

Little Buddha

Exploring Child Protection in Buddhist Communities
across Southeast Asia - A Scoping Study



International Network
of Engaged Buddhists



Acknowledgments

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Authors: Opor Srisuwan, Rita Litwiller, and Ornella Barros, with insights from Nonglak Kaeophokha and Somboon Chungprampree. **Concept :** Adriana Lucía Gómez V. **Design:** Diana González Molina www.domestika.org/es/diko/portfolio

Country Researchers: **Cambodia:** Ping Ann Oung | **Laos:** Pintong Lekan | **Myanmar:** Ohnmar Aung | **Thailand:** Worrawan Jirathanapiw | **Vietnam:** Nguyen Thi Xuan Phuong & Dat Nguyen

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Acronyms

ABC Asian Network of Buddhist for Child Protection	ASEAN Asian Network of Buddhist for Child Protection	CBID Community-Based Inclusive Development	CSO Civil Society Organization	CVACS Cambodian Government's Violence against Children Survey	ECPAT End Child Prostitution and Trafficking
FBO Faith-Based Organization	FGD Focus Group Discussion	GNRC Global Network of Religions for Children	KAP Knowledge, Attitude, Practice	KII Key Informant Interview	MICS Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MOLISA Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs	MSC Most Significant Change	NGO Non-Governmental Organization	SIDA Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency	UNCRC United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child	UNFPA United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF United Nations Children's Emergency Fund	UNICEF EAPRO Unicef East Asia and Pacific Regional Office	VAC Violence against Children	VAW Violence against Women	WHO World Health Organization	

Foreword

It is our pleasure to present this scoping study that aims to provide a baseline for protection from and prevention of violence against children in Buddhist educational institutions across five Southeast Asian countries - Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. Buddhist educational institutions hold a significant role in shaping the lives and minds of young individuals, and it is crucial that these institutions become safe sanctuaries where children can learn and grow in an environment free from all forms of violence. Buddhist teachings and principles are in harmony with the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The scoping study analyses the complex situation in specific Southeast Asian countries, seeking to shed light on the multifaceted nature of violence against children in this sub-region in Buddhist educational institutions. By understanding the current situation, we can better comprehend the challenges that exist and identify opportunities for improvement. Moreover, this study explores effective practices and mechanisms that have already been implemented in various contexts. By examining these successful approaches, we can learn from one another and replicate these strategies in different settings, thereby bolstering our collective efforts to protect vulnerable children everywhere. The study highlighted also several gaps in the data and evidence on this topic and we acknowledge that this is only the beginning for there is much more in-depth research that needs to be undertaken to complete the full picture.

The insights and recommendations provided in this study are intended to serve as a reference for religious leaders and educators in Buddhist educational institutions with the goal to provide the knowledge and tools needed to strengthen child protection.

Preventing violence against children requires a collaborative approach that involves a wide range of stakeholders across sectors. They include not only religious leaders and educators but also families, communities, governments, and civil society organizations. The recommendations put forth in this study, when implemented collectively, have the potential to create lasting change, safeguarding the rights and well-being of children.

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the INEB team coordinated by Opor Srisuwan and all those involved for the last several years in developing this scoping study with dedication and commitment. It is our hope that the study will serve as a vital resource for all stakeholders working towards a violence-free world for children. Ultimately, the overarching goal is to foster cultural transformations in an environment where everyone can coexist harmoniously while upholding the rights of each and every child.

Rebeca Rios-Kohn J.D.

Executive Director

Arigatou International New York Office

Somboon Chungprampree

Executive Secretary

The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB)



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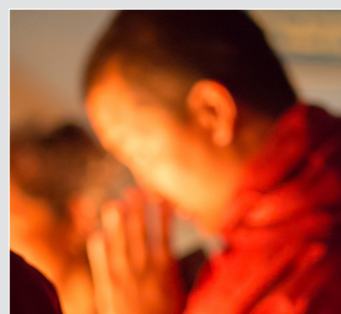
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Executive summary

The scoping study aimed to establish a baseline for protection from and prevention of violence against children in Buddhist educational institutions across five Southeast Asian countries: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. In this context, the study looked into:

- The current status of violence against children and child protection in these five countries.
- Effective practices and mechanisms employed by Buddhist organizations to prevent and respond to violence against children.
- Recommendations for religious leaders to prevent and address all forms of violence against children in their communities.

With the exception of Vietnam, the other four countries in the Mekong sub-region have significant Buddhist populations. While Theravada Buddhism is the oldest and often considered the most conservative, both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism stress the importance of child protection, positioning themselves as providers of alternative or residential care. Monastic schools serve a broad audience, ranging from monks to vulnerable children and communities, and play a central role in education and child protection in these nations. However, the exact number of monastic schools remains undetermined.

The study reveals significant gaps and opportunities in:

1. addressing corporal punish
2. challenging prevailing social norms related to gender inequality and discrimination;
3. exploring the pivotal role of Buddhist institutions in fostering child protection;
4. applying Buddhist principles to education; and,
5. ensuring active participation of children in shaping protective environments.

Corporal punishment remains prevalent across all countries studied, with varying levels of acceptance in different settings. Cambodia stands out for its comprehensive approach, involving NGOs and local law enforcement in monitoring and reporting mechanisms. However, there's a need for more systematic strategies in other countries, especially in Myanmar, to ensure effective prohibition of corporal punishment in all settings. Buddhist institutions, especially in Cambodia, play a vital role in child protection advocacy. Collaboration with organizations like UNICEF and incorporating child protection into educational curricula demonstrates proactive efforts. However, challenges persist in garnering support from

policy influencers and governmental bodies, hampering the broader impact of these initiatives.

Deeply ingrained gender norms pose significant challenges. In some cases, societal expectations limit girls' choices and often lead to child marriage. In other cases, the victim-blaming culture increases risks associated with escalated violence or re-victimization. Buddhist monasteries have long served as community centers, embodying not just spiritual sanctuaries but also hubs for education and social support. Monks and nuns, influential community figures, can contribute to child protection efforts. Proactive support from Buddhist institutions, educating parents and caregivers, is crucial in breaking these norms and fostering a protective environment.

Findings suggest that Buddhist Educational Institutions actively incorporate Buddhist principles aligning with child protection and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). These principles emphasize compassion, non-violence, and community spirit, providing a strong foundation for child protection initiatives. However, there's a need for more extensive training and awareness programs to ensure a consistent application of these principles across diverse contexts. Both Cambodia and Vietnam, among the countries in this study, have shown strong commitment to child protection and tackling violence against children, particularly in their post-war contexts. These nations have implemented specific child protection strategies, legal frameworks, and monitoring systems that are presented as good practices in the region.

The data collection indicates that children's participation is acknowledged, but efforts are needed to strengthen its scope, quality, and outcomes. While democratic processes exist, cultural dynamics influence participation levels which calls attention to the importance of nurturing environments that foster collective

decision-making, critical thinking, and individual expression. Efforts to include children with disabilities are ongoing. Nonetheless, some Monastic schools struggle with capacity and infrastructure to host children with special needs, indicating a need for increased support and inclusivity.

The scoping study recommends a multifaceted approach to enhance child protection within Buddhist educational institutions. Legal reforms, including eliminating corporal punishment for children under 18, are crucial. Collaborative policies involving public-private partnerships, monitoring mechanisms with gender and social inclusion indicators, and addressing existing gaps in child protection are essential steps.

Buddhist leaders are pivotal in promoting and influencing change. Their teachings emphasizing compassion and equality can help to reshape cultural norms. Initiatives like specialized workshops for leaders, community dialogues, and integrating child protection within religious teachings are proposed. Collaboration with NGOs and governments, along with active child participation, are crucial elements in this approach. Educational efforts, blending Buddhist principles with modern parenting challenges, can provide practical tools for parents. Empowering Buddhist institutions involves consistent community engagement, supporting children with disabilities, and integrating child protection rights within the community.

In summary, the study advocates for legal reforms, active involvement of Buddhist leaders, educational initiatives, and empowered institutions, all fostering a safe environment for children within Buddhist educational settings.



1

Introduction & Methodology

The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), co-founded by Sulak Sivaraksa in Thailand in 1989, is dedicated to integrating Buddhist practice with social action to create a just and peaceful world. As a growing network with members from over 25 countries, INEB focuses on promoting inter-Buddhist and inter-religious collaboration, providing resources on social concerns, and organizing conferences and training rooted in Buddhist principles.

Recognizing the issue of violence against children (VAC) in the Mekong region, INEB, in collaboration with the Arigatou International New York Office, hosted a consultation in 2017 involving 20 Buddhist leaders. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 exacerbated concerns related to VAC, highlighting the need to address this issue in future initiatives. This consultation resulted in the establishment of the Asian Network of Buddhists for Child Protection (ABC), committed to child rights and preventing VAC. ABC and INEB initiated a research project that focuses on Child Protection in Buddhist communities across Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Lao PDR, and Thailand, with the goal of collecting comprehensive data on child protection in religious settings.

Objectives

1

Explore the current situation of violence against children by conducting a literature review of the five selected countries and addressing what is known about specific Buddhist communities.

2

Identify promising practices and mechanisms from Buddhist organizations to prevent and respond to violence against children.

3

Identify strategies and recommendations for Buddhist leaders and members of the Asian Network of Buddhists for Child Protection (ABC) to prevent and respond to all forms of Violence against Children (VAC) in their communities.

Methodology

A total of
32



organizations from all five countries participated in the research study,

15

monasteries, temples, and wats

6

Buddhist-led organizations

5

governmental sectors

6

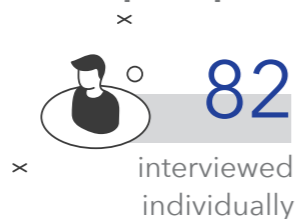
international organizations

The study involved interviews with



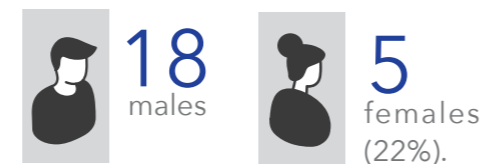
including children, youth, and adults from Buddhist organizations, temples, and monasteries, International Nongovernmental Organizations (INGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), government officials, and parents.

