

CASE STUDY

M'LOP TAPANG IN CAMBODIA

How to mitigate the challenges that boy survivors face in the reporting process of cases of sexual exploitation and abuse



SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION OF
BOYS



This research was made possible by funding from the Carlson Family Foundation.

The views expressed herein are solely those of ECPAT International. Support does not constitute endorsement of the opinions expressed.

This publication is based on a documentation of practice undertaken by ECPAT International with the kind collaboration of M'lop Tapang, in Cambodia, as part of the Global Boys Initiative.

From M'lop Tapang:

Yorn Sophearoth, Maggie Eno and Jacob Goodlin.

From ECPAT International:

Francesco Cecon.

Design and layout by:

Manida Naebklang.

Suggested citation:

ECPAT International. (2023).

Case study: M'lop Tapang, in Cambodia.

Bangkok: ECPAT International.

© ECPAT International, 2023

Extracts from this publication may be reproduced with acknowledgement of the source as ECPAT International.

Cover illustration:

The illustrations on the cover of this report depict environments and situations relevant to the sexual exploitation and abuse of boys in Cambodia.

Photos in this cover are from @ Unsplash with the condition of "Free to use under the Unsplash License."

Photographer from @Unsplash:

[Joyce Lim](#)

[Abigail Grull;](#)

[Duangphorn Wiriya.](#)

Published by:

ECPAT International

328/1 Phaya Thai Road, Ratchathewi,
Bangkok 10400, THAILAND

Tel: +66 2 215 3388 | Fax: +66 2 215 8272

Email: info@ecpat.org | Website: www.ecpat.org

Table of contents

CONTEXT OF DOCUMENTATION	2
INTRODUCTION	3
METHODOLOGY FOR THE DOCUMENTATION OF PRACTICE	4
THE MAIN CHALLENGES IN ADAPTING SERVICES TO THE SPECIFIC TRAJECTORIES OF BOY SURVIVORS	6
THE WORK OF M'LOP TAPANG TO PREPARE BOYS FOR THE REPORTING PROCESS	10
THE HUMAN AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES NEEDED FOR IMPLEMENTATION	14
CONCLUSION AND POSSIBILITIES FOR EXPANSION OF WORK	17

CONTEXT OF DOCUMENTATION

Given that programmatic responses to identify and meet the particular needs of boys are scarce, ECPAT International launched the [Global Boys Initiative \(GBI\)](#) to explore the sexual exploitation of boys and the services available for their protection. The Global Boys Initiative embarked on a series of research projects in countries around the world to shed light on understanding the scale of sexual exploitation taking place with children, vulnerability and risk factors, barriers to disclosure and access to services, and what we need to improve prevention and response strategies. With the completion of the Initiative's first phase of research, we can now speak with confidence on a number of pressing issues related to the sexual exploitation of boys, successfully consolidating what we know to influence and frame the agenda for programming, advocacy and new research. We know that the sexual exploitation of boys is a global problem and have gathered information on key drivers, risk situations, gender norms, barriers to access, among other things. We are now focusing on how to address these challenges and how to support boys and service providers in the fight against sexual exploitation.

In July 2022, we began a process of mobilising ECPAT members, partners and practitioners working with boys in different regions of the world to inform them about the GBI, explore possibilities for implementing the Initiative at country and regional levels, and capitalise on members and partners' experiences in working with boys.

In discussions with our partner M'Lop Tapang in Cambodia, several points of learning were identified as relevant to the success of the GBI nationally and globally. These included the documentation of their work with boy survivors of sexual abuse and exploitation.

To this end, the aim was to document the working practices of direct assistance to boy survivors of sexual abuse and exploitation in Cambodia in order to capitalise on these experiences, to encourage learning from other organisations in other countries around the world, and to feed into GBI's practical knowledge – thus contributing to answering the global question: *“how can we work with male children at risk or survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse in a gender-sensitive approach?”*

INTRODUCTION

M'Lop Tapang is an organisation founded in 2003 in Sihanoukville, working with children, youth and families from vulnerable communities in all child protection areas. Sihanoukville is a coastal area in Cambodia which saw sharp development of its travel and tourism infrastructures, following foreign investments in the area. Many families and communities live in disadvantaged conditions and the involvement of children in situations of trafficking, labour and sexual exploitation is widespread. In this sense, boys are particularly vulnerable to end up in street situations. In Cambodia like in other parts of the world, boys are seldom perceived as being at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation, and are generally more often left without supervision than girls are. Oftentimes, boys work, live or spend significant proportion of their time in the street, and are exposed to higher risks of sexual exploitation.

