



DEPDC in detail

Updated February 2004

Development and Education Programme for Daughters and Communities Centre

"When I was going to finish primary school, my mom asked me whether or not I'd like to study more. I said I wish to become a teacher like my own teacher, because I love her. But mom denied, she said that she had no money to support me. She wanted me to do like the girl next door, who went to work for a few months and then had money to build a new house, having a TV and refrigerator. Mom didn't tell me what kind of work that girl was doing. And I've never seen her coming home."

- A former daughter of DEPDC, who received six years of education and training at DEPDC and later went on to work with indigenous projects at the University of Chiang Mai.

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Childhood Foundation "A secure childhood is the necessary foundation for a good adult life. All Children who live without the support of family, school and a secure environment are children in the risk zone"

At an age when we would regard them as still being children, thousands of young girls from Chiang Rai in Northern Thailand have, and continue to be lured, forced and coerced into prostitution. Girls as young as 10 years old have been sold to brothels of Bangkok and other cities overseas. In some areas as many as 90% of the girls who left their villages became sex workers.

Seeing with his own eyes the plight of young girls about to join the sex industry in Bangkok or other cities, Sompop Jantraka requested support from Michiho Inagaki, a Japanese journalist who had funded previous research in the area. With some financial backing and a conviction that keeping these children in the education system would provide better future opportunities, he established the Daughters Education Programme (DEP) in 1989 with 19 girls from the Mae Sai district. As the DEP grew bigger and more activities begun, Development and Education Programme for Daughters and Communities Centre (DEPDC) was founded in 1996, the old DEP being a part of it. Since its beginning it has supported about 800 girls to remain in education or vocational training in preference to entering the sex industry or enforced child labour.

DEPDC is a non-governmental organisation with no religious or political connection. Its focus is on prevention at the community level, before the young girls leave home to enter sex work. This emphasis on prevention is the only cost effective approach¹. DEPDC believes that children are the most important factor in the process of deciding whether or not they will enter sex work. Its projects aim to instill self-confidence and positive attitudes among the children

as well as improve the material, social and spiritual quality of life for these children and their communities. .

THE SITUATION OF CHILD PROSTITUTION IN THE MEKONG SUB-REGION

Most families in the Mekong sub-region (Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Yunnan-China) are subsistence farmers or landless villagers with few work opportunities. Their traditional lifestyle and values are being constantly eroded by the influx of consumer goods. Many parents and young people in the area have also given into the lure of heroin and amphetamines which are cheap and freely available. Often parents who are drug addicts are arrested and jailed, leaving their children to fend for themselves. Those who are still at home are unable to provide proper care for their families. In cases where parents are divorced and have remarried, child neglect and abuse is common as step children are not easily acknowledged by new partners.

Political conflict and civil strife in some of Thailand's neighbouring countries has led to massive displacements of populations, leaving orphans and street children extremely vulnerable to exploitation. Many children from hill-tribes and other ethnic minority groups are unregistered in their country of birth and have no identity papers. They face discrimination and limitations in the wider society, such as difficulties accessing education and public health services.

The commercial sex market in Thailand represents an important pull factor. The demand for young prostitutes has been rapidly increasing during the nineties and till today, both in the sex industry catering for tourists and in the local market. The widespread belief that sex with a young girl, especially a virgin, is rejuvenating and risk-free in terms of contracting AIDS, has in many areas led to skyrocketing prices offered for virgins.

Faced with these pressures parents come to view their daughters as commodities that can be traded. Some parents sell their children not just for the money, but in the hope that the children will be escaping poverty and move to a place where there will be a better life and more opportunities. Agents, working on behalf of brothels, have established effective and comprehensive networks throughout the countryside, systematically targeting families undergoing economic hardship in the hope of recruiting new girls. Cash incentives are offered and the parents sign a supposedly legal contract, specifying the period of employment and the amount of debt plus interest the child

must pay back. It can take years to pay off the debt as extra costs are added such as food, doctors visits, penalties, etc. Once a girl has entered prostitution, it is hard to escape and even harder to return to her home community and continue life as before.