Of the participants



Regarding gender

23 participants (children) were aged between **15** and **18** year



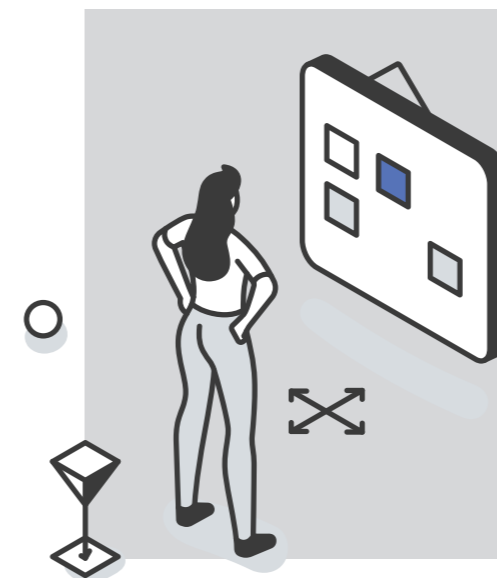
Female participants represented 55% of all participants, with their numbers increasing with age.

Frameworks and qualitative methods used included Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation, INSPIRE, and the Community-Based Inclusive Development model (CBID). Additionally, the Most Significant Change Technique was employed to provide more in-depth insights about certain participants.

To safeguard privacy, we have chosen to employ pseudonyms for individuals and institutions when necessary. Additionally, all translations of legal documents, interviews, and narratives are our own, reflecting our commitment to accuracy and clarity. It is important to note that while this report, meticulously curated by our research team, benefits from the diverse perspectives contributed by many, the analyses presented primarily represent the work of the country researchers. Thus, these interpretations may not necessarily align with the views held by all participants or their respective organizations.

Qualitative Tools

Country consultants employed semi-structured interview questions and guidelines rooted in child protection principles. These were utilized during site visits, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), group discussions, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The primary focus of data collection was to assess the effectiveness of child protection projects, particularly their impact on direct beneficiaries such as youth (aged 15-24 years), families, communities, stakeholders, and involved Buddhist leaders. KIIs and FGDs typically lasted between one to one and a half hours.



Support for these interviews was provided by INEB and country partners. In each country, **5-7 KIIs** or group interviews and at least two **FGDs** were conducted: one with Buddhist leaders and another with NGOs, private sectors, and government agencies.

Limitations

Generalization: One notable limitation highlighted by the Myanmar researcher is the challenge of generalization. Given that perspectives on Violence Against Children (VAC) and child protection are deeply rooted in cultural beliefs and longstanding traditions, there is a valid concern that the research findings may not be universally applicable or uniformly accepted by various populations across Myanmar.

Moreover, the Thai researcher emphasized that the current data might not accurately represent the experiences of a broader range of children and youth attending monastic and Dhamma schools. This limitation primarily stems from the restricted number of key informants involved in the data collection process. Furthermore, the selection of these key informants by the country partners could potentially introduce bias in the elicited statements and testimonials. Nonetheless, the insights gained from this study can serve as a foundational step towards conceiving more comprehensive research tailored to child protection within Buddhist contexts.

Constraints due to COVID-19: The COVID-19 pandemic presented a dual set of challenges. It not only posed significant obstacles to implementing child protection measures in Buddhist settings but also had an impact on the research methodology, specially the need to shift from in-person interviews to virtual ones. While this approach ensured the continuity of data collection, it proved impractical for certain stakeholders and key informants, potentially limiting the depth of insights obtained.



2

Buddhism and Monastic schools in the Mekong sub-region

Table 1. Country Data

Total Population, Percentage of Buddhists, and Buddhist Educational Institutions

Cambodia

16.7 M
96.8% Buddhist
832 Buddhist educational institutions (primary - university)

Lao PDR

7.3 M
64% Buddhist
54 Buddhist education institutions (primary - university)

Myanmar

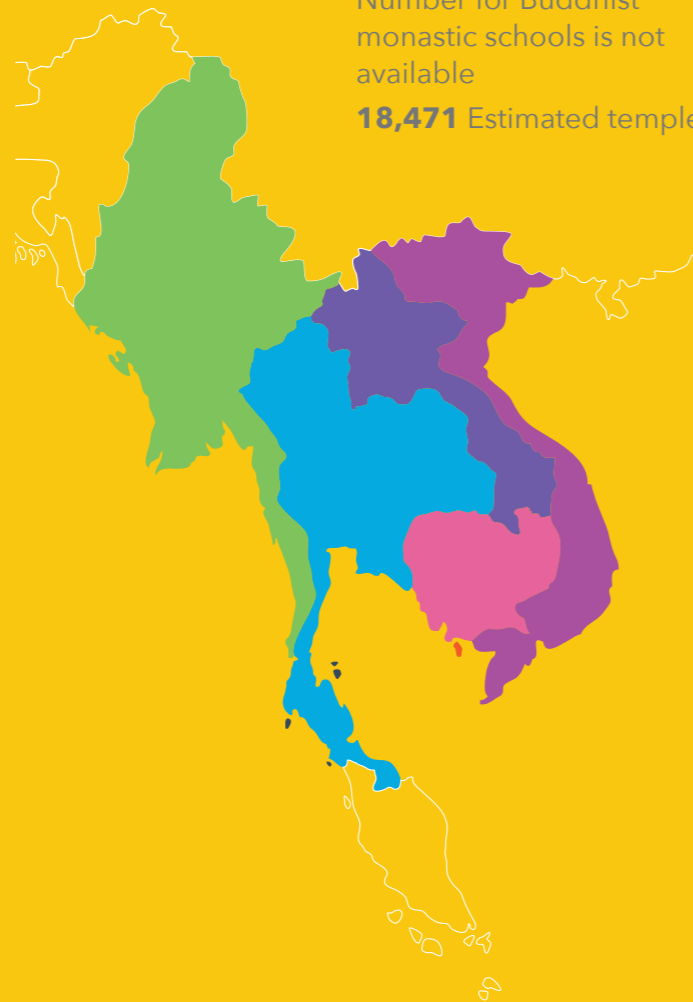
54.4 M
79.8% Buddhist
1,700 + Buddhist educational institutions (monastic & nunnery)

Thailand

69.8 M
92.6 % Buddhist
408 Registered monastic schools

Vietnam

97.3 M
60% Buddhist
 Number for Buddhist monastic schools is not available
18,471 Estimated temples



1 Source for all country populations data is from: Worldometer - 2020 population estimates, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/south-eastern-asia-population/>
 2 Buddhist population estimates for Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand are taken from World Population Review - <https://world-populationreview.com/country-rankings/buddhist-countries>, Buddhist countries, (Pew Research 2020).
 3 Cambodia: Source for school statistics, pagodas, and monks, Ministry of Cults and Religious Affairs, 2012- 2013, 2018; and source for Buddhist universities Ven. Suy Sovann, 2014.
 4 Laos: Sources - Central Sangha Education Office in Vientiane (2015) with updated information for 2018. At present, most of the Buddhist education in Laos includes two main subjects: a) Buddhist studies and b) science & social sciences, Lochan A, 2019:498.
 5 Myanmar - Burnet Institute, et al, 2016, is the source of information about schools in states and regions.
 6 Thailand - Source: National Office of Buddhism, 25 July 2020.
 7 Statista - <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1108165/vietnam-share-of-religions/#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20over%2026%20percent,Roman%20Catholics%20at%207.4%20percent.>
 8 "The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha is the only recognized Buddhist religious organization and representative of the entire Buddhist Sangha. Source for estimated temples, monasteries and more than 49,500 monks and nuns." (Shuyin, 2018).

Theravada Buddhism

In four of the five countries examined—Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand—the majority of the population adheres to Buddhism, specifically to Theravada tradition. Theravada, recognized as the oldest form of Buddhism, is considered more conservative and is believed to closely align with the early teachings of Buddhism. Specifically:

In **Cambodia**, which has a long history of a Buddhist majority, over **95%** of the population identifies as Buddhist.

In **Lao PDR**, **66%** of the population practices Theravada Buddhism, making it the country's largest religion.

Thailand's population is predominantly Theravada Buddhist, with roughly **94.6%**, or around 64 million people, adhering to this faith.

Myanmar boasts a significant Theravada Buddhist population, with approximately **88%** of its 55.6 million people (as of July 2018) practicing this tradition.

Theravada, which means "Teaching of the Elders," is the oldest surviving Buddhist school. It emphasizes an individual's path to enlightenment, primarily through meditation and mindfulness practices. Based on the earliest recorded teachings of the Buddha found in the Pali Canon, Theravada teaches that insight gained through meditation and observance of moral precepts leads to personal liberation. Monasticism plays a central role, with monks and nuns holding a special place in the community. Theravada is prevalent in Southeast Asia, including countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar (Burma), Laos, and Cambodia.

Mahayana Buddhism

In contrast, Vietnam presents a distinct religious landscape where Mahayana Buddhism prevails. This sets Vietnam apart from its predominantly Theravada Buddhist neighbors in Southeast Asia. According to the 2019 Vietnam Population and Housing Census, Buddhists constitute about 5.3% of the total population. However, other sources, such as a 2018 report from the Government Committee for Religious Affairs (GCRA), suggest that up to 14.9% of Vietnam's population (totaling 97.9 million as

of mid-2019) identifies as Buddhist. Despite a significant portion of the Vietnamese population identifying as Buddhist, the practice remains relatively underrepresented in global discourse. This limited visibility is partly attributed to the nation's communist governance, which maintains strict oversight over religious entities and requires official registration.

Vietnam boasts a rich tapestry of Buddhist history, tracing its origins back to the first or second century C.E., as documented by scholars like Nguyen The Anh, Cuong Tu Nguyen, and Nguyen Lang. Positioned at the crossroads of East, South, and Southeast Asian cultures, Vietnam has seamlessly integrated and adapted Buddhist traditions from neighboring nations, such as India, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar. Present-day Vietnam is characterized by a mosaic of Buddhist schools, encompassing various Mahayana traditions, Theravada practices found among ethnic Vietnamese and Khmer groups, and distinctive indigenous forms like Khat Si Buddhism, Hoa Hao Buddhism, and Truc Lam Zen. These local variants interweave elements from Mahayana, Theravada, and other regional religious customs. While Mahayana Buddhism predominantly shapes the Vietnamese spiritual landscape, the nation's Buddhist practices often blend teachings and practices from diverse traditions. A unique aspect of Vietnamese Buddhism is its flourishing communities of Buddhist nuns and their lineage transmissions, spanning both Mahayana and Theravada traditions (as noted by Swenson and Pichler).