M'Lop Tapang was founded in 2003 as a small initiative to feed and offer safety to six children (of which most were boys) who slept under a large Tapang tree¹ on the beach every night, and who were extremely vulnerable to exploitation. Since then, M'Lop Tapang expanded its programmes and became the main civil society organisation in the area providing protection services, amongst other support services, to children, families and communities in the region.

The vision of M'Lop Tapang is an environment where all children are allowed to grow up in their families feeling safe, healthy and happy; a society where all children are respected and treated equally; and a community where all children are given choices about their future. The mission of M'Lop Tapang is to provide a safe haven for the vulnerable children of Sihanoukville, offering care and support to any child at risk. The organisation offers access to education, reintegration with families, life-skills training, creative and recreational activities, while ensuring protection from all forms of child abuse.

The main services provided by the organisation are the following:

- The designated Child Protection team focuses on prevention through community education, response/rescue in collaboration with local authorities, medical, legal, safe shelter, emotional support for victims, and advocacy of children's rights. As part of their child protection activities, M'Lop Tapang operates a 24-Hour Hotline. The Outreach team collaborates with families to identify difficulties that are impeding the development of their children and then works with them to find long-term solutions to these concerns. The organisation's social workers offer assistance tailored to the needs of each family, including helping to set up small businesses to boost family income, making essential home repairs, providing emergency food assistance, and making connections to other M'Lop Tapang initiatives;
- In addition, M'Lop Tapang offers vocational training programmes² to provide vulnerable youth (aged 15 years and older) with opportunities to learn marketable skills, with the goal of improving their employment prospects to secure decent work that will allow them to lead a more dignified life and a better future. This is done in complementarity with a variety of extracurricular activities for students that help them develop social skills, explore new interests, and increase self-esteem. In this sense, the organisation also runs an Arts Center, offering classes in circus/acrobatics, dance and hip hop, drawing and painting, and music;

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koompassia_excelsa

² Done in coordination with schooling.

- M'Lop Tapang's Drugs team provides harm reduction services and support to drug and alcohol-addicted young adults, and those who care for children. *Pteah Romchang*, M'Lop Tapang's 24-hour detoxification and rehabilitation center, provides children and youth with a range of holistic services necessary for successful addiction treatment, including medical treatment and supervision, case management, social work services, and follow-up;
- The organisation's medical team sees children and families at M'Lop Tapang's Medical Clinic as well as in the neighborhood through community outreach visits;
- M'Lop Tapang's Special Needs Program works with children and youth with learning and behavioral challenges, including children with an autism spectrum condition, Down syndrome (Trisomy 21), and other neurodevelopmental conditions;
- M'Lop Tapang's Baby Care Program, under the supervision of the medical team, provides supervised daytime care for children under the age of five years old that have been diagnosed with severe malnutrition or neglect;
- The Alternative Care team works to ensure that children who have been separated from their families are safe (through providing temporary shelter and care as well as foster care) and activities are implemented to reunite them with their parents or a family-like environment.

METHODOLOGY FOR THE DOCUMENTATION OF PRACTICE

The documentation of this case study was realised with the use of an assessment and learning tool developed by ECPAT International's Research and GBI's teams. The assessment and learning questionnaire was used to guide the interview with the coordination and the case management team. The questions included in the questionnaire aimed at collecting information on what practices seem effective according to the organisation in providing case management assistance to boy survivors of sexual abuse and exploitation and what key elements need to be considered in addressing the complex and unique challenges that boys face in accessing support. The methodology was applied during a visit to the office of the organisation and its services, in which direct observations could be conducted on the physical space and resources.

The research conducted in the framework of the GBI tells us that boys who are involved in situations of sexual exploitation and abuse face a series of very complex challenges and issues. In addition, findings of the research inform that current response services are not adjusted to the specific trajectories and situation of boys, affecting the overall success of case management processes (when available). **The experience gathered by the teams of M'Lop Tapang offer important learnings on how to understand the holistic live situation of boys and how to support them through the challenges of the reporting process in cases of sexual exploitation and abuse.** This case study focuses therefore on these aspects and provides tips and recommendations on how to mitigate these challenges and strengthen the access of boys to service providers.

