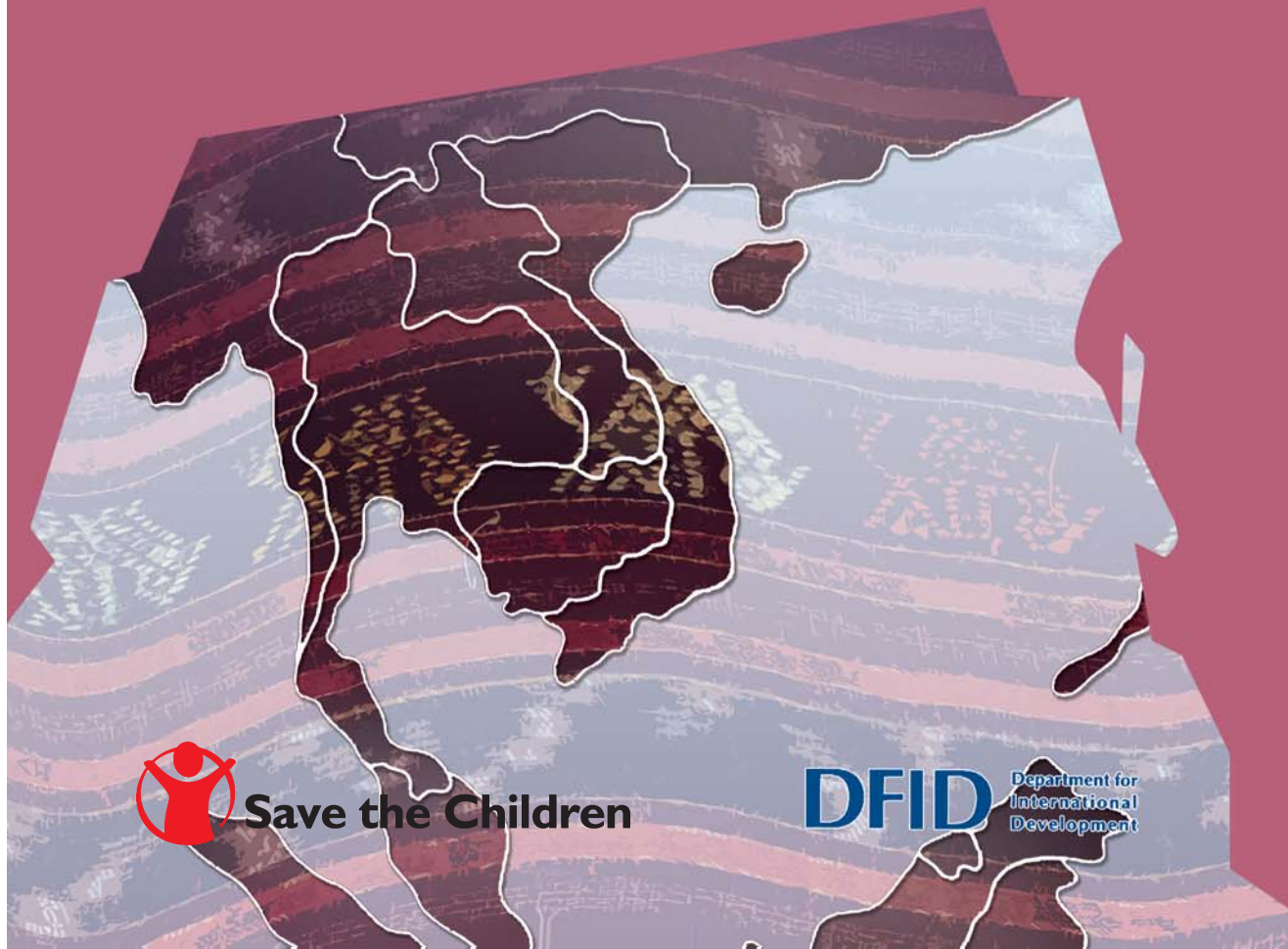




SAFE MIGRATION CHANNEL FOR CHILDREN ON THE MOVE IN CHINA:

An example of good practice
in the Cross-border Project Against Trafficking and
Exploitation of Migrant and Vulnerable Children
in the Mekong Sub-region



Save the Children

DFID

Department for
International
Development



The Cross-border Project Against Exploitation and Trafficking of Migrant and Vulnerable Children in the Mekong Sub-region

Thousands of vulnerable and migrant children, their families, and communities across Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, the countries comprising the Mekong sub-region, experience or are susceptible to suffer abuse, neglect, and exploitation, including being trafficked for forced labour, sexual abuse, forced marriage, and illegal adoption. Like in many other countries globally, migrant and trafficked children in the Mekong, both in-country and across borders, are often invisible to people in society, treated with discrimination, and are excluded from community life, making them extremely vulnerable to continuously endure multiple forms of harm.

The Cross-border Project Against Exploitation and Trafficking of Migrant and Vulnerable Children in the Mekong Sub-region (Cross-border Project) is an initiative developed by Save the Children UK and its partners to respond to these situations of neglect, abuse, and exploitation of children since 1999. With funding from the British Department for International Development (DFID), the Project is now in its third phase until 2009, this time aiming to develop models of child protection systems that are able to keep vulnerable children, particularly migrant children, out of harms and are capable to ensure helpful rescue, recovery, and reintegration of children victims of trafficking and other forms of exploitation and abuse. The project follows the children's migration paths, setting up the interventions at places of origin, transit, and origin.

Through the Cross-border Project, Save the Children continues to bring to the fore the voices of children and grassroots communities in creating policies that uphold the best interest of the children and of other people most affected by human trafficking.

Foreword

Children and young people from China's ethnic minority communities have been leaving their villages, mainly to work in urban centers and cities. Many of them fall prey to human traffickers and to abusive employers in the process.

Save the Children's partners in Daluo township, Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province analysed this phenomenon affecting their villages in 2003 and came up with a strategy to protect their own youth.

The "Safe Migration Channel" strategy mobilises the local authorities, parents, and the children themselves in controlling out-migration of underage persons from their village and preparing those who are of legal age for employment outside their villages. The people work together so that the policy where only those who have completed the compulsory middle school education is implemented, and those who are eligible to leave do so with adequate knowledge and life skills that will help protect themselves in their new life as migrant workers, or as students for those who are leaving for higher education. Recruiters who come to the village are registered and are linked to the young people who are interested and ready for work. Eventually, the leaders of the project realised that these efforts are not enough to ensure the protection of the young migrant workers. It is important to develop a similar protective environment in the destination of the young people. Thus, the work in Liming Community, in Jinghong City started.

This experience of the Cross-border Project shows how protection of young people is undertaken in the context of the labour migration process, how the communities have taken up the leadership on developing and implementing the strategy, and how a solid partnership can indeed be formed between young people and adults so that human trafficking can be prevented.

SAFE MIGRATION CHANNEL FOR CHILDREN ON THE MOVE IN CHINA

Xishuangbanna Prefecture, China

Introduction

Rural-urban migration in China is a growing phenomenon. China's rapid economic development in the last two decades has widened the gap between rural and urban economies and resulted in increasing numbers of rural people migrating to urban areas for better work and educational opportunities. China's fast pace of urbanisation has pushed many rural villagers to the cities as they have to give up their lands for public infrastructure projects. Further pushing this migration trend is the Chinese government's withdrawal of compulsory migrant registration to allow people to move freely into cities. However, without the registration and support system, many migrants, especially children and women, have fallen prey to exploitative working conditions and human trafficking.



Since 2003, Save the Children UK has been working with children, young people, and local authorities in Xishuangbanna Prefecture in southern China to pilot a rural-urban safe migration channel for children and young people between Daluo Township (a rural township bordering Myanmar) and Jinghong City (the capital of Xishuangbanna). The pilot project aims to establish migrant support systems in the places of origin (Daluo), transit, and destination (Jinghong) to make it safe for people, especially women and children, to migrate.