Monastic Schools

Although the exact number of monastic schools in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Thailand is unknown, the following statistics for registered monastic schools in these four countries are sourced from reliable data:

- **Cambodia:** According to the statistics of the Ministry of Cult and Religious Affairs (2012-2013), there are 775 Buddhist primary schools, 26,462 students, and 1,817 teachers; 35 junior high schools, 4,817 students, and 614 teachers; 17 senior high schools, 1,685 students, and 377 teachers. Additionally, there are five Buddhist universities throughout the country (Ven. Suy Sovann, 2014).
- **Lao PDR:** The Central Sangha Education Office in Vientiane (2015) stated that there are more than 40 Buddhist schools in Lao PDR, ranging from primary to secondary levels. In 2018, there were a total of 54 schools in Lao PDR, divided into 7 primary schools, 32 lower secondary schools, 12 upper secondary schools, 2 Buddhist colleges, and 1 school of Pali, with 9,122 students and 902 teachers. Currently, most Buddhist education in Laos focuses on two main subjects: a) Buddhist studies and b) science & social sciences (Lochan A, 2019:498).
- **Myanmar:** The monastic school system in Myanmar operates over 1,700 schools catering to approximately 300,000 children. Data collected from July to October 2013 indicates that there were 1,146 monastic schools in eight states of Myanmar, namely, Yangon, Mandalay, Bago, Sagaing, Chin, Shan, Ayarwaddy, Tanintharyi (Burnet Institute et al, 2016). Monastic education is a major contributor to education in Myanmar, with its history dating back to the 11th century, spanning from the earliest Myanmar kingdom through periods of British colonization to the present day (Myanmar Education Consortium, 2015). An estimated 1,700 monastic and nunnery schools currently provide education to children from nearby communities, areas affected by armed conflict, and orphanages. These children, novices, monks, and nuns receive instruction in Buddhist teachings as well as a general curriculum (MOE,

2015; MOPRR, 2014). Additionally, residential care in Myanmar serves children who are abandoned, vulnerable, poor, and disadvantaged. In areas experiencing extreme political instability, poverty, and a shortage of infrastructure and services, residential care provides these children with living arrangements.

- **Thailand:** As of July 25, 2020, according to the National Office of Buddhism, Thailand has 408 registered monastic schools with 34,208 students (22,820 junior high school students and 11,388 high school students).
- **Vietnam:** The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS) is the sole recognized religious organization representing Buddhist monks and nuns, as well as lay followers in Vietnam and overseas Vietnamese communities. It has jurisdiction over 49,500 monks and nuns and oversees 17,376 temples and monasteries throughout the country (Shuyin, 2018).

Monastic schools serve not only monks, nuns, and novices but also vulnerable children, families, and entire communities. In Cambodia, temples or monasteries, known locally as "Wats" in Khmer, hold more than just spiritual significance; they represent vital educational hubs for children from underprivileged backgrounds. Beyond their religious connotations, monasteries have historically been the heart of village communities, offering essential educational, cultural, and social services (Ven. Suy Sovann, 2014). A 2019 report by UNICEF Cambodia emphasized the pivotal role of Buddhist pagodas, describing them as "powerful, faith-led institutional mechanisms" that facilitate community engagement in social services, particularly in health and education. These pagodas are deeply trusted and frequently consulted by Cambodians, especially for matters concerning child welfare. Some of the larger pagodas even serve as alternatives to

the conventional government education system, especially for the nation's most impoverished families. Given the presence of approximately 4,872 pagodas across the country, it's notable that out of nearly 69,199 monks, almost half are children (Ministry of Cult and Religion, 2018).

In Myanmar, monastic schools play a pivotal role in offering both education and care to vulnerable children. A prime example is the Parahita Monastery, established in 2007 and located in the Shwegyin township of Bago, approximately four hours from Yangon. Under the guidance of Ven. Aggasara, the monastery serves as a training institution for aspiring monks and provides sanctuary to 200 vulnerable children, including orphans, abandoned children, and those from separated families. Additionally, it hosts a vocational training center and a preschool, ensuring a holistic approach to child wellbeing and education (Buddhistdoor International Shuyin, 2015). Reflecting the broader challenges in Myanmar, a 2021 UNICEF report highlighted that nearly half of the children aged between five and 15 come from impoverished backgrounds, and at least a million of them are subjected to hazardous work environments. Furthermore, close to 250,000 find shelter in residential care facilities, including Buddhist monasteries (UNICEF, 2021).

Thailand's Monastic School Education Act, known as Phra Pariyatidhamma, was officially enacted on April 15, 2019 (as referenced in the Government Gazette, volume 136, issue 50 A, dated April 16, 2019). Article 5 of this legislation outlines three primary objectives for the administration of monastic schools, one of which is promoting the incorporation of Buddhist principles into everyday life. A significant role of these monastic schools, as mandated, is to facilitate and coordinate educational initiatives for vulnerable children and youth in remote and rural areas. As a result, the Thai government has legally affirmed the role of monastic schools in extending educational support to all children, with an emphasis on assisting those who are economically disadvantaged or vulnerable.

In a broader context, monastic schools have increasingly emerged as pivotal institutions for education and child protection in the region. For instance, in Myanmar, government recognition and support for monastic schools became evident in 2013, when the government allocated 3 billion kyat (equivalent to USD 3.3 million) to bolster monastic schools nationwide, primarily focusing on subsidizing teachers' salaries (as noted by Shuyin in 2015). Similarly, in Lao PDR, the quality and outreach of Buddhist education have seen significant advancements recently. This growth has been facilitated through collaborative efforts between the Buddhist Fellowship Organization of Lao PDR, the country's Ministry of Education and Sports, and the broader Lao government (as highlighted by Lochan in 2019).



3

Violence against children across the five countries

Children aged between birth and 14 years constitute a significant percentage of each country's total population, ranging from 16.55% in Thailand to 35.55% in Laos. Ensuring the protection of children's rights is a crucial national priority. Unfortunately, violence against children is prevalent in the sub-region.

Cambodia



A report by UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, UNFPA Asia and Pacific Regional Office, and UN Women Asia and Pacific Regional Office (2020) sheds light on the issue of Violence Against Children (VAC) in Cambodia:

- More than half of children have experienced **severe beatings**, with one in two children in Cambodia affected (UNICEF, 2019).
- **Emotional abuse** has been experienced by one in four children.
- Disturbingly, one in 20 girls and boys has been **sexually assaulted**.¹
- Perpetrators of violence against children are often **known to the victims**, coming from their own families or communities.
- Children aged **13-17** are particularly vulnerable to **physical violence** from parents, caregivers, adult relatives, or community members, with teachers being the most frequently cited community perpetrators.
- Many children are **trafficked, forced into labor**, separated from their families, and placed in residential care institutions.
- The latest figures from the Cambodia Health and Demographic Survey 2022 reveal that **43%** of children report that they are **disciplined in the home using physical violence**.

¹ Ministry of Women's Affairs, UNICEF Cambodia, United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014.

Lao PDR



In Lao PDR, corporal punishment is still permitted, despite repeated recommendations by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. These recommendations were also reiterated during the Universal Periodic Review in 2010. The most recent update in February 2020 from the End Violence Against Children's Country Report for Lao People's Democratic Republic emphasized the need for legal reform to prohibit corporal punishment across all settings, including homes, alternative care settings, daycares, and penal institutions. There is no legal confirmation of parents' or caregivers' right to administer "reasonable chastisement."

- One in six children in Lao PDR experiences physical abuse before turning 18.²
- More than a quarter of children witnessed **physical violence** at home and almost a third witnessed physical violence in the community.
- About one in 10 children is **sexually abused**.
- More than one in **10** children aged **13 to 17** experiences **bullying at school**.
- In Lao PDR, about **25%** of children have faced emotional violence in their homes, and **1 in 10** has been subjected to some form of **sexual abuse** during their childhood.³
- Only **15%** of these children receive the necessary support to heal from their **traumatic experiences of sexual abuse**.⁴
- **Emotional violence** during childhood was endured by approximately **1 in 4 females** (24.2%) and roughly 1 in 6 males, often perpetrated by parents, guardians, adult caregivers, or other adult relatives.⁵

² National Commission for Mothers and Children, Lao Statistics Bureau, and UNICEF (Lao PDR, 2016).

³ Violence against Children Survey (Lao PDR, 2019).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.



Myanmar

Violence against children is regrettably common in Myanmar, affecting communities, families, and schools. Violence against children is regrettably common in Myanmar, affecting communities, families, and schools. Traditional parenting practices often do not distinguish between corporal punishment and child discipline, accepting acts that might be considered domestic violence and VAC in Western culture.

Three out of four children between the ages of 2 and 14 have experienced some form of violent discipline, with over 1 in 10 subjected to severe physical punishment.

- Approximately three in four children face psychological aggression from a parent or caregiver at home.
- Half of students aged 13 to 15 report being bullied at school.
- The Myanmar Demographic and Health Survey (MDHS) reported that 77% of children aged two to 14 experienced violent disciplining, including psychological aggression and mild or severe physical punishment by parents, family members, and teachers.
- Since February 2021 at least 405,700 people have been displaced in Myanmar, according to UN data roughly 37% of the displaced are children living in makeshift jungle shelters, exposed to hunger, illness, and other threats.⁶

⁶ Save the Children Myanmar (2021, December). Displaced families, Kayah State, Myanmar. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/violence-intensifies-myanmar-least-150000-children-forced-their-homes-year-military>)



Thailand

Violence against children remains widespread in Thai society. A 2016 report by the National Statistical Office in collaboration with UNICEF Thailand reveals alarming statistics:

- Three out of four children aged 1-14 years have experienced some form of psychological aggression or physical punishment at home.
- Four percent of children have been subjected to severe physical punishment.
- Nearly half of parents and caretakers believe that physical punishment is necessary for child upbringing.
- Despite a legal ban on corporal punishment in educational settings, its occurrence persists, leading to approximately 9,000 children treated in hospitals for injuries resulting from physical and sexual abuse in 2017.
- The 2020 report from the Ministry of Interior indicates that of the total number of stateless persons residing in Thailand, over 40% or approximately 297,000, were children with stateless status.

Vietnam



Violence against children remains a significant issue in Vietnam, needing a more comprehensive child protection system:

- From January 2015 to June 2019, 8,442 child abuse cases involving 8,709 children were reported, with nearly 81% being girls and over 19% boys.
- Sexual abuse victims accounted for nearly 74% of reported cases.
- A survey conducted during 2013-2014 found 68.4% of children aged 1-14 years were subjected to some form of violent “discipline” (psychological or physical punishment) by household members.⁷
- Approximately 20% of 8-year-old children revealed that they had suffered corporal punishment at school.

⁷ (General Statistics Office & UNICEF (2015), Monitoring the situation of children and women: Viet Nam Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014. Final Report, Ha Noi, Viet Nam: General Statistics Office



4

Key findings

The findings of this scoping study have highlighted significant gaps and opportunities across the five countries. These insights have the potential to enhance children’s protection within and outside Buddhist Educational Institutions. The key areas of focus include:

Challenges in Addressing Corporal Punishment: One major concern is the effective enforcement of laws and the need for more robust mechanisms to combat corporal punishment within these institutions.

