

**A PROPOSAL TO REDUCE  
CHILD EXPLOITATION  
IN VIETNAM**



Hanoi, 2001

## SUMMARY SHEET

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**Background:** Viet Nam's recent economic gains have been accompanied by rapid urbanisation, unemployment and homelessness. This has forced many families and children to migrate to cities in search of a "better life"<sup>i</sup> - often putting children at risk of abuse and exploitation.

**Objective:** To support Government efforts to protect, prevent, rehabilitate and reintegrate vulnerable children involved in the worst forms of child exploitation by:

- strengthening law enforcement mechanisms;
- implementing micro level interventions such as the provision of formal and non-formal education;
- raising the awareness of and training children and families at risk of being exploited, basic service providers and professional groups and national leaders and decision-makers on child and women's rights;
- promoting credit and income generating schemes for families at risk of being exploited;
- providing legal education programmes to national leaders and decision makers;
- training basic services providers and professional groups; on social work and counselling

**Implementing Agency:** Vietnam Committee for Protection and Care for Children (CPCC)

**Partner Agencies:**

- Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA)
- Ministry of Public Security
- Border Guards
- Women's Union

**Duration:** 2002-2004

**Beneficiaries:**

- Trafficked and sexually exploited children
- Children and families at risk of being exploited
- Basic service providers and professional groups
- National leaders and decision-makers

**Geographical Coverage:**

Five of the worst affected provinces in the country

**Funding Sought:**

US\$ 450,000

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## BACKGROUND

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*Thirty seven per cent of Viet Nam's people live in poverty, despite recent economic changes that doubled average per capita income and shifted the market away from subsidies (particularly for health and education) and centralised control. This is especially so for the poorest of the poor and those who live in rural and disadvantaged areas.* The nation's overall economic gains have been accompanied by rapid urbanisation, unemployment and homelessness, which has forced many families and children to migrate to cities in search of a better life<sup>ii</sup> -- often putting children at risk of abuse and exploitation.

*It is estimated that thousands of Vietnamese women and children are trafficked both within and outside the country's borders every year.* Thousands are also forced to work in Cambodia's commercial sex industry, with children under sixteen years of age representing nearly 15% per cent of the total figure<sup>iii</sup>. A recent report issued by the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) indicates that thousands more women and children are illegally trafficked to China,<sup>iv</sup> with lesser numbers being sent to Thailand, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan<sup>v</sup>. Hundreds of young women have also been "married to foreigners" only to find that their marriage is trafficking in disguise, where they may end up as a wife for all the men in the husband's family or his friends before being sold off to a brothel.

*It is difficult to estimate the exact number of trafficking victims.* Due to the secretive and illicit nature of the business, very little is known about the phenomena. Studies indicate that most of trafficked children come from poor families; a disproportionate number come from one-parent homes, and a large number were already victims of sexual abuse.<sup>vi</sup> The majority are forced to engage in commercial sex work, subjecting them to a high risk of sexually transmitted infections (including HIV). And, while many are lured away with a promise of a lucrative and respectable job, it is astonishing to find out how many families knowingly sell their children into prostitution.

*Commercial sex is not the only destination for trafficked children. They can be illegally sold for adoption to foreign couples or used as bonded labourers, domestic servants, and child brides.*<sup>vii</sup> But regardless of whether these children are sold to adoptive families, or as child brides, bonded labourers, or commercial sex workers, every last one of them is being robbed of his/her childhood and dignity. These children have no rights, no freedom, no ability to defend themselves, and are normally abused if they refuse to work.<sup>viii</sup>

*The Vietnamese Government has taken important steps to limit the commercial exploitation of children* by signing ILO Conventions on the Prohibition and Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, a CRC Optional Protocol on Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking of Children and a Convention against Transnational Organised Crime. National legislation has also set the minimum age for employment at 15 with an official circular forbidding the use of child workers in 81 hazardous occupations.

*Law enforcement and prevention efforts need to be increased, however, to deter trafficking and end child abuse and exploitation. To date, only two cases of illegal adoption have been tried in the country, and while it is generally agreed that tens of thousands of women and children have been trafficked both within Viet Nam and abroad, authorities have uncovered only 779 cases since 1991, and then only after the survivors had escaped their captors and reported the occurrence<sup>ix</sup>.*

## **Previous UNICEF Programme Support**

*UNICEF has been supporting the Government of Viet Nam to provide care for children in need of special protection since 1996. While most of this support has focused on advocacy and legislation, UNICEF has also provided assistance to grassroots projects focusing on prevention, protection, and reintegration.*

In Ho Chi Minh City, for instance, UNICEF successfully supported local government and provincial officials to repatriate 400 migrant children -- working in hazardous conditions in one of the biggest garbage dumps in the city -- to their former homes, where they can now take advantage of educational and training opportunities, previously unavailable to them. UNICEF has also worked with officials to ensure that (1) surrounding provinces are aware of the conditions in the dump (to prevent other children from coming out), and (2) that regulations regarding access to the dump were changed to prohibit any access from unauthorised persons in the future.

