dreadful experiences, other practices seem particularly callous. Girls described times when the brothel owner would force them to pretend to the client that they were still virgins. The bodyguards would beat them if they would not cooperate. To be convincing, they would be forced to insert into their vagina a plastic bag of frozen blood, either their own blood or that of someone else. As the sexual act progressed the plastic bag would be pierced and the now melted blood would be "proof" of their deflowering. They described the pain involved in removing the remains of the plastic bag.

#### **Begging**

Other girls described situations where, after a girl could no longer give sexual services, she would be injected to make her arms or legs wither so that she could then go out and beg and bring money back to the pimp that way.

## 2.2 ABOUT SERVICES

*One girl described the world as being one where there are the gods, then humans, and then, below them, girls who have been trafficked.*

The girls were asked which of the services they had received since being rescued were most helpful and useful. They were also asked what the ideal set of services should be.

### Shelter

As all of the girls are currently in centers, it is perhaps not surprising that this was the service they focussed on and their descriptions of what should be provided in a center were largely descriptions of what was currently being provided. They did not comment on other services such as the police, hospitals or the courts.

They wanted centers to provide adequate food and clothing. Daily materials such as soap, shampoo, toothpaste, underwear and flip-flops should be provided regularly and be of good quality. They wanted a center to have a television, radio and fans and to have a good standard of hygiene. They would like centers to have a range of sports equipment, including a bicycle. Some wanted to learn dance and some wanted a range of recreational activities. They would like some trips out of the center from time to time. One girl said that although she was living in a center in Phnom Penh she had never been out of the center and therefore, because she came originally from a province, had never seen the Royal Palace or other landmarks in the city. They would like to have birthday parties or other parties from time to time.

### Job Training

All girls appreciated vocational training. They would like training in sewing, weaving, hairdressing, embroidery, knitting, massage, makeup, cooking and basic agriculture. They wanted to learn to read and write Khmer well and to learn English. Some wanted to learn Thai. One girl wanted education in human rights. Many wanted to learn the computer. Some girls wanted “morality education”.

### Center staff

Attitudes and behavior of the caretakers were also very important to the girls. They want caretakers who will look after them without hitting them or saying something bad to them. They want a feeling of being supported and encouraged. They would like counseling to be available. They would like staff to encourage them to think of more than just the short term, to see a better future for themselves.

### Locked-up

They don't want staff to be watching them all the time in case they run away – this makes them feel uncomfortable. Some girls described having their room in the center locked every night which is a problem if they need to use the toilet. They have to ask the staff member to get up and unlock the door and often then the staff member gets angry with them for disturbing her sleep. If the gates and doors are always locked, they said that they feel that they are in a prison.

### Discrimination

The girls said that when they go out, people outside know they are from the center and often discriminate against them – this makes them feel angry. However some girls said that they feel discriminated against *within* the center which is also providing accommodation for children from other situations. They said that because they have been trafficked, they are discriminated against by staff and are made to do the more menial tasks such as cleaning. They feel that other girls who have not been trafficked are treated more leniently because, unlike them, they have parents who come to visit and hence staff are frightened to mistreat those girls because they will tell their parents. Some girls said that their complaints were not followed up.

## 2.3 ABOUT THE PREVENTION OF TRAFFICKING

*One girl wrote: "The girl who has been trafficked is like the moon in the sky that has no light".*

The girls were asked to give their ideas about what could be done to prevent the trafficking of children.

### **Law Enforcement**

Not surprisingly given their experiences, they want the government to close all brothels and get rid of all brothel owners. They want an effective justice system so that the law punishes those who traffic children but they believe that corruption in the legal system will have to be overcome for this to be effective. For example, they think that police should not be corrupt and allow brothels to stay operating and they don't want criminals to be able to get out of jail by paying bribes. Some girls had been injected with drugs whilst in the brothels and hence want drug abuse to be eliminated.