Challenging Prevailing Social Norms: Gender inequality, discrimination, and parenting practices represent significant hurdles. Addressing these issues is crucial for fostering a more protective environment for children.

Role of Buddhist Institutions: Buddhist institutions have a long-standing tradition of social engagement, with monks and nuns often serving as influential figures within local communities. Leveraging this influence can be instrumental in advancing child protection initiatives.

Application of Buddhist Principles: Buddhist Educational Institutions have actively sought to apply Buddhist principles that align with child protection goals and are consistent with the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Children's Participation: Recognizing the importance of children's voices and perspectives, there is a need to go beyond simply acknowledging their right to be heard. Encouraging active participation and meaningful engagement is essential.

By addressing these key findings, stakeholders can work towards strengthening the protection of children both within and outside Buddhist Educational Institutions across the five countries.

4.1 Corporal punishment: The challenge of law enforcement and effective mechanisms

Corporal punishment is one of the most common forms of violence affecting children in the subregion, and it is accepted and practiced in all countries at different levels. In Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam it is acceptable in day care, alternative care settings, and at home, but prohibited in schools. Myanmar remains a pending case in taking significant measures to prohibit corporal punishment in all settings.

**Table 1.
Relevant Country Legal Framework
on Corporal Punishment**

Cambodia

Corporal punishment is:

- Prohibited in public and private schools under Article 35 of the Education Law 2007.
- Prohibited in penal institutions as a disciplinary measure under Article 5 of the Juvenile Justice Law 2016 and Article 38 of the Constitution (1999).
- Lawful in the home, in alternative care settings and in day care.
- Cambodia has not undertaken a specific legislative review on VAC, but plans to amend several articles in the 2015 Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims to improve its compliance with international standards. The new Child Protection Law is being developed that will place a statutory duty on all bodies and professionals working with children to refer cases of suspected child abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence.

Lao PDR

Corporal punishment is:

- Lawful in the home and in alternative care settings.
- Considered unlawful in schools under Article 47 of the Education Law 2007.
- Considered unlawful in early childhood education under Article 47 of the Education Law 2007, but it is not explicitly prohibited in other early childhood care or in day care for older children.
- Considered unlawful as a disciplinary measure in penal institutions, but it is not explicitly prohibited by law.
- Unlawful as a sentence for crime by Article 27 of the Penal Law 2005.
- Lao PDR has not yet undertaken a specific legislative review on VAC. However, some important legislative developments have taken place in recent years to enhance protecting children from violence.

Myanmar

Corporal punishment is:

- Banned under section 69 of the Child Rights Law 2019 (Parents, Guardians and teachers shall guide the child to foster the habits of compliance with conduct or discipline described in Section 68 without using any form of penalty including corporal punishment).
- Adopted in a new Child Rights Law in 2019, with provisions intended to prohibit all corporal punishment of children. Legal analysis is underway to confirm whether prohibition has been achieved.
- Under the newly enacted Law, all forms of VAC are prohibited and the minimum age of marriage was raised to 18 years.

Thailand

Corporal punishment is:

- Lawful in the home, in alternative care settings and in day care.
- Prohibited in schools under Article 6 of the Ministry of Education's Regulation on Student Punishment 2005.
- Unlawful as a disciplinary measure in penal institutions under Department of Corrections Regulation 2005 on Abolition of the Department of Corrections Regulation No. 3 on Punishment by Means of Physical Chastisement (1937).
- Unlawful as a sentence for crime under the Revised Penal Code 2003 and the Juvenile and Family Court and Juvenile and Family Case Procedure Act 2010.

Vietnam

Corporal punishment is:

- Corporal punishment is:
- Lawful in the home, alternative care settings, early childhood care and day care.
- Prohibited in schools under Article 75 of the Education Law 2005.
- Prohibited as a disciplinary measure in penal institutions by Article 30 of the Child Law 2016.
- Unlawful as a sentence for crime. There is no provision for judicial corporal punishment in criminal law.
- Vietnam conducted a review of national legislation on violence against children in December 2016, which informed the development of the new Child Law. The approved Child Law came into force in June 2017. It contains dedicated chapters on child protection system building, alternative care, justice for children and child participation. It also contains specific provisions on child sexual abuse prevention. Importantly, the Law extends Government responsibility to child protection for all children and not just those in special circumstances as under the previous law.

The evidence indicates that the countries have established mechanisms for reporting violence against children, including toll-free emergency telephone hotlines aimed at preventing and reporting such violence. However, there is a need to enhance their visibility, purpose, and accessibility to reach a broader audience, including children, youth, and individuals seeking help on their behalf. As emergency services, these hotlines should be child-friendly and structured on a peer-to-peer basis to increase their usage and availability to the target audience.

In the ASEAN region, Cambodia stands out as the only member country that has adopted and implemented a comprehensive national communication strategy to tackle violence against children, signifying a more systematic approach to preventing and addressing such violence (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019). Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) have actively participated in establishing child protection grievances and reporting mechanisms. For instance, hotline services at the provincial level are monitored by local law enforcement and NGOs (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019). The Cambodian hotline receives the highest number of calls among all participating countries, indicating its accessibility and responsiveness to emergency needs.

During research in Cambodia, respondents generally knew where to seek help and report incidents of child violence and abuse to relevant officials, parents, or community leaders. However, some respondents admitted difficulty in imagining their course of action, particularly when they lacked prior experience in handling such situations.

"In Cambodia, both the Cambodia Monk Council and the Ministry of Cult and Religion have collaborated with UNICEF to promote child protection in our community. As you are aware, in our country, there is a tendency to resort to violence when teaching and advising children. A significant initiative has been incorporating Wat Sagnkahak Komar into the educational curriculum for all three levels of monks, aiming to enhance their understanding of child protection."

Buddhist Leader at Ounalom Monastery



In Myanmar, research findings from interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) indicated that child protection policies and procedures had been established in Dhamma and Monastic schools five years ago and were being diligently followed. The implementation of these policies, along with child protection training, appeared to have contributed to positive changes in the treatment of students and children. However, this progress was not reflected in government schools.

“Decision makers and policy influencers, particularly those within religious organizations, have not been supportive of the development of monastic education. Consequently, it is challenging to secure official recognition and support for our concerns. Effective child protection development requires collaboration and support from multiple ministries, including Religion, Education, and Health.”

FGD 1 & 2

Based on data available from Vietnam, limited knowledge among social workers has posed challenges for the effective implementation of child protection measures and interventions. Additionally, constraints related to financial and human resources, coupled with poor coordination between agencies, have hindered the efficient delivery of child protection services (Vu, 2016). While there are only a few professionally qualified child protection officers, particularly at the commune level (Tran, 2020), a significant portion of the staff working on children’s rights at the grassroots level are not full-time employees. They often juggle multiple responsibilities within their respective agencies, leading to issues of low accountability and consistency within the national child protection system. The shortage of social workers has a direct impact on the quality of prevention, support, and intervention services.

4.2 Challenging social norms: Gender Inequality, discrimination, and parenting

Gender attitudes were deeply ingrained in cultural beliefs and practices across the diverse country contexts examined in this study, and Buddhist educational institutions also experienced this at various levels.

For instance, in Cambodia, many Buddhist-led organizations primarily support young girls and women in rural provinces, while Buddhist monasteries predominantly focus on young boys, who often become monks. Despite the prevailing bias towards boys in accessing education, organizations like the Cambodian Village Fund and the Life and Hope Association are dedicated to ensuring girls’ right to education in these provinces.

The influence of patriarchal societies is particularly evident in Myanmar, where girls and women are expected to conform to social norms that are not equally imposed on boys. Respondents strongly believed that sexual abuse and child marriage were grim outcomes for girls. Marriages are typically arranged with the consent of parents, leaving girls with little say in choosing their partners. Alarming, most respondents noted that girls forced into marriage often suffered abuse, initially from their fathers and later from their husbands.

“Parents become deeply concerned that their daughters will face societal judgment. To many, a respectable girl should only have one boyfriend, to whom she is expected to be wed.”

Female student, aged 15





Similarly, in the course of the study, researchers consistently identified notable challenges associated with sexual health and reproductive rights. In Thailand, sexual health and reproductive rights education tends to occur informally, often through discussions among peers or counseling sessions outside of the traditional classroom environment. During these sessions, educators frequently provide guidance to female students on safeguarding themselves from potential sexual exploitation. Moreover, they stress the significance of academic pursuits over romantic relationships and advise caution when interacting with men. This approach mirrors the societal norms in Thailand, where a prevalent culture of victim-blaming places the onus on women to protect themselves from situations that may lead to sexual abuse and exploitation. In contrast, men are neither expected nor educated on their role in preventing gender-based violence. This contrast was notably evident in the interviews, with girls often discussing sexual health and reproductive rights as a means of self-protection against abuse and exploitation. Conversely, boys frequently expressed discomfort in addressing this topic and, in some instances, chose to avoid discussing it altogether.

Efforts to tackle this issue include initiatives led by nuns, aimed at enhancing children's awareness of gender-based violence and gender equality, while fostering a safe environment for them to express their concerns. In Vietnam, for instance, the Buddhist University of Ho Chi Minh City established the Faculty of Early Childhood Education in partnership with HCMC University of Pedagogy in 2015. This program acknowledges the significance of working with children and equips female monastics with the necessary training to assume senior positions at Buddhist kindergartens and Buddhist Community Centers (BCIs). This initiative has significantly bolstered the social involvement of Buddhist nuns in childcare and protection. Although childcare and caregiving are commonly regarded as women's responsibilities, this faculty focuses on early childhood education and underscores the vital role of caregivers in creating a nurturing and safe environment for children to thrive.

Findings suggest that parents and caregivers tend to pay minimal attention to and possess limited understanding of the concepts of Violence Against Children and child protection. This deficiency in comprehension arises from their limited capacity to engage in discussions related to topics such

as sexual health and reproductive rights, child protection, and positive parenting. The prevailing lack of awareness and understanding within parental and caregiver circles has significant repercussions. Firstly, it hinders the promotion of gender equality and inclusivity, as it perpetuates traditional norms and practices that often lead to unequal treatment and opportunities for children. Moreover, this environment increases children's vulnerability to various forms of abuse and exploitation, which poses a substantial threat to their well-being and development. Ultimately, it contributes to the perpetuation of a culture of violence in society at large.