The main challenges in adapting services to the specific trajectories of boy survivors

Throughout the years, the programmes of M'Lop Tapang expanded and now involve 225 staff (more than 98% are Khmer), of which half are women. The services of the organisation have been evolving, and still are, in accordance with the evolving human rights violations of children, families and communities. For instance, the education programme evolved with non-formal educational activities for street-connected boys to better adjust to their time and learning capacity. M'Lop Tapang uses the experience, as well as the exchanges with boys, as a way to define programmatic priorities and expansion of work areas to be relevant and meaningful for them.

When reading this case study and learning from the approaches implemented by M'Lop Tapang, it is important to keep in mind that the organisation provides comprehensive services to the population that include a transitional home for girls and boys who are separated from their families as well as a detox and rehab residential program. M'Lop Tapang counts with resources to provide full case management support to very complex child protection cases and with technical specialists across its teams. In this sense, it is also important to consider that internal referrals are facilitated by the availability of different specialised services offered to children and families by the organisation itself.

“Children do not see a gap, a waiting list, are not going to see three months pass to be able to access solutions. All the programmes are rolling all the time, these need to be holistic, for the boy and his family”.

In addition to these holistic services, M'Lop Tapang ensures continuous engagement and exchange with communities at large. This is particularly important to be able to conduct work with boys at risk and boy survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse. Boys in vulnerable situations, such as street-connected boys, might be perceived as 'dangerous' or as 'problematic' for the life and safety of the community. This myth can therefore affect the outreach activities and the provision of support to boys in these situations. A key learning of the organisation, in this regard, has been to engage with and respond to communities' perceived issues and concerns to then be able to conduct work with these boys in communities and start raising awareness amongst communities about the violations of their human rights. This means that part of M'Lop Tapang programmes looks specifically into how to provide practical solutions to communities. For example, community members might express the need to have houses or materials fixed and repaired. Providing solutions (wherever possible) to needs identified by community members helps in constructing trust with them and in creating a more favourable environment to receive their support in then engaging and working with boys at risk and survivors.

“We work with the most vulnerable groups. People see this and they appreciate it. We spend time where they are, where they live”.

As mentioned, M'Lop Tapang begun working with boy survivors from its very beginning. The path of working with boys at risk and boy survivors has seen many challenges, especially in liaising with local authorities and services.

“When you work with street-connected population, it's mostly boys. From the beginning we saw this and we wanted to work on this issue³”.

The main challenge that the organisation faced at the beginning was to sensitize police and law enforcement officers about the fact that boys can be at risk or be victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. When the first case of sexual exploitation of a boy was identified in 2003, the police had little understanding on the issue and did not see it as one of their potential 'child protection cases'.

“If a boy received money or a present in return for sexual abuse, then it was his fault. It's up to him, it's his choice”.

In addition, the attitudes of local authorities towards the boys created an extra layer of difficulty for those cases that the organisation did report. The personnel of the organisation could witness rude and inappropriate behaviours from the authorities' sides that blamed and shamed the boys. This prevented boys from wanting to receive support and eventually drop out of the case management process. An interesting example in this respect was the lack of a diagram of boys' anatomy in medical forensic offices. Medical personnel had diagrams of the female body and could not work with boys to circle areas of abuse, trauma, and bruising, inter alia. It took the advocacy of M'Lop Tapang, along with other Cambodian civil society organisations, to introduce the issue of male abuse amongst service providers, and the first diagram of the male body was made available in 2012. Similarly, other service providers had problematic attitudes when it came to working with boy survivors. At the beginning of its interventions, M'Lop Tapang had to work with a lawyer for the reporting of cases who dismissed and shamed cases of boy survivors. In addition, the formality of the reporting process (for instance, lawyers and police officers maintained their format outfit when interacting with such boys.) created more distance with the boys, who thus felt ashamed and intimidated. The physical space where boys, along with other children, are received and interviewed can also be intimidating to them in this sense (even today).

3 Girls are also present amongst street population and receive support services from M'lop Tapang.

“The lawyer was a in a suit and talking down to boys. They just could not understand that a boy could be raped or sexually exploited”.

M'Lop Tapang had to learn how to work with boys as to prepare them for the different encounters with authorities and services, while at the same time raising awareness with service providers on male victimisation and the specific trajectories and vulnerabilities of boy survivors. This is done through training activities and bilateral encounters with authorities.