Map of Xishuangbanna Prefecture

Piloting a safe migration channel

At the place of origin

Daluo Township is a small town about 20 minutes away from the border with Myanmar. It mainly derives its income from agricultural products like rubber and tea. The town used to earn much from cross-border tourism until the border with Myanmar was closed in May 2005. One of the villages in the township is Manxixia where majority of the inhabitants belong to the Bulang ethnic group. The village has 151 households with a total population



of 707 people, whose average income is only 950 RMB (approximately US\$116) a year. Since 1987, a large number of young people from this village have migrated to work and study in big cities in mainland China and in neighbouring countries.¹ Through Participatory Action Research (PAR) with local partners, villagers, and children in 2003, Save the Children found that a number of migrants in Daluo Township had low education and awareness of risky migration and thus, lacked self-protection. There was also an absence of information, education, and support network for migrants.



¹H. Bei, "Safe Migration Channel for Children" in *Striving for Good Practices: Lessons Learned from Community-based Initiatives against Trafficking in Children in the Mekong Sub-region* (2006), edited by Ana Maria Clamor, pp 33.

Through a series of meetings and children's rights trainings with local partners, the Cross-border Project identified and built the capacity of key village members, including children, to help raise awareness of potential migrants in Manxixia and nearby villages on the risks associated with migration and human trafficking.

These partners of Save the Children piloted the voluntary migrant registration in Manxixia Village to collect information from people before they migrate, to trace them, and to get feedback when they reach Jinghong City. Children who have not yet completed the compulsory education requirement are discouraged to migrate and those who are out of school are helped to go back and complete their basic education. Recruiters and employers coming to the village are also required to register at the local authority office for screening and monitoring.

At the destination place

As one of China's three major tourism zones, Xishuangbanna has an international airport in the growing capital city of Jinghong, where over 90,000 of its more than 360,000 inhabitants live in the urban areas. Being a popular tourist destination in the Mekong sub-region and a gateway to China, the city's rapidly expanding economy has attracted numerous migrants from neighbouring townships and other prefectures and provinces in China.





Located in the heart of Jinghong, Liming is one of several communities where many migrants live or stay temporarily before migrating further. While some migrants travel by themselves, some come with their families. Most migrants migrate in irregular and risky patterns. As such, it is important to build a safe migration channel and support system in the city for them.

Save the Children works with the Liming Community Committee (community government) and Youth League of Xishuangbanna Prefecture to raise migrants' awareness of the risks associated with migration such as labour exploitation and human trafficking. The Youth League, composed of college students, government officials, and migrant workers, helps strengthen the capacity of the Peer Education Team in Liming community. The Community Committee assists migrant families to better integrate into a new community. Most importantly, the Community Committee helps mediate conflicts between migrants and their employers in cases such as breach of working contract. Together as a network, the Labour Bureau, Youth League, Liming Community, Women's Federation, and local schools are working to establish a protection system for migrant children.



Developing a child protection model for children on the move

The Cross-border Project defines a child protection system as “an organised structure composed of responsible government agencies and groups of adults and children with a legal mandate² to ensure the protection of all children from exploitation, physical, emotional, sexual abuse, and neglect.”³

As one of the emerging child protection models⁴, the safe migration channel for children and young migrants provides pre- and post-migration support to young migrants and develops a sustainable support network among different stakeholders to ensure the safety of the children when they migrate.

²The mandate is not necessarily legislated or long-term in its operations.

³This is the definition agreed upon by the Project Teams and stated in the Project’s logical framework of 3 October 2006.