The proactive support of Buddhist institutions has fostered strong ties with surrounding communities, further fortifying a social safety net for children. In Myanmar, the focus of this support is on constructing a safety net that shields children from all forms of exploitation and abuse. To achieve this, parents and caregivers are invited to attend training sessions and workshops centered on child protection. These educational initiatives are designed to equip parents and caregivers with a comprehensive understanding of child protection, violence against children, and sexual harassment, enabling them to cultivate a protective environment for their children starting from within their homes.

"After receiving CP training, corporal punishment has been strictly avoided in my family. I've grown to be more patient myself. CP training has changed our behaviors as parents, but the change needs to be maintained. Awareness raising and behavior change should be done for all parents, teachers, and community members."

Father, Myanmar

In Vietnam, urban Buddhist establishments have initiated educational programs tailored for the youth. These programs not only offer essential life skills but also impart ethical guidance. They educate children about their rights, self-protection strategies, and importantly, Buddhist principles emphasizing non-violence and compassion. Furthermore, these institutions conduct Dhamma talks and Buddhist wedding ceremonies for adults. During these sessions, prospective parents and other family members receive insights on non-violent child-rearing methods, and guidance on fostering a harmonious family environment.

Barriers to inclusivity for children with disabilities persist within Buddhist educational institutions. However, in the twenty-first century, advancements in technology and increased awareness of accessibility have enabled some Buddhist educational institutions to enhance their facilities to accommodate children with disabilities. Historically, there has been a longstanding tradition of not accepting boys and young men with disabilities into the monkhood, and regrettably, this practice continues today. According to the Thai researcher, Venerable Maha Praise, individuals with disabilities are not permitted to ordain.

“The prohibition of ordination for people with disabilities dates back to the early days of religious propagation. This restriction is rooted in concerns that a large number of people with disabilities might seek ordination in Buddhism, potentially burdening the monastic community and being unable to fully engage in religious practices. While the Buddha did not completely forbid their ordination, he stated that it was ‘inappropriate.’ In cases where Buddhist monks assist people with disabilities in ordaining, they may face light disciplinary measures, whereas individuals with disabilities themselves do not receive any punishments.”

Prachathai, 2016

This historical perspective sheds light on the ongoing challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in seeking ordination within Buddhist traditions, highlighting the need for further discussion and consideration of inclusivity within these institutions.



4.3 Buddhist institutions' long tradition of social engagement with monks and nuns as key influencers in local communities

“Religious leaders are very powerful, just like celebrities and influencers. During our Khmer religious rituals, once our monks start speaking, everyone is quiet, praying and listening to those spiritual messages.”

Child Protection Officer, World Vision

Cambodia

Buddhist and monastic schools have extended their roles beyond education as a way to connect with children's caring environment, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have been proactive in offering emergency assistance, such as providing food and essential items to the families of novices affected by the crisis. In Cambodia, Temples, or monasteries (known as 'wats' in Khmer), served as fundamental educational centers for children from impoverished families. These monasteries not only functioned as the moral and religious hub of village communities but also played crucial roles in education, culture, and social activities (Venerable Suy Sovann, 2014). A report by UNICEF Cambodia, titled *Integrating Faith for Social and Behavior Change into Pagoda Structures for a Systems Approach to Capacity Development* (2019:3), emphasized that “Buddhist pagodas are robust, faith-led, institutionalized mechanisms for community engagement, encompassing social services like health and education. They enjoy the trust and active



participation of Cambodians in matters related to children.” Remarkably, some larger pagodas even served as alternative educational institutions for extremely impoverished families .

“My family is poor. My parents don’t have money to provide for my education, but the temple offers everything we need, including food, shelter, and education.”

Child, Lao PDR

In Myanmar, monastic education has been a cornerstone of the educational landscape since the 11th century, spanning the earliest Myanmar kingdoms through periods of British colonization and continuing to the present day (Myanmar Education Consortium, 2015). Currently, an estimated 1,700 monastic and nunnery schools provide education to children from nearby communities, conflict-affected areas, and orphanages. These institutions impart Buddhist teachings alongside a general curriculum (MOE, 2015; MOPRR, 2014). Monastic schools were established to serve not only monks, nuns, and novices but also vulnerable children, families, and entire communities. In regions marked by political instability, poverty, and limited infrastructure and services, residential care in monastic settings offers living arrangements for these children.

Notably, in Myanmar, monastic schools also extend their educational and welfare support to vulnerable children. For instance, Ven. Aggasara managed the Parahita Monastery, which not only operated a training school for monks in Bago but also provided a home for 200 children (including orphans, abandoned children, and those from broken families), vocational training, and a preschool (*Buddhistdoor International*, Shuyin, 2015). A UNICEF report in May 2021 highlighted that nearly 50% of children aged 5 to 15 came from impoverished households. Of

these, approximately one million were exposed to unsafe working conditions, while nearly 250,000 lived in residential care settings, such as Buddhist monasteries (UNICEF, 2021).

Dr. Seri Phongphit provided insights into the central role of wats in Thailand before the enactment of the Phra Pariyatidhamma (monastic school) Education Act:

“Monasteries and temples were the epicenters of community life. Monks not only served as spiritual leaders but also played vital social and cultural roles. Parents sent their sons to become novices or monks, ensuring they received an education encompassing reading, writing, and, most importantly, the study and practice of Buddhism. While some monks remained lifelong, others disrobed after a period and assumed leadership positions within their families or communities.”

Monastic schools also contributed to child protection by offering residential and alternative care. In Cambodia, a report by UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation, titled “Mapping of Residential Care Facilities in the Capital and 24 Provinces of the Kingdom of Cambodia” (2017:11), noted, “There are more faith-based residential care institutions (54%) than non-faith-based centers in the 20 provinces. The majority of faith-based residential care institutions are Christian (84%), followed by Buddhist (11%). Additionally, there are 65 pagodas and other faith-based religious

buildings functioning as residential care facilities, and although the mapping doesn’t categorize them by faith, it’s likely that most are Buddhist.” The same report highlights that Pagodas and other faith-based care in religious buildings rank among the top five residential care facilities in Cambodia (2017:9).

Temples and monastic schools, while not officially designated as alternative care institutions, unmistakably embody the principles and values associated with such facilities. Beyond shelter, they offer comprehensive care and spiritual guidance, carving out a distinctive niche in the realm of caregiving. Based on interviews conducted, temples and monastic schools consistently emerge as safe havens, free from violence against children. Young respondents conveyed how these Buddhist and monastic establishments instill hope and a renewed sense of purpose in their lives. The compassionate guidance of Buddhist leaders who establish and oversee these schools is often credited with providing life-changing opportunities, especially for those facing challenging circumstances. Moreover, these institutions go beyond traditional education, equipping children and youth with essential life skills that empower them to navigate society beyond the confines of the school.

At the Luminous Temple in Vietnam, monastics and lay Buddhists collaborated to create a series of 13 books on “Buddhist ethics” tailored for children from kindergarten to grade 12. This series drew upon the Ministry of Education and Training’s curriculum for civic education, incorporating Buddhist perspectives that emphasize preventing violence against children and promoting non-violence from a young age. For instance, kindergarten-aged children were taught the importance of using kind words and behaviors, fostering compassionate attitudes towards others. The series also aimed to guide parents in adopting nurturing techniques and caring behaviors to support their children’s growth and development, shifting away from conventional methods of physical discipline.

Buddhism in Vietnam boasts a rich history of social engagement, including its commitment to the wellbeing of children and youth. Following the Vietnam War (1955-1975) and the establishment of the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam, their role and activities expanded significantly. They played a pivotal role in founding childcare centers designed to provide care, protection, and education to disadvantaged children. These centers cater to a diverse range of beneficiaries, including orphans, those with disabilities, and children hailing from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

“Monks have a cultural value that is given by the society. Compared to the community leaders, monks are the people that visited people the most during their morning ritual (BEN BART). They go around the village and visit people’s houses, so they see a lot of things happen around people’s homes. Monks are very trusted because they give a speech to people without any political agendas.”

Child Protection Officer, UNICEF

4.4 Buddhist Educational Institutions: Integrating Buddhist values for child protection in alignment with UNCRC Principles

Throughout history, religious institutions, including Buddhist temples, churches, synagogues, mosques, and ashrams, have consistently advocated for the well-being and protection of children. These religious communities are steadfast in their commitment to principles of care, compassion, and empowerment for all children, regardless of their geographic or cultural backgrounds. Reports from UNICEF and Religions for Peace suggest that these religious communities can use the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as a guiding framework to ensure the rights of children are upheld. By promoting awareness and education, faith communities and faith-based organizations can effectively translate the principles of the Convention into spiritual contexts, making them more accessible and relatable. For instance, Buddhist scriptures emphasize gender equality, exemplified by the establishment of the Bhikkhuni order for nuns by the Buddha. However, it's worth noting that gender bias still exists in some monastic settings.



Major world religions universally consider life as sacred from its very beginning and underscore various inherent rights such as health, education, and protection from harm.⁸ Nevertheless, religious perspectives on contentious issues like abortion may differ. While some denominations may not strictly regulate abortion, there may not be a unanimous consensus among their followers. As secular laws on abortion evolve, religious institutions advocating for the preservation of life must also strengthen support systems for expectant mothers.

In a June 2021 interview with Viravamsa Bhikkhu at Wat Somanas Vihara, Thailand, the venerable monk highlighted the inclusive nature of Buddhism. He stated, "Buddhism accepts the concept of birth control. Unwanted pregnancies result from unsafe sex, which can be prevented through birth control. Furthermore, the Buddha did not mention that being born as LGBTQ+ was a result of engagement in adultery or extramarital relationships in a past life. Such explanations were disseminated by other Buddhist monks, not by the Buddha." Viravamsa Bhikkhu also noted that the Tripitaka does not explicitly mention the relationship between adults and children. He emphasized, "The Tripitaka does not prescribe that adults must protect children because the Buddha expected everyone to treat others kindly, regardless of age, status, or gender. Therefore, the Tripitaka's teachings can be applied to everyone, including children."

When examining the involvement of children in Buddhist societies, a UNICEF study points to the limited extent of genuine engagement. Although adults may seek children's opinions, these views often go unheard. Consequently, Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) must prioritize the best interests of children by emphasizing non-violent communication and active listening. In addition to upholding the core principles of the UNCRC, religious leadership is expected to adhere to a comprehensive set of child protection protocols, including creating safe environments and promoting non-violent educational approaches. While instances of exploitation within religious settings are relatively rare, incidents like the abuse cases in Cambodian pagodas must not be disregarded.