### **Attitude Change**

Interestingly, they also think it is important to change the attitudes of owners and pimps so that if they don't just get out of jail and do it again. They think it would help if they could tell them of their own experiences so that they would know and understand how it affects children.

### **Rescue**

They believe that the most urgent task though is to help their friends and other girls still in the brothels. They want to inform the police and try to get them out. They want non-government organizations and others to rescue any girls who have been victims of trafficking. They want the government to rescue these girls one by one, even if it is difficult.

### **Peer Warning**

They would like to visit other girls in brothels and share their experiences with them, particularly telling them about what the centers have to offer and about their lives now in the centers.

### **Media & Awareness**

They think that the media can be a powerful tool to prevent trafficking and that the government should be educating people about the issue. They particularly want to tell girls and parents not to easily trust people who promise good jobs. They want parents to understand that they should know the person well and know where the girl will be going. They had lots of ideas for posters about child trafficking that could be developed. They think that storybooks for children could also be developed.

They want to tell people about their experiences of being trafficked. They want girls who have been trafficking victims tell other girls about their bad experiences through non-government organizations, magazines, papers and radio. They want to share their experiences with other girls in the centers so that it will help prevent them being trafficked. They want to find someone they trust to lead group discussions to talk about their experiences.

### **Action**

They want girls to be able to stand up for themselves and protect themselves. They believe that if all girls were able to read and write, they could stand up for themselves more effectively. They want the government to construct more schools for the poor so that poor children can become literate and therefore less likely to believe people who make false promises about jobs.

They would like the government to provide training to parents about domestic violence. They would like parents not to get divorced so that children have to have stepparents who then mistreat them.

They want to prevent foreigners from having sex with very young children and they want people who do this to be jailed. Generally they don't want people to have sex with girls until the girls are of marriageable age.

## 2.4 HOW THE GIRLS FEEL ABOUT PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

*One girl said that she felt reborn in the center.*

### The Past

The girls were asked to describe how they felt when in the brothel.

They listed their feelings as follows:

- Afraid of the beatings and the drugs; worried about the long term effects of the drugs
- Afraid of getting pregnant.
- Afraid of getting AIDS or other diseases
- Regret that they trusted people who promised them good jobs
- Confused about why it was happening to them
- Despair; Hopeless, Feeling that there is no future for them and that they will never be happy again
- Sad; Suicidal; Helpless; Stupid; Pessimistic.
- Alone; Feeling that no-one is paying attention to their problems
- Worried that even when they get out of the brothel, people will discriminate against them and look down on them
- Missing their parents and siblings
- Watched, even when they went to the toilet.
- Afraid of giving their family a bad name, ashamed to go back to their village.
- Sorry about the loss of their virginity.
- Afraid that if they run away the pimp will kill them or the money they owe will be doubled.

### The Present

The girls were asked how they feel now that they have been rescued and are living in the centers. They listed their feelings as follows:

- Happy because they are no longer in the brothel and they can see their parents again; Relieved and more relaxed
- That what they have gone through has passed and they will never have to go through the same experience again
- That they now are loved and have affection again
- That they will be able to take care of themselves, study, and find a good job.
- That they want to help other girls so they don't have the same experience
- Free; Optimistic about the future

### The Future

They were asked how they felt about the future and what they wanted for themselves in the future.

Some girls feel worried about the future because they still "owe" the brothel owner money. This would have been money that the owner spent on medicine or clothing and so on for them. They are fearful that the owner will find them and demand to be paid.

Generally however they feel optimistic about the future.

One girl said that she wants the center to help her and support her into the future and also help her brothers and sisters. Another girl wants to explain to her brothers and sisters that they need to study hard and look after themselves well.

The girls want to have a profession such as sewing or to work in a factory to support their family. They would like non-government organizations to help them to set up their own small businesses, such as a small hairdressing shop. They would like the center or NGO to follow up with them after they go home or move to independent living. Many said that when they have a job, they want to teach their skills to girls in centers because they want to pass on their learning to help others. They want to have their own house and some money so that other people won't look down on them.