UNICEF has also supported education, vocational training and skills development projects in areas where children are vulnerable to trafficking or sexual/commercial exploitation, as well as an initiative in Ho Chi Minh City to re-integrate child survivors of abuse, exploitation and/or trafficking.

Furthermore, UNICEF has been working with relevant government ministries to update national legislation to correspond with the signed international legal instruments. Last year, UNICEF assisted the Ministry of Justice in revising laws dealing with child trafficking and prostitution. With these revisions, persons caught trafficking children are now subject to a prison term from ten years to life<sup>x</sup>. UNICEF has also assisted Government in drafting an ordinance on prostitution that contains additional provisions on trafficking. As part of its endeavour to improve monitoring of law enforcement, UNICEF supported training for civil servants on child rights in general and on relevant laws and recent amendments in particular.

## **Lessons Learned**

- Support to these activities has showed that to tackle the worst forms of child exploitation, interventions for prevention are the most beneficial and cost effective, but they also take the longest time. In addition, success indicators for preventive action are difficult to determine, making it challenging to demonstrate quantitatively that the interventions have had positive impact. Furthermore, awareness raising in

only helpful when it is complemented with opportunities for direct support to beneficiaries (e.g. micro credit schemes for poor/female headed households).

- Re-integrating services for survivors of abuse are often lacking in both urban and rural areas.
- Poverty and traditional norms for women's roles continue to put them at risk for trafficking and abuse.
- Despite the fact that social work has not yet been recognised as a legitimate profession in Vietnam, "social workers" still exist, although their lack of formal training limits the quality and effectiveness of their impact. In addition, given the increase in children in need of protection over the years, it seems likely that the demand for social workers will increase.

## **THE PROJECT**

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### **Opportunities**

- Government commitment to minimising negative impacts of recent economic policies; an emerging open environment to combat social problems
- Increased awareness on child protection, trafficking and sexual exploitation
- Ratification of ILO Conventions on the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour and other international instruments
- Existence of knowledgeable and pro-active local partners (Women's union, CPCC, community volunteers/collaborators, local social organisations etc.)
- Incorporation of child abuse targets in National Programme of Action for Children 2001-2010
- Extensive and regular media coverage on these issues
- Extensive and systematic network of Government agencies at all levels

### **Challenges**

- Sensitive nature of the problem and difficulty in accessing target populations because of local resistance and the tendency to hide child abuse/exploitation for fear of stigma and/or shame
- Criminal linkages with the issue

- Escalation in the demand for girls, either as brides, babies, prostitutes, domestic servants, etc.
- Changing economic, socio-cultural environment (rising unemployment, urban migration, increased availability of sexually explicit videos)
- Lack of complementary interventions, such as, education and training on social work and counselling services, education system that provides equal educational opportunities for marginalised children, vocational training that meets the demands of the labour market.
- The majority of those who work with children in need of special protection lack an understanding of the psychological dimensions of the human experience, and are unequipped to help children on levels beyond the immediate and physical needs.

## Objectives

1. Prevent trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children; Reduce the number of children trafficked by 30%
2. Increase awareness on trafficking and sexual exploitation among children, families and people working for and with children
3. Develop policies against the worst forms of child exploitation
4. Provide child survivors of sexual exploitation and trafficking with appropriate support services for integration
5. Improve practical co-operation between governments and concerned bodies, including Project Provincial Authorities, Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, Women's Union, Ministry of Public Security, Border Guards and other social organisations, on prevention and rescuing

## Strategy

**In order to effectively address the exploitation of children, project activities will centre on prevention, protection and integration.**

At the national level, UNICEF will employ **advocacy** to lobby for legislative improvements, to broaden public awareness on the issues and to prevent the stigmatisation of survivors. This will be done in collaboration with other international organisations addressing trafficking in the region, including UNDP, IOM, ILO, AUSAID, ESCAP, and the Mekong Region Law Centre etc ).

Social work and counselling services will also be strengthened through **capacity building** both at the centre and among communities for more effective identification of and response to families at risk as well as rehabilitation and reintegration services for survivors.