Research conducted by Rev. Sangabopura Akhila (2019), an Assistant Professor and Visiting Lecturer at the Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka, strongly supports the alignment of Buddhist principles with the prevention of child abuse and the promotion of sustainable development. This perspective is corroborated by Arigatou International's (Faith and Children's Rights 2019) and other scholarly resources (Ubeysekara A, 2020; Narada Thera, 1996; Brahmali B, 2021; Venerable Kumbuke Visuddhi Citta Thera, 2020; UNESCO, 2018), which draw parallels between Buddhist teachings, specifically Sutta and Dhamma, and child protection concepts, as outlined in Table 2.

⁸ See, Faith and Children's Rights: A Multi-religious Study on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Arigatou International New York and UNICEF, 2019, p.79

Table 2: Buddhist principles aligned to UNCRC principles and provisions

Buddhist principles	Description	Child Protection principles	UNCRC Articles
Vasala Sutta	<p>If someone engages in adultery and extramarital relationships either by force or with the consent of the other party, it is a grossly immoral action.</p> <p>Parents bring a child to this world and attend to the needs of the child in an unselfish way with unconditional love. **</p>	<p>Stop child marriage</p> <p>Positive parenting</p>	<p>Article 34</p> <p>Article 9, 18, 19</p>
Sigālōvāda Sutta	<p>In five ways, young householder, the parents thus ministered to as the East by their children, show their compassion:</p> <p>(i) they restrain them from evil,</p> <p>(ii) they encourage them to do good,</p> <p>(iii) they train them for a profession,</p> <p>(iv) they arrange a suitable marriage,</p> <p>(v) at the proper time they hand over their inheritance to them.*</p> <p>In these five ways do children minister to their parents as the East and the parents show their compassion to their children. Thus is the East covered by them and made safe and secure.**</p>	<p>Positive parenting</p>	<p>Article 9, 18, 19</p>
Vattakkhandhaka of Vinaya Pitak	<p>A teacher should conduct himself properly toward his pupil... [for example] A teacher should help and take care of his pupil through recitation, questioning, and instruction.*</p>	<p>Stop child abuse and exploitation in school settings</p>	<p>Article 28, 34</p>
Virmanaya***	<p>Every person has an ethical responsibility to prevent from any kind of abuse or sexual harassment of child**</p> <p>Abstain or refrain from the relevant evil action*</p>	<p>Stop child sexual exploitation and abuse</p>	<p>Article 34</p>
Samādānaya***	<p>There is a social responsibility to safeguard children as a part of social compassion**</p> <p>Observe and cultivate the good deed relevant to each precept*</p>	<p>Child safeguarding</p>	<p>Article 9, 18, 19</p>
Ahinsa	<p>Non-violence practice</p>	<p>End violence against children</p>	<p>Article 19</p>
Metta	<p>Universal love</p>	<p>Rights to life, survival and development</p>	<p>Article 6</p>
Dhammapada	<p>Importance of civility, understanding and sharing experiences of adults and children as a way of promoting love and respect.**</p>	<p>Best interests of the child</p> <p>Respect for the view of the child</p>	<p>Article 3</p> <p>Article 12</p>

*Original Buddhist Text: Taken directly from Buddhist Sutta and/or Dhamma.

**Author's Interpretation: The author's understanding or interpretation of the statement.

***This excerpt is sourced from a Buddhist Sutta in Sri Lanka and may not be present in the Tripitaka from the five studied countries.

Based on the data collected, various Buddhist principles are identified as instrumental in underpinning Child Protection (CP). Across the five countries studied, the concept of child protection has been linked to several Buddhist tenets, including the noble eightfold path, the Middle Way, the 38 Mangala Sutra, Vipassana, the four sublime states of being, and the five precepts. Collectively, these teachings stress moderation, balance, community spirit buttressed by love, compassion, joy, equanimity, and the shunning of violent and prejudicial actions.

Five Precepts: A respected monk from Cambodia drew parallels between the Five Precepts of Buddhism and the principles of Child Protection (CP). He explained,

“The Buddhist principle has five precepts that are equal to the laws. Buddha wants us to practice the five precepts where we can live peacefully without persecution and assault in any form. **The first** precept is to not harm or kill any form of life. **Second** precept is to not lie, manipulate or take advantage of others. **Third** is to not sexually violate anyone. **Fourth**, to not steal. **Fifth**, to not involve yourself with any alcohol or drug that causes the loss of consciousness. When we talk about human rights and human violation, we think about how humans are being protected from birth, so the five precepts also protect the child since they are at birth. In the monastery, the young monks are being protected from any form of violence because they are restricted to travel unless there are consents.”

Senior monk, Prek Leap Pagoda, Cambodia



Noble Eightfold Path: Monks and program facilitators in Myanmar related child protection to the Noble Eightfold Path. This path, comprising right understanding, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration, underscores understanding individual contexts through critical thinking, problem-solving, experiential learning, civic education, and needs assessments.

Middle Way and the 38 Mangala Sutra: Both the Middle Way and the 38 Mangala Sutra were referenced in Myanmar in relation to childcare and child protection. These doctrines advocate for a balanced life approach, steering clear of extremism and avoiding actions that breed negativity.

Vipassana: In lieu of corporal punishment, Vipassana or meditation is emphasized for child discipline. As a Buddhist leader in Lao PDR articulated, “In our temple under my care, there is no corporal punishment at all. If our novices and monks do the wrong things or do not follow the rules, the punishment we do is just to let them

go to do vipassana (meditation). If in a serious case, we called their parents to come and take the kids back home. But not many kids got into that point. We had very few in the past...”

Four Sublime States of Being: Buddha’s teachings strictly forbid corporal punishment, emphasizing that any form of abuse goes against the Four Sublime States of Being: loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity. A Myanmar researcher reasoned that such physical punishment goes against the grain of teachings that vouch for forgiveness and compassion. Hence, monks who truly internalize Buddha’s teachings shouldn’t resort to corporal punishment on children under their care. Instead, embodying kindness and compassion is paramount, especially towards vulnerable children in their charge.

The discussions surrounding child protection and rights remain contentious, yet the findings point towards the significance of community solidarity, particularly in the framework of Buddha’s teachings.





4.5 Children's participation: Beyond their right to be heard

Article 12 of the UNCRC, commonly referred to as the "Right of the Child to Be Heard," firmly establishes the principle of respecting the views of children regarding matters that affect their lives. Article 12 grants children the right to freely express their opinions on all issues that concern them, with the stipulation that the weight given to their views should align with their age and maturity. This right to be heard is closely intertwined with other fundamental rights, such as freedom of expression (Article 13), freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (Article 14), freedom of association (Article 15), and access to information (Article 17). Article 12, either independently or in conjunction with these rights, is frequently recognized as a cornerstone of children's participation rights.

In Buddhism, the right to be heard can be contextualized within a broader set of values. Buddhism promotes tolerance for diverse opinions, encourages consultation and mediation as means of conflict resolution, and espouses these principles in its Sutra/Sutta discourses and other sacred scriptures. Specific teachings in texts like the Dhammapada and Sigâlovâda Sutta underscore the significance of civility, understanding, and the sharing of experiences between adults and children, fostering love and respect. Buddhism's educational ethos emphasizes a compassionate and gentle approach to teaching and learning, emphasizing independent thought. The doctrinal approach underscores the value of individuals personally investigating and discerning truth (ehipassaka), as seen in the Kalama Sutta. (Arigatou International, 2019) This approach is aligned to the importance of children's critical thinking as a means to their effective participation.

Schools play a pivotal role in empowering children to voice their preferences. The study reveals a commendable effort toward inclusivity, with children highlighting institutions' receptivity to their ideas and recommendations, particularly in school activities like field trips or vocational training. Elements of democratic governance are evident, with voting as a common practice for decision-making. Many students feel that their voices are heard, and adults are generally open to their suggestions. However, the degree of participation varies across different activities. While active student involvement is evident in some cases, many routine tasks and daily activities remain more prescriptive with limited student input. This democratic process, while empowering, can sometimes lack depth, such as when students vote on field trip locations without providing justifications. This may inadvertently hinder critical thinking and analytical reasoning.



In Thailand, interviews with educators revealed a willingness to let students express differing views, particularly when they disagreed with school rules or directives. However, observations suggested a tendency among teachers to validate the school's stance or their own decisions instead of genuinely considering students' feedback. This practice sometimes led to guiding students back to the original rule or directive, potentially discouraging open dialogue and diverse perspectives.

In Myanmar and Thailand, efforts are underway to include children with special needs and those considered vulnerable in residential care facilities. Nonetheless, these children often face unmet developmental needs in such settings, which can lead to problematic behaviors and deficiencies in physical and mental development. This exclusion of vulnerable children is also observed in some Monastic schools in Thailand, where there is no explicit prohibition against supporting these children, yet their numbers remain low.

Educators in the region are skilled at providing friendly consultation to teenage students. Encouraging learning by doing, students are empowered to make decisions and accept the consequences confidently. Peer-to-peer consultation has been cited by students in Thailand and Lao PDR, as well as by project implementers (teachers), as a means of ensuring a safe and supportive environment. It's crucial to consider the cultural and social context. Some students mentioned their peers' reluctance to voice opinions publicly, possibly due to shyness or reticence in group settings. While this dynamic may appear minor, it carries broader implications. The comfort and confidence students feel in these formative environments significantly influence their self-esteem and self-assuredness as they transition into adulthood, especially if they decide to leave the monastic life. This underscores the importance of nurturing environments that foster both collective decision-making and individual expression.



5

Learning from good practices: the cases of Cambodia and Vietnam

Both Cambodia and Vietnam, among the countries included in this study, distinguish themselves for their comprehensive initiatives in addressing violence against children and promoting child protection. While several countries under investigation have experienced extended periods of internal conflicts, Cambodia and Vietnam, having transitioned into post-war phases, have particularly excelled in devising measures to ensure the safety and well-being of children. The case studies of these two nations showcase the specific strategies, legal frameworks, and monitoring mechanisms they have implemented to safeguard children effectively.

Cambodian Case Study: 30 Years of Intersectional Collaboration with Positive Results on Child Protection in Monastic Settings

In Cambodia, over 50% of the population is below 25 years, with 30.9% aged 14 or younger (Source: Knoema 2020). With around 4,872 pagodas hosting nearly 69,199 monks—half of whom are children—the need for nationwide child protection is paramount (Ministry of Cult and Religion, 2018). These figures emphasize the importance of robust measures to prevent violence and uphold child rights.

Chronology of milestones and Buddhism's Contribution to Child Protection in Cambodia



1992

2005

2007

2013

2014

Cambodia ratified the **UNCRC**, incorporating its articles into its Constitution, laying groundwork for domestic **violence laws and child abuse concerns**.