They would like to get married and have a family and to take good care of the children and husband. They don't want their children to be illiterate. They would like their husbands to not drink alcohol, bet, or beat them and the children. One girl said that she wants to have a good husband who really loves her and doesn't sell her.

### 3 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 3.1 EVALUATION OF THE WORKSHOP BY GIRLS AND CARE-TAKERS

##### Girls

The girls were overwhelmingly positive about the workshop. They were happy with the practical aspects such as the accommodation, food and sightseeing activities. They appreciated the good care they were given and the skills and attitudes of the adults directly involved in running the workshop. They felt close to those adults and to the other girls. Interestingly they also said that they felt happy and could forget their bad past (in contrast to what some organizations feared, that they would feel upset and traumatized if they discussed their past experiences).

They said that in any future workshop they would like more time to talk about what had happened to them in the brothels and to discuss their experiences with the other girls. They felt that the caretakers from the centers should be able to be in the group sessions but not say anything – this way the caretakers could understand the girls experiences better but not interfere in the discussion.

Reflecting their fears, they said that they didn't want to go out at night during the workshops because of the fear of other people catching them and returning them to the brothels. They don't want girls to go out alone and want the organizers to count the number of girls in the minibus each time to make sure that no one is missing.

##### Caretakers

The caretakers were asked for their evaluation. They hadn't participated in the actual workshop sessions so could only comment on the more general aspects. They were generally happy but said that they would like the mealtimes to occur at a regular time more in line with the mealtimes that girls were used to in the centers. They recommended having a first aid kit available with simple medicines such as headache tablets. They would have liked a copy of the detailed workshop program so that they had an overview of what was planned.

#### 3.2 CONCLUSIONS

##### Wanting to Talk

The enthusiastic participation of the girls in the workshop demonstrates a number of things. Most strikingly it demonstrates that these girls who had been trafficked *want* to talk about what happened to them. They want to tell their story and to be listened to. Rather than being traumatized by this, they feel helped and *empowered* by being able to talk about what happened to them and to have their opinions listened to.

##### Wanting to Help

They want to talk about their experiences so that they can help other girls who have been trafficked or stop girls from becoming victims. They have opinions about the law, about how the media can be used and about best practice in the centers. By describing exactly what happens to children in the brothels, they can help adults, organizations and governments to understand the issue better and therefore to be more effective in interventions.

##### What we should do

If they are brave enough to have survived being trafficked and abused, we need to be brave enough to hear their stories and brave enough to stand with them to stamp out the trafficking of children in Cambodia.

### 3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

This workshop has demonstrated that trafficked girls, at least those now safe in centers, *will* talk about their experiences in an environment where the adults are caring and non-judgmental. The girls *wanted* to talk about what had happened to them and to share their experiences with other girls in the group. They were *not* traumatized by speaking about what had happened. They have opinions and ideas and want to help other girls avoid being victims of traffickers.

We recommend that:

Center staff should discuss within their own center and with staff of other centers how they relate to this group of girls at the moment and how they might be able to improve their work with these girls.

Center staff should particularly try to overcome ideas that girls should not tell anyone that they have been trafficked and not talk about what happened to them, because:

- Telling girls *not* to talk about what happened to them sends the wrong message and implies that what happened to them is shameful and too awful to be spoken about.
- Counseling practice generally has shown that people will be helped, not damaged, by being able to talk about their experiences and problems.
- *All* center staff, not just the counselor, can play a part by being understanding and non-judgmental and helping girls to feel comfortable to talk about their experiences and feelings.

Center staff should discuss whether there are policies with their centers that should be changed in the light of some of the issues raised by the girls.

- Specifically, a policy of locking rooms at night should be reviewed - for safety reasons in the case of a fire; to help staff get a better night's sleep since girls will not have to wake them up to go to the toilet; and to reduce any impression that the girls are in a prison-like environment.