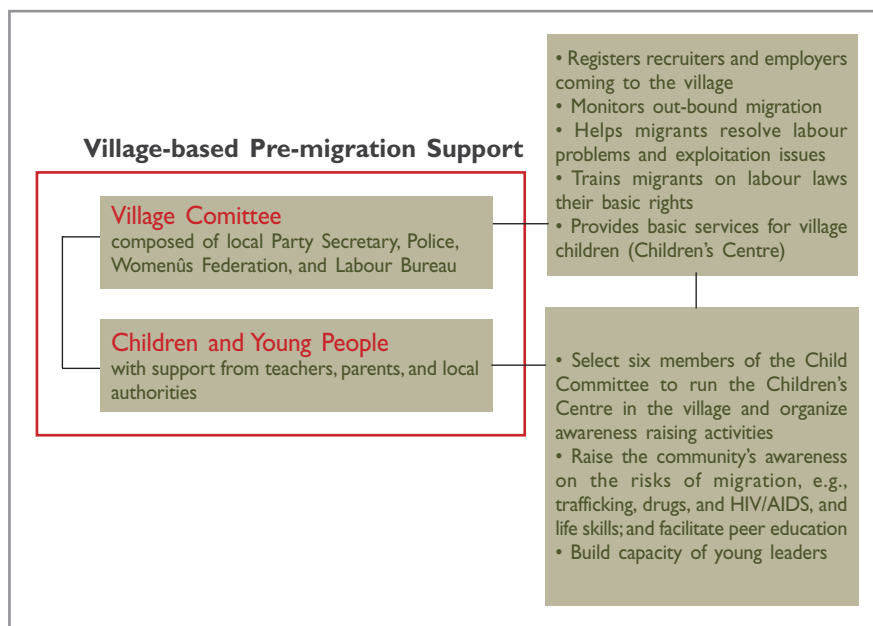
⁴The Cross-border Project is supporting the development of models of child protection systems in 37 project sites in the places of origin and 33 project sites in the transit and destination areas.

As a child protection system, the migrant support network is expected to:

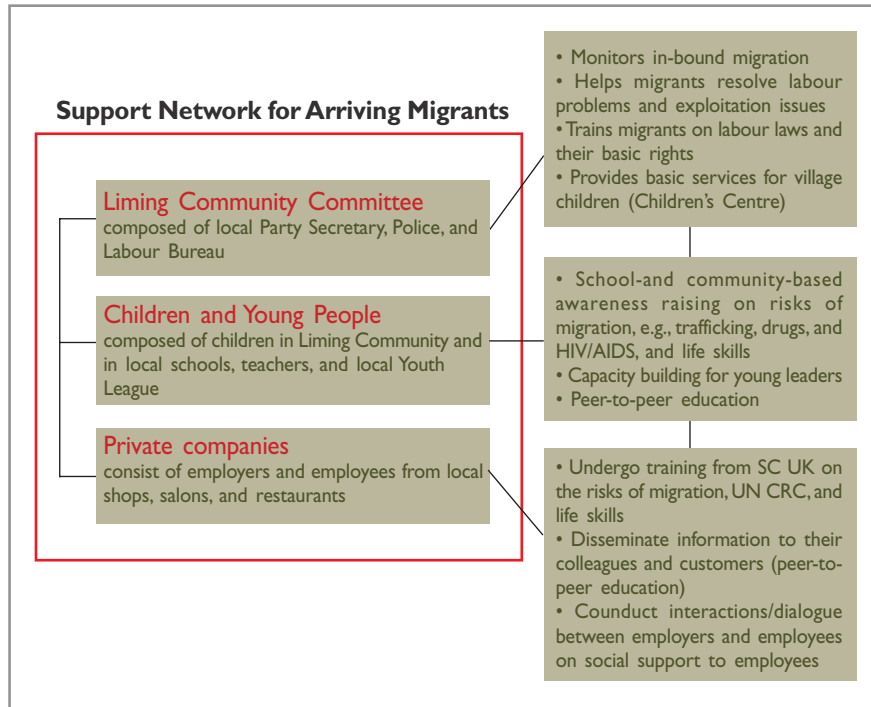
- ◆ Develop better procedures and practices for preventing abuse, exploitation, and neglect of migrant children.
- ◆ Identify and protect child victims of abuse and exploitation.
- ◆ Monitor and report incidences of abuse and exploitation of migrant children.
- ◆ Provide basic services needed by migrant children.
- ◆ Ensure that the system is known and accessible to all children.
- ◆ Register and facilitate cooperation of recruiters and employers

The migrant support network models are illustrated below:

I. The Migrant support network in Daluo Township



2. The Migrant Support Network in Jinghong City



The models above show that networks of stakeholders, including children and young people, work together to;

- ♦ deliver important knowledge and information to migrants before they leave and when they arrive at the destination areas;
- ♦ monitor abuse and exploitation against migrants;
- ♦ improve skills of migrants and working conditions; and
- ♦ take action when abuse and exploitation occurs.