Law on Prevention of **Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims introduced**, aiming to reduce domestic violence and nurture non-violence in homes. This led to the establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Corporal punishment banned in both public and private schools per **Article 35 of the Education Law**.

Cambodia reveals its first study detailing the extent and nature of violence against children.

Royal Government of Cambodia issues core commitments to counteract violence against children.



2019

2018

2017

2016

ASEAN's mid-term review emphasizes cross-sector collaboration in its action plan against child violence. A national strategy to end violence against children is introduced.

MSVY begins the Partnership Programme for the Protection of Children, reaching over 7,500 at-risk children. Wat Sangkahak Komar policy, emphasizing pagodas and monks' role in violence prevention and child protection, is launched in cooperation with UNICEF. This includes a Pagoda Child Protection Programme.

Ministry of Women's Affairs introduces the First National Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children with multi-agency collaboration. The Ministry of Education releases a toolkit for positive discipline in schools.

Corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure in penal institutions is prohibited. The child protection information system is developed by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation (MSVY).



Cambodia's 2017 National Action Plan and its 2019 mid-term review showcased participation of marginalized youth in action planning. These efforts were supplemented by projects like national training for monks using the INSPIRE strategy and collaborations with international agencies like UNICEF and World Vision, Cambodia. These endeavors underscore Cambodia's comprehensive approach to child violence prevention, involving the government, international agencies, Buddhist-led NGOs, and monasteries. Additionally, partnerships emphasized the crucial role of Buddhist institutions in child protection, with initiatives like the Wat Sagnkahak Komar policy, a collaboration between UNICEF Cambodia and the Ministry of Cult and Religion.

1

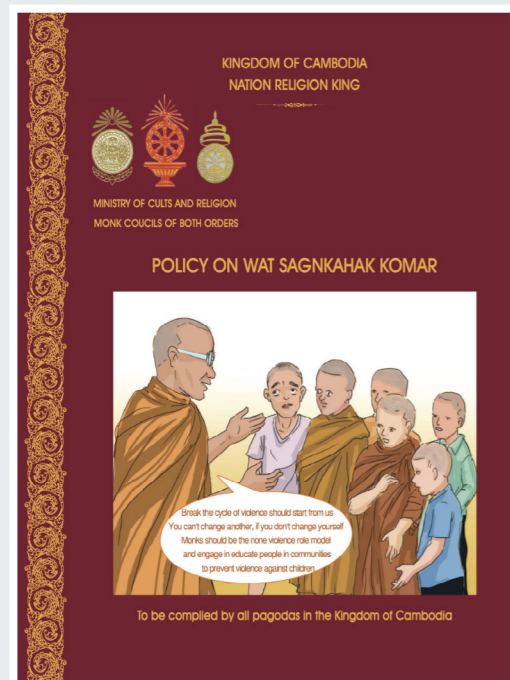


Illustration 1 - Policy on Wat Sagnkahak Komar (also known as Child Safeguarding Policy)

2

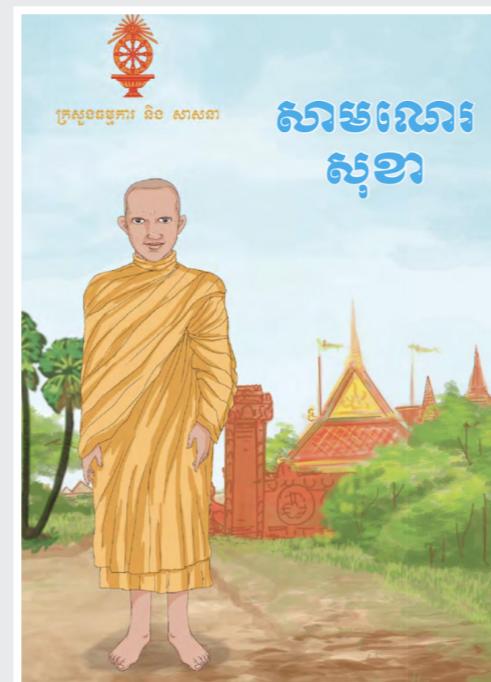


Illustration 2 - Novice Sokha - a children-friendly educational book about the role of monks in educating community members about preventing child violence.

Codes of conduct and comprehensive guidelines were collected from all pagodas in Cambodia which have been used as educational material to respond to findings of the survey on National Violence Against Children of 2013, which highlights pagodas and monks as important catalysts to prevent and respond to child violence. (The Ministry of Cult and Religion, 2018).

“At every child-support institution created by monks, we follow a non-violence policy and child protection policy. At our institution, and for the last ten years, we have always had a regular meeting to remind everyone to ensure no verbal or physical abuse is used on children. Children living in child-support institutions are children impacted by many pressures in life. One child in my institution witnessed his parents killing each other, and if they come to live with us and we practice violence toward them, they will be even lonelier. So, we constantly remind our team members to spread love and take good care of them. Children in my institutions are safe and able to learn well. All of these depend on the senior monks in each pagoda to develop and to not use violence on children. Many children living in some pagodas face physical abuse and other pressures. Some educators believe that violence is a form of education. I do not know what to do, but we need people at the leadership level in our Buddhist setting to rework the policy and closely monitor the practice of those policies.”

Monk, Managing Director, Life and Hope Association

Over the last 30 years, Cambodia has demonstrated a consistent commitment to societal and structural reforms, aiming for a safer environment, especially for children. The efforts to curb violence, stemming mainly from INGOs, Buddhist entities, and NGOs, have jointly propelled the national child protection policy. However, there is concern about the genuine ownership felt by Cambodians towards these child protection measures. To be effective, these newer child protection policies demand profound cultural shifts and collaborative efforts between the government, judiciary, law enforcement, and communities. A crucial element currently lacking is the effective monitoring and enforcement of these policies. Without these monitoring mechanisms, the true impact of such initiatives remains undetermined.

Vietnam Case Study: Strengthening the Role of Buddhism Associations in Child Protection

Buddhism in Vietnam has had a long history of social engagement that provided care, protection, and education for youth. Vietnamese Buddhist nuns have played significant roles in Vietnamese Buddhist institutions through activities that contribute to learning Dhamma, education, and social engagement. Since the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam (BSV) was established in 1981, Buddhist monastics have continued their social engagement activities and founded childcare centers for disadvantaged children where they are cared for and educated in a safe environment.

Chronology of key events and Buddhism's Contribution to Child Protection in Vietnam

1940

Launch of the Buddhist Youth Family Movement focused on child education and protection. By the 1960s, it grew to encompass 70,000 youths.

1965

Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh founded the School of Buddhist Youth for Social Service, blending Buddhist ethics with social development and aiding war-impacted communities.

1981

Post-war revival of Buddhist initiatives with the establishment of the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam (BSV). Compassion-driven childcare institutions emerged.

Late 1980s

Local governments in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) supported Buddhist Childcare Institutions in areas like health care and education.

1990

Vietnam is the first country in Asia to ratify the UNCRC.

2000-2005

Vietnam ratified child-focused Optional Protocols to the UNCRC, established the Child Support Line, and outlawed corporal punishment in schools.

2008

Formation of HCMC Child Rights Working Group, promoting child rights and child protection.

2015-2016

The focus on children and disability rights deepened with legal and institutional reforms, like the Law on Children which emphasized safe educational environments.

2019-2021

Monitoring programs for child abuse policies by Vietnam's National Assembly were initiated, along with the National Action Plan for Child Abuse and online protection strategies.

2005-2018

Ongoing summer retreats for youth promoted Buddhist values to counteract child violence. Activities like these continued, with examples like the weekly retreats at the Luminous Temple.

2013-2014

Buddhist associations strengthened child protection measures, and organizations like Ho Chi Minh City Association for Protection of Children's Rights (HCMC APCR) advocated for children's rights.

2017

Introduction of the National Child Protection Hotline 111.

2021-2030

The National Plan of Action for Children started, laying out a decade-long strategy for children's well-being and protection.

In 2002, UNICEF initiated Buddhist participation in the National AIDS Response, partnering with local religious and governmental bodies to address HIV/AIDS in Vietnam. Monastic communities were mobilized to provide aid to those affected, with a particular emphasis on counseling services for children impacted by the virus.

UNICEF’s “Buddhist Leadership Initiative” aimed at the grassroots engagement of Buddhist leaders in sustainable HIV/AIDS prevention. In HCMC, the initiative trained Buddhist figures in aiding children affected by HIV/AIDS, resulting in specialized counseling centers at temples and a recognition of broader child welfare needs.

Save the Children International (SCI) acknowledged the vast resources Buddhist organizations possessed for childcare and collaborated with the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam (BSV) in HCMC to further child protection endeavors. A standout achievement was the creation of a “minimum standard” guideline for child well-being, addressing everything from managerial codes of conduct to violence response mechanisms.

An evaluation revealed that awareness of violence against children at Buddhist Childcare Institutions (BCIs) varied, with some children and adults unaware of its manifestations. However, advocacy for children’s rights has permeated Buddhist communities, leading to a broader understanding of children’s well-being. Dedicated monks and nuns have been pivotal in advancing child protection measures, with Vietnam notably being the first Asian country to ratify the UNCRC in 1990.

Steps like creating minimum standards for child protection in monastic settings in Ho Chi Minh City exemplify their efforts. However, post-project sustainment remains a challenge due to shifts in leadership and reduced collaboration between BSV of HCMC and international entities. While Vietnam has taken commendable strides in child protection, there is still a need for dedicated resources and budget allocation. Enhanced understanding, monitoring, and responses within government branches, particularly the judiciary, are essential. The journey towards fully violence-free communities for children and all continues.

In summary, both countries’ case studies provided unique approaches to preventing violence against children and promoting child protection. Although the collaboration involved people working at the grassroots level, some barriers still prevented moving forward to assure full implementation of policies and mechanisms within government ministries and Buddhist educational institutions. However, each country’s infrastructure is emerging at its own pace to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and youth.



Recommendations

The recommendations in this chapter draw upon the findings, with a specific focus on assessing violence against children and enhancing their protection within Buddhist educational institutions across the five participating countries in this scoping study. Influencing positive change in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors within such diverse national and community contexts will require the establishment of committed and sustainable public-private partnerships. These partnerships should extend their reach to all levels of government ministries, Buddhist Sanghas, educational institutions, as well as international and non-governmental organizations (INGOs, NGOs), and civil society entities. Ultimately, the overarching goal is to foster cultural transformations, promoting an environment where everyone can coexist harmoniously while upholding the rights of each and every child.