DEPDC works closely with teachers, monks and village leaders to identify girls at risk. Complicity in the trade by families and village members produces a major stumbling block as they often stand to gain much by selling their daughters. Officials, monks, teachers and other adults are often involved in debt bondage arrangements, linking families with brothel agents and benefiting financially from the sale. DEPDC staff incorporate a mix of official documentation, information, persuasion and an argument based on the basic rights of children according to the CRC (Convention on the Rights of the Child) to convince parents not to sell their daughters. They persuade them to reconsider their options for the child and educate the parents about the perils of the sex industry. Information about HIV and AIDS, brothel conditions, laws, penalties and other potential dangers support their argument. In many successful cases the decision of the child to continue their education overrides the parents' desire for monetary gain.

EDUCATION IS THE KEY

Evidence shows that the longer a girl stays in school, the greater the probability that she will stay out of sex work. Education is viewed as one of the best strategies to deal with the prostitution problem and hence the vulnerability of the girls. While physically located in school children are unable to work. School attendance limits the hours of work and defines the character and the conditions of employment that children can undertake and allows them to build a social network. . While studying, children are not leaving their hometowns for sex employment in Bangkok or elsewhere in Thailand. Also, they are far less likely to be working in sex establishments in the Chiang Rai province compared to girls of their own age who are not studying. Better educated girls (and boys) are much less likely to fall for the promises made by brokers². Statistics based on follow-up of the DEPDC daughters show that only 2 percent have later entered the sex industry.³

It is widely acknowledged that measures to prevent a child from entering prostitution rather than channelling resources entirely into rehabilitation, is preferable both to the individual and society as a whole. Prevention is more cost-efficient and has a considerably higher success rate for each child involved than efforts to rehabilitate a child who has already experienced life as a prostitute. Rehabilitation is the necessary act of "righting wrongs" – a response to the mistake of not channeling enough resources into prevention.

According to UNICEF (Yahoo News, October 2003) children who do not attend school are much more likely

to suffer from disease, abuse and sexual exploitation with girls being particularly vulnerable, where as girls who get an education grow up to take much better care of themselves and their families. "This is key to breaking cycles of poverty," Carol Bellamy, Executive Director, UNICEF has said

PROJECTS

Daughters Education Programme (est.1989)

Support of girls (and boys too, since 1998) to attend primary and secondary school in two districts of Chiang Rai province. They have all been identified as being at risk of entering prostitution, or are orphans with no one to take care of them. Some children live at home but attend extra-curricular activities at the DEPDC centres in Mae Sai and Doi Luang. Others live at the centres because they are too vulnerable if they live at home or have no one suitable to take care of them. Currently 37 girls and 20 boys live in the two centres. Most belong to different upland minority groups of Northern Thailand.

This project currently has no major funder and relies fully on ad hoc individual donations.

Patak School (1996)

Day care and instruction in basic literacy for children from very poor and troubled families who have no nationality or identity papers and therefore have difficulty enrolling in the formal education system. The Patak School offers free schooling and a meal per day for children aged 4-16 from the Patak village surrounding the DEPDC centre in Mae Sai. These children would otherwise be fending for themselves during the day while their parents work.

The school has two kindergarten classes and five primary school classes that follow the Thai government syllabus, offering education in mathematics, Thai language, sport, art, basic life skills and health. The children also participate in activities such as camps, cultural celebrations and games organised for DEPDC's live-in students. Currently, 130 children attend the school.

This project has been sponsored by Co-operaid, Switzerland since 1997.

Vocational Training Programme (1992)

The Vocational Training Programme is aimed at girls who are at risk of being sent into child labour or prostitution. The girls are taught sewing, handicrafts, typing, English and other skills increasing the girls' employability.