As seen, the reporting process can be re-traumatising for boy survivors and represent in itself an important challenge that M'Lop Tapang had to face and overcome through the years. The reporting process in Cambodia still includes a minimum of five interviews for child protection cases, and it has been difficult to ensure that boys would be willing to go through all of these steps. The approach of M'Lop Tapang in working with boys is henceforth founded in a holistic understanding of their situation and a connection to their fears and concerns during the reporting process.

“Even with the best officer, the kindest, some boys struggled. These boys come from difficult life situations, struggle with language, and everything seems like a challenge. Without the support of the team, it would have been impossible for them to navigate the system”.

As seen, many boy survivors come from, or are connected to, street situations. The reporting process can be particularly challenging and exhausting for them. These boys tend to mostly work during the night time and gain some money from selling and begging in the streets. They thus tend to be sleepy and tired during the day, and many interviews by authorities are organised during the day time. Ensuring that boys come to the appointments is another challenge in this sense.

When boys are able to attend the appointments, police officers or other service providers might arrive late, contributing to the nervousness of the boys.

“The kids are tired, annoyed and sleepy. And then they get all these questions. And the boys might come across as if they were not interested. They pretend that they are strong and look uninterested”.

These factors feed a vicious circle that contributes to the perceived ideas of local authorities that these boys cannot be victims of sexual violence and can be annoyed by the boys' reactions and responses. Local authorities struggled to understand the living conditions of these boys and the lack of support in their lives and situations. Street-connected boys are discriminated, and are perceived as dangerous and problematic, even before accessing services.

The work of M'Lop Tapang to prepare boys for the reporting process

As mentioned previously, M'Lop Tapang works with boys, families, communities and local authorities at the same time and in parallel to raise awareness on the vulnerability of boys on issues of sexual abuse and exploitation. The process of awareness raising and training with authorities takes time and can be challenging, especially when considering human resources turnover amongst police officers and legal personnel. M'Lop Tapang uses data, evidence and learnings gathered through the implementation of its programmes and engagement with boy survivors to construct and design advocacy, prevention and capacity-building interventions. The organisation builds on its own experience to define training activities with local authorities and create awareness-raising messages that are more oriented towards challenging biases, rather than providing training on how these stakeholders should work. In this sense, it has been noted to be particularly helpful to use training activities as an opportunity to show how the services of M'Lop Tapang can be beneficial for their work, and help them in improving the management of their caseload.

This case study focuses on the work conducted specifically with boys, but this parallel work with authorities is essential to consider when constructing or adjusting interventions to support boy survivors.

The initial contact with the boys

Based on the understanding of M'Lop Tapang's teams of boys' living conditions and specific trajectories, the following considerations are used to design and implement support activities, especially during initial contact with the boys:

- Learn and adjust to the language and slang words used by boys. This is a sign for the boys that staff is entering their world and are on the same level as them, it shows that they are part of their universe and understand the realities from which they come from. Language is also important as to ensure that both the social worker and the boy have the exact same understanding of the situation and the form of abuse suffered by the boy;
- Not showing hierarchy. This means that staff will have same-level body language, informal clothing and show respect to the boys' situations and experiences. The clothes and tools used by staff (including vehicles) would be simple and not expensive in order to avoid creating distance and installing a power relationship;
- Active listening is essential to show the boys that one listened to their problems and concerns, even those that are not strictly related to the situation of sexual exploitation. In this regard, it is important to respect and take seriously problems shared by the boys. Affirmations such as: *"I believe you, I listened, what do you want us to do to fix this?"* help in creating a feeling of support and trust with the boys. When it comes to moments of disclosure, boys might ask justice and reparation. These moments allow the staff of M'Lop Tapang to start a conversation about the reporting process.

“Many boys say that they want the offender to face justice, they want the police to catch him”.

In starting the conversation with boys about the reporting process, the team of M'Lop Tapang is aware of the dynamics in which the boys live and of the fact that they lack a support adult figure in their lives. This means that many times, staff has to play that role and incarnate a trust-worthy adult who is there to help the boy, and not to exploit him or abuse him. Transparency is also fundamental when discussing the reporting process. M'Lop Tapang staff would inform the boys about the different steps of the process, along with the requirements and difficulties that it implies. In this sense, staff first makes sure with the boys that the information was well received and understood: *“have you understood what the process entails? What are your concerns and fears on this? What would make you feel more comfortable?”*.