1

Enhance Law Enforcement and Mechanisms to Safeguard Children’s Rights

2

Buddhist leaders contribute to increasing gender equality, social inclusion, and positive parenting by promoting public advocacy and strengthening capacity-building

3

Empowering Buddhist Institutions and Leaders as Cornerstones of Child Protection in Local Communities

4

Advancing Buddhist Educational Institutions to Apply Buddhist Principles Promoting Child Protection and Aligning with UNCRC Principles

5

Enhancing Child and Youth Participation through a Child Rights-Based Approach

Enhance Law Enforcement and Mechanisms to Safeguard Children's Rights

Implementation of child protection measures has been inconsistent across the countries under consideration, with a lack of corresponding monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure the protection of children's rights. It is imperative to garner political will and commitment to systematically apply child protection policies and procedures, which will significantly bolster the legal and educational infrastructure in each country.

A. Prohibit Corporal Punishment of Children Under 18

Encourage countries like Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar to commit to law reform to uphold the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and eliminate corporal punishment of children below 18 years in all settings. Refer to <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/> for guidance.

B. Develop Collaborative Policies through Public-Private Partnerships

Foster partnerships between government bodies, international organizations, Buddhist educational institutions, civil society organizations, and grassroots initiatives. Expanding networks with relevant stakeholders will strengthen the implementation of child protection programs across various Buddhist educational settings.

C. Establish Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

Design and implement regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for child protection at appropriate levels within Buddhist educational institutions, relevant government ministries, and related organizations. Adequate funding allocation is crucial for the effectiveness of these mechanisms. Additionally, ensure that the process empowers children and youth to active and meaningful participation. Monitoring and evaluation should also incorporate gender and social inclusion indicators, such as those concerning children with

D. Address Barriers and Gaps in Child Protection

- Each country should identify barriers and gaps in their child protection mechanisms to enhance responsiveness and effectiveness. Develop minimum standards for child protection and establish follow-up and monitoring systems to ensure children's safety. Provide education and training to staff responsible for children's care to professionalize the caregiving sector.
- Focus on monitoring children's right to be heard and addressing issues of

sexual harassment among youth, teachers, and parents within these mechanisms.

E. Incorporate Child-Friendly Approaches in Law Enforcement

- Train law enforcement staff in child-friendly investigation techniques.
- Create child-friendly investigation rooms.
- Allocate dedicated budget lines for child protection at all levels.
- Professionalize the social work sector through ongoing training on child rights and child protection.
- Develop child protection policies and treatments within the healthcare system and hospitals to enable staff to recognize and appropriately address the needs of children and youth.

Buddhist leaders contribute to increasing gender equality, social inclusion, and positive parenting by promoting public advocacy and strengthening capacity-building

Buddhist leaders can play a significant role in advocating for gender equality, social inclusion, and positive parenting. Their influence is rooted in both the spiritual teachings of Buddhism and the social respect accorded to them.

A. Spiritual Interpretation and Teachings

- Buddhist leaders can draw from the rich tapestry of Buddhist teachings that emphasize compassion, equanimity, and non-discrimination. By highlighting these teachings, they can underscore the importance of treating everyone, regardless of gender or background, with respect and kindness.
- Address misconceptions or misinterpretations of scriptures that might perpetuate gender biases or social exclusion.
- Address cultural practices or traditions that might perpetuate inequality or exclusion and provide alternative perspectives rooted in Buddhist teachings.
- Address adolescent Issues from a Buddhist perspective and organize sessions specifically tailored for parents of adolescents, discussing common challenges such as identity, independence, and peer pressure using Buddhist teachings as a guiding reference.

- Dedicate specific sermons to discuss the challenges faced by disabled individuals, humanizing their experiences and calling for community support and understanding.

B. Leading by Example

- Demonstrating gender equality and social inclusion in monastic settings and within Buddhist organizations. For instance, supporting the full ordination of women in traditions where it's not yet prevalent can be a powerful statement for gender equality.
- Actively involving women and marginalized groups in decision-making processes within Buddhist institutions can also set a positive example.
- Ensuring universal accessibility for individuals with disabilities. Adapting physical infrastructures with barrier-free pathways to serve diverse needs, ensuring that every devotee, regardless of their physical abilities, can participate fully in Buddhist ceremonies.

C. Training and Education

- Introduce Parenting Workshops Rooted in Dharma: Organize regular sessions that blend Buddhist principles with modern-day parenting challenges. Topics could cover mindfulness in parenting, managing stress and anger, and cultivating compassion in family settings.
- Collaborate with organizations specifically working for the rights and well-being of disabled individuals to offer training for monks, nuns, and lay community leaders on issues related to disability, ensuring that they have the knowledge and tools to further advocacy and support.

D. Community Outreach and Education

- Organize community sessions, workshops, or seminars on topics of gender equality, social inclusion, and positive parenting, integrating Buddhist teachings and practical advice.
- Incorporate gender equality, social inclusion, and positive parentings into regular sermons or Dhamma talks.
- Organize community service events where families can engage in community service together. This not only instills essential values in children but also strengthens the family.

E. Collaborations and Partnerships

- Partner with NGOs, governments, and other religious organizations to work on shared objectives related to gender equality, social inclusion, and positive parenting.
- Support research and initiatives that further these causes, offering monastic settings or Buddhist institutions as platforms for dialogue and action.

3

Empowering Buddhist Institutions and Leaders as Cornerstones of Child Protection in Local Communities

In local communities, Buddhist institutions and leaders wield significant influence, shaping values, beliefs, and societal norms. Recognizing their potential to catalyze positive change, it is imperative to harness this influence for the betterment of child protection. The following recommendations provide a strategic framework aimed at enhancing the involvement of these key influencers, ensuring they actively and effectively safeguard children within their communities. Through a combination of awareness, community engagement, education, and collaboration, these guidelines offer a pathway to a safer, more nurturing environment for all children.

A. Awareness and Institutional Capacity Building:

- Initiate specialized workshops for Buddhist leaders, emphasizing their pivotal role in child protection.
- Equip them with the skills to identify indicators of abuse and neglect, navigate established reporting channels, and employ intervention methodologies.
- Formulate uniform guidelines for all Buddhist establishments regarding the reporting and scale-up of safeguarding incidents and concerns.
- Ensure comprehensive dissemination and integration of these protocols and standards within the entire Buddhist community.

B. Embedding Child Protection within Spiritual Discourses:

- Advocate for the seamless integration of child safety narratives within religious sermons and dialogues.
- Produce and distribute resources, such as booklets or informative pamphlets, that illustrate the alignment between Buddhist teachings and child protection principles.

C. Community Interaction and Advocacy:

- Facilitate consistent community dialogues, creating platforms for Buddhist leaders and community stakeholders to collaboratively address child protection.

- Position monasteries and temples as sanctuaries equipped with child protection resources and information.
- Establish systems for continuous oversight and evaluation of child safeguarding efforts led by Buddhist entities.
- Conduct community feedback forums, ensuring grassroots-driven refinements to protective measures.

D. Inter-sectoral Collaboration:

- Foster partnerships with NGOs, government entities, and interfaith organizations to pool resources and share safeguarding best practices.
- Engage with international entities to tap into broader expertise, particularly in areas where local knowledge may require reinforcement.

4

Advancing Buddhist Educational Institutions to Apply Buddhist Principles Promoting Child Protection and Aligning with UNCRC Principles

To advance child protection rights within Buddhist communities and align them with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) principles and standards, a comprehensive approach is essential:

A. Consultation Workshops and Sessions

Organize sessions to enhance understanding of the UNCRC principles and standards among Buddhist leaders, including Monks, Bhikkhunis, and nuns. Similarly, educate child rights practitioners about core Buddhist principles, fostering mutual understanding and dialogue.

B. Buddhist Texts and UNCRC Alignments

Illustrate the natural congruence between Buddhist teachings and UNCRC principles and standards, creating a seamless connection between religious practices and child rights advocacy.

C. Community of practice

Facilitate dialogues and exchanges to explore approaches to child protection and challenges faced by the Buddhist community in adhering to the UNCRC, and by practitioners in collaborating with religious communities.

These discussions will shed light on unique perspectives and opportunities to further the implementation of the UNCRC.

D. Integrated Curriculum Development

- Customized UNCRC Handbook: Develop a specialized handbook outlining intersections between UNCRC principles and standards and Buddhist teachings. This tailored resource will serve as a guide for both practitioners and educators.
- Educational Curriculum Integration: Integrate key Buddhist principles, such as compassion and non-harming, into the educational curriculum. Include programs focusing on children's mental, emotional, and physical well-being, incorporating Buddhist practices such as meditation and mindfulness.

E. Sustainability

Establish partnerships with government departments, including the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture, Department of Religious Affairs, and the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. Collaborate on cultural, educational, and social initiatives to ensure the sustainability of efforts made within Buddhist communities.

F. Monitoring and Evaluation

Implement a systematic monitoring system for the Customized UNCRC Handbook's distribution and usage. Gather feedback through surveys and discussions to assess its relevance. This continuous evaluation process will enable necessary revisions, maintaining the handbook's effectiveness and ensuring a profound understanding of child rights within the Buddhist context.

5

Enhancing Child and Youth Participation through a Child Rights-Based Approach

Increase the participation of children and youth in Buddhist educational settings and the broader community by employing a child rights-based approach as a guiding framework.

A. Holistic Approach

Implement a holistic child rights-based approach to create a safe and inclusive learning environment where children actively participate in decision-making processes. This approach should extend across all aspects of Buddhist educational settings.

B. Inclusive Decision-Making

Ensure children's meaningful participation in decisions related to subjects,

activities, and matters that concern them. It means that children must have a voice, a space, an audience, and the power to influence decisions. Encourage their participation in key areas, including:

- Needs assessments
- Curriculum development
- Development, review, or update of child safeguarding policies and standards
- Capacity-building for faculty, staff, and caregivers in residential care settings
- Integration of Buddhist teachings into the educational process

C. Ethical and Effective Participation of Children

Ensure ethical and effective participation of children by incorporating the Nine Basic Requirements included in the General Comment No. 12 of the UNCRC as a planning and monitoring tool to increase the quality of participation processes. See Appendix for the full list of requirements.

D. Intergenerational Dialogu

Create safe spaces for adults and children to exchange and discuss topics that matter to them and that are not necessarily addressed on a daily basis. Introspection activities, peace circles, or story-telling could support such efforts.

E. Online Safety Awareness

Raise awareness among students about online abuse and online sexual exploitation, equipping them with the knowledge and tools to protect themselves in the digital world.

F. Life Skills Development

Focus on the development of life skills and social skills to prepare students for reintegration into society after leaving the Buddhist educational setting.

G. Child-friendly Communication

Use child-friendly language throughout communication, feedback, processes, and tools.

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