The training is operated from the Mae Sai centre, where most of the students have also lived. In addition to vocational training, the girls attend non-formal education on

weekends. The training lasts for 18 months and the last group of 26 girls and 3 boys graduated in October 2001. The latest group of 19 girls and 1 boy began training in May 2002.

This project has been sponsored by Co-operaid, Switzerland since 1997.

Sustainable Agricultural Skills Training (1999)

This project aimed to teach students at DEPDC sustainable farming techniques, give a group of families in Mae Sai an opportunity to learn organic farming at the DEPDC field, increase their income and also spread information about organic farming to a larger audience and of course to grow food for the centre.

Vocational Training students are given plots of land on which they work and are given training in organic farming. The products are then sold to the DEPDC production section and the students receive half the income.

Child Protection and Rights (CPR) (2001)

Initiated by DEPDC, the Mae Sai CPR is a network of GOs, NGOs and community organisations in Mae Sai district. The network takes on the task of prevention, protection and intervention on behalf of children through rescuing, counselling, and case follow-up. The Mae Sai district is the first district with a network like this in Thailand. This project is one of the major activities in the Chiang Rai Province Master Plan for Child Development prepared by ILO/IPEC partners in 1998.⁴

CPR includes the following components:

1. Emergency services including notification of abuse, investigation, rescue and follow up for women and children.
2. A 24 hour service.
3. Further developing co-operation among network partners on questions concerning children's rights and safety.
4. Baseline data collection concerning specific cases.
5. Maintenance of up-to-date information regarding children's rights.
6. Co ordination of information campaigns for the public.
7. Documentation of the best practices and lessons learned about the project's structure (in order to use this knowledge in other areas of Thailand and countries in the Mekong sub-region).

In 2001, the CPR handled 76 cases. It is estimated that the CPR will handle around 200 emergency cases this year. CPR is contacted by the children themselves, parents or teachers, reporters, other child rights organisations, or "outsiders"

who have observed violations of children's rights. The CPR staff then help the child in a way best suited to each individual case. For the last two years, DEPDC/CPR staff have been trained in how to handle emergency cases.

This project is funded by The Embassy of Finland.

Mekong Regional Indigenous Child Rights Home (MRICRH) (2002)

The MRICRH incorporates A Half Way Home for women and children who have been rescued from the commercial sex industry and a Child Protection and Rights Centre for Hill Tribe Children.

The Half Way Home provides a temporary home for rescued cross bordered trafficked women and children in the Mekong Sub-region, who are awaiting voluntary repatriation to their Country of origin and reintegration into society. Given the illegal and fluid nature of trafficking neither Governments nor NGOs can be effective by themselves. Co-ordinated and complementary efforts are essential within countries and across borders.⁵ HWH will promote and sustain the network of NGO's and GO's in the Mekong Sub-region DEPDC has already established through partnering with the Government operated Hill Tribe Development Centre on the operation of MRICRH.

The girls and women in the Mekong sub-region – Burma, Laos and Yunnan Province (China) are known to be easy victims of human trafficking. Each year, thousands of children and young women are being kidnapped, forced, persuaded and sold into brothels for sex work. The role Thailand plays is as the gateway or "receiving country".

The HWH engages a multi disciplinary team involving counsellors, lawyers, teachers, doctors and nurses to combat the hurdles faced by women and children who want to return to their home land. Rescued women and children stay at HWH for an average of 3 months. During this time the necessary administrative and legal issues for their repatriation are expedited as well as extensive research conducted and assessments made into both their case history, for necessary police reports and public campaigns, and their home situations to ensure a safe repatriation.

The HWH can house 50 women and children at any one time. In one year the centre can accept up to 150 cases. The Half-way Home will endeavor, where possible, to have each case handled by a worker from the country of repatriation to overcome language barriers.

At the end of the rescue and repatriation process the girls and women can be integrated to their homes easily given

Mae Sai's proximity to the borders of Myanmar (15 kms), Lao PDR (35 kms) and Yunnan Province (250kms) where local partner networks and organisations will follow up on their reintegration.