**Communities will also be empowered** to provide necessary prevention and protection for their children, especially against trafficking and sexual exploitation.

## Activities

### Advocacy: Prevention

- Public awareness campaigns in project provinces; Development and distribution of IEC materials to beneficiaries; Provision of training on different topics for the people who work with and for children at different levels in project provinces.
- Review, amendment and formulation of policies to reduce child exploitation

### Capacity Building: Protection and Re-integration

- Baseline Survey to establish data on the prevalence and incidence of child exploitation in five of the worst affected provinces in the country
- Development of rural/peri-urban/cross-border prevention plans of action to strengthen co-operation between concerned governments and agencies within and outside the country
- Integration of trafficking and sexual exploitation of child survivors by supporting them with credit schemes to generate income and the provision of vocational training, non-formal education
- Provision of short training courses for basic service providers in the project provinces on knowledge and skills related to social work and counselling.

## PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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The national Committee for Protection and Care of Children (CPCC) will be the government body responsible for the management and co-ordination of the project. Community and district People's Committees will in charge of co-ordinating planning, implementing and monitoring activities, while local CPCCs and Women's' Unions will be responsible for project implementation.

The Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Public Security, Border Guards and respective concerned provincial/district officials will be responsible for collaborating and co-ordinating with local CPCCs to implement cross border networking activities. (UNICEF will also seek the collaboration of other relevant UNICEF country offices for these issues.)

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

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UNICEF and government project management staff at the central and district level will carry out monitoring and evaluation of the project through field trips and minutes/records/reports of meetings and workshops. UNICEF will also assign its staff to attend relevant meetings and trainings and provide support, where relevant. Project reports will be submitted on an annual basis with the progress of project interventions regularly evaluated with donor participation and input.

The People's Committee, in consultation with communities, will identify a focal point in each village to bolster monitoring efforts. These focal points will be responsible for investigating reports, incidents in relation to abuses to children's rights and providing feedback to local, district, provincial and national authorities, project partners and UNICEF. Wherever possible, focal points will collect and copy all-important documentation, including, written notes, photos, police reports or affidavits. This process will document and monitor the violations of children's rights, and record action taken at the village, district or national level.

A baseline survey will be conducted to assess the prevalence and incidence of the worst forms of child exploitation in the five provinces to establish baseline data as well as the best intervention strategies. A comprehensive evaluation of project activities will be carried out toward the end of the third year to prepare for the Mid-term Review of the current UNICEF/GOV country programme.

## BUDGET REQUIREMENT

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ACTIVITIES	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	TOTAL
Baseline Survey	10,000			10,000
Legislation/Policy Review	15,000	10,000	10,000	35,000
Awareness raising	20,000	20,000	20,000	60,000
Plan of Action Development	20,500	30,000	30,000	80,500
Vocational training and credit schemes	25,000	30,500	30,500	86,000
Social work and counselling	25,000	25,000	25,000	75,000
Monitoring and evaluation	7,000	7,000	7,000	21,000
Project Management (salary for one national project officer)	20,000	20,000	20,000	60,000
NY HQ Recovery cost (5%)	7,500	7,500	7,500	22,500
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>150,000</b>	<b>150,000</b>	<b>150,000</b>	<b>450,000</b>

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>i</sup> According to "the Study on Child Labour in Vietnam: 1992-1998 conducted by MOLISA, 29% of children aged 6-17, or 6.3 million were working - many of them involved in hazardous or exploitative work.
- <sup>ii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>iii</sup> "A Review on Child Labour, Street Children, Child Prostitution and Trafficking, Disability, and the Family" (UNICEF Hanoi, 1998; citing a 1997 study by Save the Children)
- <sup>iv</sup> "A Study on Child Labour in Vietnam: 1992-1998" (Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social affairs, 2000, citing the Vietnam Living Standards Survey of 1992-3 and 1997-8)
- <sup>v</sup> (citing The Centre for Information and Statistics on Labour and Social Affairs 1998 Study)
- <sup>vi</sup> World Bank figures for 1997/98; Accord "Needs Assessment on Child Labour, Social Economic Prevention, and Reintegration" (Oxfam-Quebec, 1998, citing a 1997 UNDP study)
- <sup>vii</sup> UNICEF Study, citing an Institute of Labour and Social Affairs survey (1992-1998).
- <sup>viii</sup> See, e.g., International Labour Convention 182, which was adopted by Vietnam in 1999.
- <sup>ix</sup> Save the Children Study.
- <sup>x</sup> Penal Code Article 120.