A follow-up workshop should be organized with the same girls who attended this workshop. Aside from being fun for them, there is much that they have to share and contribute to our understanding of the problem of child trafficking – this first workshop has just been the start of hearing what they have to say.

The follow-up workshop should include discussions of how the girls can further contribute their ideas regarding programs to prevent the trafficking of children. This is consistent with the project's aim of finding ways to include children in policy formation and development.

## APPENDIX 1

### NGO-CENTERS PROVIDING SERVICES FOR TRAFFICKED AND SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILDREN

(List based upon a survey during year 2002 done by COSECAM staff)

|   | Agency  | Province            | Contact                              |
|---|---|---------------------|--------------------------------------|
|   | Cambodia Women's Crisis Center (CWCC)                                 | SIEM REAP           | Tel: 023 963 276/ 012 715146         |
| + | AFESIP  | SIEM REAP           | Tel: 012 804214                      |
|   | KROUSAR THMEY   | SIEM REAP           | Tel: 063 380 016                     |
|   | GOUTTE D'EAU  | POI PET             | Tel: 054 967 135 /012 698 371        |
| * | CWCC  | BANTEAY<br>MEANCHEY | Tel: 054 967 144/ 012 925 579        |
| + | Komar Rik Reay Association Center                                     | BATTAMBANG          | Tel: 012 838 602                     |
| * | Children without Borders ( KNK)                                       | BATTAMBANG          | Tel: 053 952 759/49                  |
| + | MEAHTO PHUM KO'MAH (Homeland)   | BATTAMBANG          | Tel: 053 952911/ 012 881 784.        |
|   | AFESIP CENTER II  | KOMPONG CHAM        | Tel: 012 838 329                     |
|   | HOUSE OF HOPE   | KOMPONG CHAM        | Tel: 042 941598                      |
|   | GOUTTE' DÉAU  | PREY VENG           | Tel: 043 348 332/ 012 985 384        |
| + | NEAVEA THMEY (World Vision Cambodia)                                  | PHNOM PENH          | Tel: 023 880 342                     |
|   | SOK SABAY   | PHNOM PENH          | Tel: 012 969 800                     |
|   | HAGAR   | PHNOM PENH          | Tel: 023 217 478                     |
| * | HEALTHCARE CENTER FOR CHILDREN<br>(HCC)                               | PHNOM PENH          | Tel: 023 212 133 / 012 877 975       |
| + | Cambodian Center For Protection Of Children<br>Rights (CCPCR)         | PHNOM PENH          | Tel: 023 880 802/ 012 967 385        |
|   | White Lotus   | PHNOM PENH          | Tel: 023 364 984                     |
| + | AFESIP  | PHNOM PENH          | Tel: 023 884 123                     |
|   | Cambodian Women's Development Agency<br>(CWDA)                        | PHNOM PENH          | Tel: 023 210 449<br>Fax: 023 210 487 |
| + | Cambodian Women's Crisis Center (CWCC)                                | PHNOM PENH          | Tel: 023 982 158 / 012 840 507       |
|   | FRIENDS (MITH SAMLANH)  | PHNOM PENH          | Tel: 023 426 748/ 012 852 406        |
| * | The Cambodian Center for protection of<br>Children Rights (CCPCR) SHV | SIHANOUKVILLE       | Tel: 012 752 373                     |
| + |   |                     |                                      |

\* Girls from these centers participated in the Workshop on 28-31 March 2003

+ Commercially sexual abused girls were at time of survey contact residing in the center

## APPENDIX 2

### ***INFORMATION SHEET FOR WORKERS***

(distributed after translation into Khmer)

One of the recommendations of the Conference on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Yokohama in 2001 was to involve children more in planning and activities. We need to listen to their ideas and opinions so that they feel listened to and feel that their ideas and experiences are valued. By hearing their voices and ideas, planners and policy makers can have a better understanding of issues and consider the best ideas put forward for the future.