The support during the reporting process

As seen, the reporting process can be challenging and retraumatising for boy survivors because of the interiorised gender biases of local authorities and service providers. The different stakeholders that the boy has to meet with during the case management and the reporting process have little understanding of the boys' life situations and of their reactions and attitudes. M'Lop Tapang staff therefore developed strategies to mitigate the impact that this has on the boy survivors. In general, each social worker assigned to a boy will accompany him through the different appointments and meetings, and will help cushion the negative attitudes of authorities.



“The boy is hurt and is embarrassed. He might not show interest or be intimidated by the process. Authorities can think the boy is not really in pain. Why am I helping this boy? He looks fine to me!”.

These challenges are particularly relevant in navigating the process to access justice. As mentioned, many boy survivors seem to be mostly interested in obtaining justice and in making sure that their perpetrator faces persecution. Following the initial contact where M'Lop Tapang explains to boys the challenges and hurdles that the process entails, and after ensuring that the boys have a good understanding of the process, the organisation implements the following steps to prepare the boys to navigate the different steps:

1. When boys are invited to go to court, they receive an invitation letter (transmitted by the organisation). Oftentimes, boys, and specifically street-connected boys, do not know how to read or write. The invitation would be reviewed by the staff and by the organisation's lawyer. The lawyer supports the boys in understanding the content of the letter and supports them in the process, together with the social workers;
2. Staff uses a flipchart model developed by the Cambodian organisation [APLE](#), which contains images to show the boys the different steps of the process, who are the people that they are going to meet, the disposition of the courtroom, where they would be sitting, amongst other details. This tool has proved to be very useful for boys to prepare for the process and raise questions and concerns with the staff in a safe space;
3. Authorities might have prejudices and negative views of these boys. M'Lop Tapang provides clothes to the boys. The social workers accompany boys to the market to choose their new clean clothes, so that they can feel more comfortable and respectable;
4. Staff provides boys with lunch or breakfast before the court appointment. If the day of the appointment the boy might feel tired or ill, the lawyer would ask to move the appointment and ask authorities to understand his life situation and circumstances. This is not only useful for the boys, but it also represents an opportunity to educate and raise the awareness of the authorities on the boys' trajectories;
5. The team organises transportation so that they can pick up the boys at their current location and accompany them. This is important on several levels. Firstly, this provides a safer means to boys to get to the court and gain more time to prepare for the appointment. Indeed, the team will provide further reassurance to the boys and answer any last minute questions or doubts that they might have in a private space. Secondly, most boys have never been in a car and this increases their own perception of self and increases the feeling of self-respect before the appointment. Thirdly, it also contributes to change the negative perceptions that authorities might have of the boys, changing the stereotypes they have about how they boys might look and present themselves;

6. The social worker acts a shield for the boys in court. In *Khmer*⁴ culture, it is common to have people working at the court curious about boys and people coming in and asking questions about their situation. The social worker prepares the boys beforehand about this potential challenge but also prevents people – to the extent possible – from talking to the boys and asking questions.

“People might ask you questions there, do not answer about your case. Just say that you have an appointment, but do not share anything about your case”.

It might happen that court personnel will delay, or reschedule, the original appointment for the boys' case. This situation usually disappoints the boys, as they were prepared and emotionally ready to face it. In these circumstances, social workers bring the boys to the beach⁵ and conduct play activities with them as to reduce the feeling of frustration generated by the situation. Yet, when these situations happen several times, boys, especially those living in the streets, might lose interest and motivation in the process.

4 People of Cambodia.

5 In line and respect of M'lop Tapang Child Safeguarding policy;

The human and technical resources needed for implementation

M'Lop Tapang counts with different skill sets within its team and with gender diversity. The Child Protection team works in strict coordination and collaboration with personnel from other thematic teams and is involved in internal referral mechanisms and cross-thematic learning opportunities. The ability of M'Lop Tapang to provide all services to boy survivors and the possibility of having smooth internal referrals helps massively in reducing the potential frustration of social workers when it comes to the challenges inherent to external referral processes. This indeed gives time to social workers to figure situations out and to understand how to act on complex child protection cases.