The CPR for Hill Tribe Children takes on the task of prevention, protection and intervention on behalf of children living in abusive situations through rescuing, counselling, and case follow-up. The CPR for Hill Tribe Children is based on the successful CPR model currently operating at the DEPDC main campus in Mae Sai.

This project is funded by USAID through the Asia Foundation.

Mekong Study Centre (MSC) (1997)

The MSC centre houses reports and information on issues concerned with Child Rights, Trafficking, Prostitution and HIV/AIDS in all six countries of the Mekong Sub Region, handles the Thai Language Public Relations, functions as a library, maintains the DEPDC website and is currently compiling a database of information on all children past and present who have benefited from DEPDC programs.

MSC is also conducting an extensive research and mapping exercise into the make up and movements of the families in the surrounding Patak village funded by the US Embassy, Bangkok, and a compilation of detailed case studies funded by Whole Child Initiative, USA.

Mekong Youth Net Project (2004)

The Mekong Youth Net Project will work to create a group of youth leaders who will network against trafficking in the Mekong Region. Youth leaders from the four countries (Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Yunnan (China)) will be trained to build education programs to prevent trafficking in their own communities. The youth leaders will return to work in their own community with either GOs or NGOs, or start a new child rights protection project. The youth leaders will be trained in the social and political problems of the Mekong sub-region, the different ethnic cultures of their region and the problems facing indigenous people (issues related to poverty, health, HIV/AIDS, education, nationality, etc.). They will be trained in international human rights, how to conduct research and paper work, management and team work, psychology, conflict resolution, among other topics.

Upon returning to their home regions, the youth leaders will serve as links between the communities, GOs and NGOs working against trafficking. They will share the experiences of child victims of trafficking within their own communities and educate villages in the consequences of sending children across borders to work. This project is due to start in 2004 and will be partially funded by Open Society Institute.

PROJECTS AWAITING FUNDING

Community Development and Training Center

The Community Development and Training Center in Mae Sai will provide access to vocational training, human rights education, and literacy training for undocumented migrants and refugees living along the Thai/Burmese border. Their socioeconomic circumstances make them very vulnerable to agents from the commercial sex industry, who try to purchase young girls and boys for the commercial sex industry in Bangkok and elsewhere. The Center would be open to both young people who may be at risk for being sold into the commercial sex industry, as well as to their parents and other adult community members.

This project is looking for a major funder and/or partner.

Childline

Childline will be a National 24 hour telephone helpline, modeled on the successful Childline operating in India, that takes 1 million calls a year. The Childline operator will assess the situation, give counseling, administer required assistance or refer the caller to the organisation most qualified to meet the established need. In order to meet a variety of needs, Childline will work in coordination with local Government organisations such as health care centres, schools, legal advisors, etc as well as non Governmental organisations working in corresponding fields. Childline will be a free service with a short, easy to remember phone number. The foundation of this service is currently being carried out within the existing resources of DEPDC, support from Ashoka International and Childline India.

This project is looking for a major funder and/or partner.

¹Framework for action to combat trafficking in children for labour exploitation in the Mekong sub-region, ILO/IPEC discussion paper, Sub-regional consultation, 22-24 July 1998, Bangkok, p.6

²Bales Kevin "Disposable People New Slavery in the Global Economy", 1999, page 65

³10 Years of Lessons Learned, 10 years report of DEPDC, 1999

⁴ILO/IPEC: "Strategies for Capacity Building for Local Partners to Prevent Child Labor and Child Prostitution 1998-2001"

⁵ibid 1, page 11

Children by Ethnic Group:

(Updated July 2003)

Ethnic Group	DEP/ Doi Luang (on campus)		Patak School/Voc T'ing (off campus)		Total
Hmong (Meo)		4			4
Akha (Igor)	29		30		59
Jin How (Chinese)	5				5
Tai Lue	1		39	7	47
Karen (Kariang/Yang)	3		1		4
Lahu	7				7
Lao	2				2
Bamar (Ethnic Burmese)			1		1
Shan (Thai Yai)	14		54	4	72
Thai	15	10	9	1	35
Yao (Mien)	1	1			2
Lua	1		5	2	8
Total	78	15	139	14	246