These networks form a child protection system for young migrants from Manxixia Village in Jinghong City.

Critical elements of the good practice

There are three important elements in these migrant support system:

1. Multi-sectoral networking

It is important that local authorities and leaders are actively involved and committed to supporting migrants because they know the migrants and their families. They are also directly accessible to migrants seeking help. The Project helped build the capacity of key community members and leaders, and strengthened existing local governing bodies (i.e. Village Committee, Community Committee) in implementing awareness-raising activities, migrant registration, and providing support to migrants when they are in trouble.

Government partners in Daluo Township and Liming Community in Jinghong City received training on children's rights and gender issues where they actively participated in discussions on safe migration. After undergoing training, they decided to work together on this issue. They also went to villages to learn about the problems that migrants encounter in the destination areas.





Through the existing Manxixia Village Committee and Liming Community Committee⁵, the government partners work together as a multi-disciplinary team to help solve the problems of migrants. The Manxixia Village Committee helps prepare the young migrants for safe travel, while the Liming Community Committee monitors and supports the migrants once they arrive in Jinghong.

⁵The committees are composed of the local Party Secretary, Police, Women's Federation, and Labour Bureau.

Importance of government support

“Two girls from Manxixia Village entered into a contract with an employer to work in Jinghong City. The contract required a deposit of RMB1,200 (equivalent to \$USD129) a year.⁶ However, the girls had only been working for six months when their employer told them that he did not want them anymore. I saw their contract and told the girls that it was unreasonable. One of the community staff brought the contract to the Village Committee. The person in charge reported the incident to the government of Daluo Township, who, in turn, sent a staff to the employer. The government staff showed the employer the relevant laws and regulations and told him that he could not exploit his workers. The employer also learned about the migrant support network that monitored migrants' welfare and protected them from abuse and exploitation. The next day, the employer went to see the girls. With a smile, he said, 'Here is your deposit. You are welcome to come back in the future. But please do not tell anyone else about this.'

We really benefit from the project activities and support from the government. The employers would change their attitudes once we inform them of our activities in the village. They would also return our money when they realise that we are familiar with relevant laws and regulations. Besides, whenever the local government intervenes, these people would not dare oppose them.”

Yu Zhanzhong
A parent in Manxixia Village

⁶Many employers use this method to control their employees. “Deposit” are used to ensure workers do not just leave the employer, or to cover costs for possible breakage of materials and equipment in the course of work, and for uniforms supplied by the employer. This kind of deposit is illegal and the employers usually find excuses not to give deposit back to their employees.



2. Private sector involvement

Apart from government partners, the Project also involves the private sector in Jinghong City in the support network by raising employers' awareness of the rights of migrants and labourers and encouraging them to provide the necessary trainings to their employees. An example of a private sector partner is a beauty salon located in the heart of Jinghong's shopping area. The employer has been supporting her staff to attend trainings on labour rights and laws that the Labour Bureau (one of the Project's government partners) provides and Save the Children's trainings on HIV/AIDS and reproductive health. The employer also provides space for her staff to discuss their work contracts. She also sent some of her staff to trainings to develop their skills as beauticians.

Through partnership with the private sector, the Project is able to identify volunteer migrants who will help support other migrants and report to government partners when their migrant friends are in trouble.



3. Children's participation

Children and young people in Daluo and Jinghong are actively involved in the support network, effectively conveying messages on safe migration to the target group of migrant children and young people.

Children run the Children's Center established in Manxia Village and Liming Community. A group of children selected by their peer forms a Children's Committee to run each centre, plan, and organise activities for children and young people in their community. Equipped with arts and sports instruments and educational materials, the Children's Centre serves as a place where children and young people can spend their free time to play and learn together and for young leaders to organise awareness-raising activities for children in their community and nearby communities. The children-led awareness raising activities include drawing and poetry competitions, theatre, and peer education. From time to time, the Children's Committees also organise activities to raise funds.