During the recruitment and induction processes, the organisation ensures that all teams – and specifically social workers and child protection personnel – possess soft skills and do work on their own internalised biases as to be able to work with boys. For M'Lop Tapang it is particularly important that social workers:

- Feel comfortable in discussing issues related to sex and sexuality;
- That they can use terminology related to sexuality in a technical way but also in a way that boys would understand (by using terms boys themselves use);
- Need to be aware of the role they represent, of their attitudes, internalised biases and language (including body language);

“When they talk about these things, if the staff are embarrassed, the boys will also feel embarrassed”.

In addition, several of the organisation's staff received specific training on how to work with boy survivors from [First Step Cambodia](#)⁶. This same training is now replicated with new staff during induction. The training was also updated with the key learnings and experiences gathered by the organisation's staff during their work with boys. These trainings represent an opportunity for new staff to ask questions and address doubts and biases they might still have when it comes to issues of sexual violence against boys.

⁶ Cambodia organisation providing services to male survivors of sexual abuse and exploitation in Cambodia.

Other training modules for social workers at M'Lop Tapang include:

- Training on the legal framework on children's rights and child protection. Specifically, staff is trained on the anti-trafficking law, as well as on the different types of offences and prosecutions applicable. It is important that staff can refer to technical terms related to the national legal framework, as this seems to increase the credibility amongst local authorities;
- Training on how to speak to boys on the different types of offences in a way that they can understand. Staff is therefore trained on key terms and ways to adopt to start the conversation with boys about inappropriate touching, sexual abuse and exploitation. Staff is taught about the importance of using this terminology without necessarily referring to the specific situation of abuse that they boys might be going through, but rather as an educational and prevention moment;
- Training on family planning, contraception, and how to carry out awareness raising on these issues in communities. Social workers are trained to be able to discuss these issues comfortably in communities and to break taboo around issues related to sexual and reproductive health;
- The internal child safeguarding policy and its implementation across the different activities of the organisation.

“Having good knowledge about the law and the role of each actor in the case management process is essential. It reminds local authorities of their duty and responsibilities towards children”.

In addition to technical and theoretical training, social workers receive supervision during field and office activities. This means that social workers will receive initial mentoring support in field activities from more experienced staff and supervision in managing the case workload and complex cases.

It is important to note that the Child Protection team tends to encourage internal promotion of staff, rather than external recruitment. External recruitment is used for more junior staff, while senior staff can put the experience gained at M'Lop Tapang to supervise and mentor new recruits. The internal promotion system functions on the basis of regular skill and performance assessment. The personality and soft skills of each individual social worker are important in defining what role would suit them better within the team.

Social workers are also supported in their work by para social workers that provide direct help to community members in the issues seen above. Para-social workers are in charge of helping communities in fixing small issue, follow-up on community initiatives and provide direct family support. As discussed, this helps in creating a sense of trust and a favourable environment within communities for the Child Protection team to implement its case management activities with boy survivors.

The rest of M'Lop Tapang personnel is also trained on children's rights and child protection, as well as on the specific vulnerabilities and trajectories of both girls and boys. All staff (including maintenance personnel) receives this kind of training and is made aware of the boys' vulnerabilities to sexual abuse and exploitation.

“We have worked with boy survivors since our very beginning; it is embedded in our organisational culture”.

Finally, it has been noted by the organisation that having younger staff doing child protection work can help in changing traditional and harmful attitudes in their engagement with local authorities. As younger staff is more aware of gender norms and social biases affecting the views of boys, they can be more open to challenge biases and prejudices and bring a new outlook on how to work on these questions.

The budget for case management activities needs to take into account the different challenges mentioned above and include funds to deal with unexpected needs or items that the boys might need through the process. In this sense, it is important to construct budget lines as to cover transportation, food and clothing for the boys for expenses related to the reporting and access to justice process.



Conclusion and possibilities for expansion of work

The experience accumulated by the team of M'Lop Tapang in working with boy survivors of sexual exploitation provides important learnings and insights on how to mitigate the challenges related to the reporting process and how to prepare boys to navigate the different interviews and procedures inherent to the process. As also discussed, M'Lop Tapang offers essential services to all vulnerable communities in the area of Sihanoukville.