COSECAM has funding for a small pilot program to involve approximately 20 girls, aged between 13 and 18 years, who have been victims of commercial sexual exploitation. These girls will be drawn from residents of various childcare centers throughout Cambodia.

Following some initial discussions in each center, the girls will be brought together for a workshop to be held from **28-31 March, 2003** in Sihanoukville. The aims of the workshop are to 1) provide a forum for the girls to share some broad information about their experience and draw out key common factors and 2) to listen to their ideas about what types of services are most helpful to victims and what should be done to prevent other girls from being exploited in the future.

A report of the outcomes will be written which will help COSECAM members to plan and develop strategies for the future. Copies will also be distributed more widely to relevant NGOs and, importantly, to relevant government Ministers and department heads and other parliamentarians. A further workshop may be held later in the year if this seems useful.

Please help with the project by identifying 2 girls in your center who would be suitable to be involved. COSECAM will assist with costs related to the workshop but would appreciate your help with travel arrangements from the outlying centers to Phnom Penh and some assistance during the workshop itself.

COSECAM staff members involved are Mr. Yi Dara and Ms Huot Sovanneary. They are being assisted by Ms *Sandy* Hudd.

## APPENDIX 3

### ***INFORMATION SHEET FOR GIRLS***

(Distributed after translation into Khmer)

# Your chance to speak up !

Children in Cambodia need to be able to grow up free of sexual exploitation.

We need your ideas about what services are most helpful to children who have been victims of child prostitution. We need your ideas about what should be done to stop other children from being abused.

Come along to a get-together of about 20 girls at Sihanoukville from 28-31 March.

It's good to be able to speak away your problem by talking about them with others who have experienced the same things.

It's your chance to speak up about what you think. All of the ideas will be written into a report so that your ideas can be read by organizations and by government.

You'll have some fun as well!

It's being organized by the Coalition to address sexual exploitation of children in Cambodia. Its part of our Child Participation in Planning project.

See you there!

*Thinking together, planning together, acting together*

## APPENDIX 4

### WORKSHOP PROGRAM

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <u>Friday 28<sup>th</sup></u>   | Travel to Sihanoukville.   |
| <u>Saturday 29<sup>th</sup></u> |  |
| Morning                         | <p><b>Visit beach:</b> Games, swimming</p> <p>Whilst at beach, have the girls break into pairs. Have each person in the pair tell the other person their name, age and where they are from. Then each pair comes in front of the entire group and each person introduces the <i>other</i> person in the pair to the group.</p>   |
| Afternoon                       | <p><b>Exploring the issue</b></p> <p>Each girl is asked to tell her story. That is, to describe how they came to be trafficked and what happened to them.</p> <p>All the girls suggest what the factors are in girls becoming trafficking victims. Of all of the factors listed, which are the three most important?</p>   |
| Evening                         | <b>Play:</b> Girls develop and perform a play about trafficking.   |
| <u>Sunday 30<sup>th</sup></u>   |  |
| Morning                         | <p><b>Services</b></p> <p>In small groups, girls discuss what services have been most useful for them. What would the ideal response be?</p> <p><b>Prevention</b></p> <p>In small groups, girls discuss what should be done to prevent this happening to other girls?</p> <p>In small groups, write a message to the government of Cambodia about what needs to be done to stop trafficking of children.</p> <p>In small groups, design a poster about trafficking.</p> <p><b>Conclusion</b></p> <p>In small groups, each girl to answer the following:</p> <p>How did you feel – then?</p> <p>How do you feel - now?</p> <p>How do you feel when you think about the future?</p> <p>How do you want to feel in the future/want to do?</p> |
| Afternoon                       | <b>Beach:</b> swimming.  |
| Evening                         | <p><b>Evaluation</b></p> <p>With everyone, including the caretakers, ask for feedback on the workshop. If we run another workshop, what should be the same, different?</p> <p><b>Conclusion</b></p> <p>Thanks expressed, gifts given.</p>  |
| <u>Monday 31<sup>st</sup></u>   | Return to Phnom Penh.  |