The Community and Village Committees support the Children's Committees to run the Centre and organise activities by providing spaces in the Community and Village Committee's offices, funding, and equipment to run activities. They also give advice to the young leaders, who are learning how to think independently and how to plan and implement activities on their own.

To reach to a wider group of young people, the Project in Jinghong City works with selected local secondary schools to raise awareness on children's rights and risks associated with migration. It also identifies and works with peer educators and volunteers who will organise awareness raising activities in other schools and in the Children's Centre in Liming Community. Since some of the students are migrants themselves who are moving from rural townships to seek better educational opportunities in the city, they are very keen to help other migrant children, both in Jinghong and back in their hometown.

Young advocate



Pa Dao has been working as a member of the Children's Committee of the Children's Centre in Manxixia Village for almost three years. He was a 15-year-old Bulang ethnic boy who was about to quit school to help his cousin run a grocery store in Hainan Province when he was chosen to be one of the five child representatives from Southern China to attend the Mekong Children's Forum on Human Trafficking in Bangkok in 2004. As a child representative, he was able to make his parents realise that his potentials would be developed if he continued studying instead of work in a grocery.

"Because of the opportunity and the knowledge that I have learned (from the Forum), I have become more confident. I believe I will have a better future. As long as I continue studying, I know my dreams will come true."

Now an 18-year-old student at Xishuangbanna Vocational Technology College, he works with the Project as a communication cadre in Jinghong. His role is to collect information for the Liming Community Children's Centre to raise awareness on the risks associated with migration and to provide peer education on necessary life skills.

"We mainly work with children, but we also talk with adults about our work. For younger children, we use performance or theater as a way of communication. For older children, we tell them how to deal with different situations."

"... I hope that this Project will not only be carried out by Save the Children, but also involve the Public Security Bureau (PSB), government, and schools. We can work together because our capacity is far from sufficient. We need support from all people."

Challenges and lessons learned

1. Maintaining government and civil support for the safe migration channel.

The Project owes its success to the involvement and commitment of local government partners to allocate resources in running migrant support systems and implementing children's activities to ensure a safe channel for migrants. The project has to develop its strategies to ensure continuity of this level of support generated from local agencies both in Daluo Township and Jinghong City.

2. Reaching other places of origin

The support system is limited to migrants from Manxixia Village in Jinghong City. Other places where migrants originate and move are not yet included in the support system, making it difficult to trace and support other migrants.





3. Replication

There is a growing interest in other places to replicate the model but there are many difficulties. In Daluo Township, the pre-migration support system has been replicated in 5 places. There are many more villages want to establish this system but they have a limited number of capable support personnel. Government partners in Jinghong City also find it hard to provide comprehensive support to the huge number of migrants arriving and departing from the city. A successful replication of the migrant support model would need the involvement and commitment of more stakeholders, particularly government partners at higher levels, to protect young migrants.

4. Partnership with the private sector

Partnering with the private sector in the destination areas is a new challenge to the Cross-border Project. Many private companies do not have social welfare services for working children. The employers need to be educated about the rights of children and labourers. The private sector is an important stakeholder that could ensure the safety and protection of young migrants.

5. Parents' support for children's participation

Equally important is the participation of children and young people in the target areas. They can mobilise themselves to deliver knowledge and information to other children through awareness raising and peer education activities. They also report cases of abuse and exploitation to government partners. When members of the Children's Committees in Manxixia Village and Liming Community reach 18 years or migrate elsewhere, they hand over their responsibilities to younger members. Former committee members keep coming back to give advice to their successors, in the process creating a social network of children and young people eager to support the child protection system.

However, some parents who do not see the importance and benefit of pre-migration support and children's participation are not keen to allow their children to participate in project activities.





Save the Children

Save the Children fights for children around the world who suffer from poverty, disease, justice, and violence. We work with them to find lifelong answers to the problems they face.

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IMPORTANT NOTE;
The children photographed in this book are advocates in their communities and are not victims of trafficking.

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