CHILDREN AT DEPDC 2003

1. Children living on-campus, Mae Sai & Doi Luang: 93
(65 girls, 28 boys)
Ages 6yrs to 20 yrs
 2. Children living off-campus: 153
Patak School (139 - 75 girls, 64 boys)
Ages 3yrs to 16yrs
Vocational Training, (14- 13 girls, 1 boy)
Ages 13yrs to 16yrs
 3. CPR and MRICRH up to 30
- Total number of children: 276**

STAFF

- Staff: 43
- Foreign volunteers: 6/7
- Director: Mr. Sompop Jantraka
- Centre Manager Ms Oranuch Lederkulladilok

FUNDING SITUATION 2003/2004

Co-operaid, Switzerland:

- Patak School 749,500 Baht
Vocational Training 270,000 Baht

Embassy of Finland:

- CPR 2,023,125 Baht

USAID via The Asia Foundation:

- MRICRH 1,674,000 Baht

Embassy of Japan:

- Transport and building 3,300,000 Baht

Embassy of the United States of America:

- MSC Mapping Study 197,000 Baht

Whole Child Initiative, USA:

- MSC Case Study Documentation 197,000 Baht

Open Society Institute, Switzerland

- Mekong Youth Net 1,200,000Baht

Private donations:

- 2004 January 354,965 Baht

- 2003 1,681,213 Baht

(870,000 Baht from one individual donation)

- 2002 1,530,804 Baht

(increased donations due to TV exposure because of TIME Hero nomination)

- 2001 607,000 Baht

Thai Farmers Bank "Help Me Please" campaign:

- 2002 6,965,506Baht

Among other projects these funds are being used to undertake urgent repair work to all the buildings and grounds and to fund the care of 50 new children.

INTERNATIONAL FUNDERS

Ashoka, USA (1994-)
Asian Children's Fund (ACF), Japan (1990-1999)
Australia and New Zealand Women's Group (1994)
Books for Thailand (2002-)
The Finnish Embassy (2002)
USAID via The Asian Foundation (2002-)
The Australian Embassy (1996-1998)
The British Embassy (1996)
The Canadian Embassy (1999-2001)
The Japanese Embassy (1996-1998)
Co-operaid, Switzerland (1997-)
DANIDA, Denmark (1996-1998)
Daughters Education Programme, Singapore (1997)
Daughters Education Programme, New Zealand
(2002-)
The Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GATTW)
(1998-2000)
Global Fund for Women, USA
Help, Japan (1997)
International Labor Organization/International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labor (ILO/IPEC) (1994-2001)
International Organization for Migration (IOM) (1998-)
UNICEF (1994-1998)

INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

Ang Girls House Tachelek Myanmar
Ashoka, USA
Australian Volunteers International
Child Workers in Asia (CWA)
Church World Service, Lao PDR
Daughters Education Programme, Australia
Daughters Education Programme, Singapore
Don't Buy Thai, USA
End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking in Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT)
Friends of Thai Daughters, USA
Georgetown University, USA
Lao Youth Union
Lao Women Union
Migrant Assistance Programme (MAP)
Peace Corps Volunteers, USA
Saikom, Germany
Save the Children Fund
Task Force Against Child Exploitation (FACE)
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
World Vision

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HOW YOU CAN HELP

DEPDC is an independent organisation with no religious or political connection relying on grants and donations to continue its work.
You can donate to DEPDC by:
1. Sending a personal or bank cheque, in any major currency, made out to DEPDC
2. Transferring money to Bank of Ayutthaya Public Company Limited, Mae Sai, Chiang Rai, Thailand
Account Name: DEPDC
Account number: 331-1-05358-6