This allowed the organisation to be in a unique position and to be perceived as a pillar by community members and as a service in which they can trust and look for safety and support. This can be appreciated to the extent in which community members themselves refer child protection cases, as well as situations of risk and concern, to M'Lop Tapang. This accelerates the process of care and support for boys and facilitates the mobilisation of different community members and families in the follow-up of case management cases. In this sense, the participation of M'Lop Tapang to the ChildSafe Alliance allowed the organisation to establish over 600 Child Safe agents in communities (TukTuk drivers, beach sellers, restaurant and hotel staff, inter alia), who have been trained in the identification and referral of child protection cases⁷.

“There is a high chance that people already know about us and our services; many times it is because their friends or families already accessed support in the past”.

However, many cases affecting boys still go unfortunately undetected or are not reported. There is therefore a need to increase awareness raising efforts and interventions and to enhance general understanding of boys' vulnerabilities and specific trajectories. For instance, these issues are still not discussed in radio programmes and 'rape' remains a term widely associated with girls and women, but not with boys and men.

The internal learning system developed by M'Lop Tapang is important in ensuring constant improve of interventions towards boys. The organisation's capacity to work across different thematic sectors and provide the full spectrum of services helped in put the learning from each programme at the service of the other interventions. This learning space is created by the regular meetings and exchanges between different thematic teams, as well as during case conferencing on complex child protection cases. The Child Protection team exchanges regularly with the other teams to be debriefed on evolving issues

⁷ <https://thinkchildsafe.org/childsafe-alliance/>

and approaches of the organisation and to receive cross-thematic support in engaging with survivors. Similarly, the data collected by the Child Protection team on evolving issues, trends and concerns analysed during prevention and response activities is shared with other thematic themes to adjust interventions and strengthen their capacity to proactively identify signs of sexual violence and exploitation in children participating in their programmes.

In this sense, for example, learning accumulated through support activities and solutions to challenges in working with people struggling with drugs and substance abuse resulted to be useful in adapting support activities to boys in street-connected situations. The expertise developed in working with people that face several challenges at the same time helped in collecting relevant information on how to deal with complex cases and design solutions that are in line with the specific trajectories of boys. Similarly, the technical experience and knowledge of M'Lop Tapang's team in working with children with disabilities is used to provide advice to the Child Protection team on how to identify and detect with children with learning difficulties and challenges. On this latter point, M'Lop Tapang accumulated interesting experience in providing protection and educational support to children with disabilities and their families (for example, how to adjust language – including body language – while engaging in activities with children with disabilities, and how to support families in understanding potential learning and play difficulties of these children). As this issue continues to represent a knowledge gap at the global level, these learnings could be documented and capitalized upon. The personnel of M'Lop Tapang working with children with disabilities could provide insights on how to understand disability issues and design activities that are sensitive to boy survivors, which might otherwise go undetected.

Finally, the collaboration with other local and national children's rights organisations was instrumental in ensuring that the learning accumulated by M'Lop Tapang in their work with survivors could be integrated in these organisations advocacy and capacity-strengthening initiatives. The data, evidence and experience gathered by M'Lop Tapang in working with boys was for example integrated in training modules for authorities and government officials developed by other organisations at the national level⁸. Installing this type of collaboration is important to facilitate contact with authorities and to strengthen the impact of training activities, mitigating the challenges raised by turnover (inter alia). This also allowed M'Lop Tapang to contribute to national advocacy processes, while keeping the focus on the provision of essential services to children, families and communities at the local level.

8 The organisation [APLE](#) (ECPAT member in Cambodia) developed training tools integrating the issue of sexual abuse and exploitation of boys that integrated the learnings of M'lop Tapang and used these tools for their training activities of national child protection stakeholders and decision-makers. M'lop Tapang and APLE collaborate through national child protection coordination mechanisms. M'Lop Tapang geographically focuses on the area of Sihanoukville, but uses its experience and evidence to feed national advocacy process on child protection issues in Cambodia.

To delve deeper into this

- To know more about the work of M'Lop Tapang in Cambodia and obtain more detail on their approach and services, please visit: <https://www.mloptapang.org/>
- To learn more about the most recent activities of M'Lop Tapang and read about their new and different services, please see: <https://www.mloptapang.org/resources>
- To better understand the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse of boys and the work of ECPAT International on this at the global level, please visit: <https://ecpat.org/global-boys-initiative/>
- To know more about the work of ECPAT International: <https://ecpat.org/>



328/1 Phaya Thai Road, Ratchathewi, Bangkok, 10400, Thailand
Telephone: +662 215 3388 | Fax: +662 215 8272
Email: info@ecpat.org | Website: www.ecpat.org