



Mekong Migration Network (MMN)

## Burma/Myanmar Civil Society Organization Country Visit to Cambodia



Image: Cambodia Country Visit participants with hosts at a Migrant Resource Center in Battambang, Cambodia.

### Overview

- Purpose: For representatives from Burma/Myanmar civil society organizations (CSOs) to gain a better understanding of cross-border labour migration issues and responses from CSOs and government representatives in Cambodia.
- Date: 13-17 December 2016
- Locations: Siem Reap, Poi Pet, and Battambang, Cambodia
- Host Organization: Cambodian Women's Crisis Center (CWCC)
- Participating Organizations: 88 Generation Peace and Open Society, Foundation for Education and Development (FED), Joint Action Committee for Burma Affairs (JACBA), Northern Shan State Baptist Convention (NSSBC), WE Generation Network, Tavoyan Women's Union (TWU), Karen Baptist Convention (KBC)

- Visited Organizations: Cambodian Women’s Crisis Center (CWCC), Civil Volunteer Group (GVC), Battambang Migrant Resource Center (MRC), Banteay Meanchey Provincial Committee for Counter Trafficking (PCCT), Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO), Krousar Thmey (New Family), Cambodian Hope Organization (CHO), Damnok Toek (Drop of Water), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM)

### Introduction

The Mekong Migration Network (MMN) is a network of regional and national civil society and research organizations from across the Greater Mekong Sub-region. The network was established in 2003 to act as a platform for member organizations to exchange information and conduct cross-border projects advocating for the protection of migrants. MMN carries out activities in the areas of information monitoring, research, capacity building, and advocacy.

The Burma/Myanmar civil society organization (CSO) country visit to Thailand followed MMN’s Myanmar National Training on Responses to Labour Migration, which was held from 29 August to 2 September 2016. 22 individuals from 18 organizations across Burma/Myanmar participated in the 5-day national training, including representatives of 88 Generation Peace and Open Society, Foundation for Education and Development (FED), Joint Action Committee for Burma Affairs (JACBA), Northern Shan State Baptist Convention (NSSBC), WE Generation Network, Tavoyan Women’s Union (TWU), Karen Baptist Convention (KBC), Sex Workers in Myanmar Network (SWIM), Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar (CTUM), Let’s Help Each Other (LHEO), Civil and Political Rights Campaign Group (CPRC), Human Rights Defenders and Promoters (HRDP), Action Labour Rights (ALR), Rakhine Women’s Union, Mawk Kon, Agriculture and Farmers Federation of Myanmar (AFFM-IUM), and Myanmar Industrial Craft and Services (MICS).

Some participants of the training had the opportunity of visiting Siem Reap, Poi Pet, and Battambang, Cambodia, from 13 to 17 December 2016. Eight participants took part in the visit representing: 88 Generation Peace and Open Society, Foundation for Education and Development (FED), Joint Action Committee for Burma Affairs (JACBA), Northern Shan State Baptist Convention (NSSBC), WE Generation Network, Tavoyan Women’s Union (TWU), and the Karen Baptist Convention (KBC).

The objective of the visit was for representatives from Burma/Myanmar CSOs to gain a better understanding of cross-border labour migration processes and issues from CSOs and government representatives in Cambodia – a country of origin for migrant workers.

## Day 1: Learning about the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center & Civil Volunteer Group

### **Cambodian Women's Crisis Center**

On the first day of the visit, 14 December, an internal meeting took place at the office of the host organization, Cambodian Women's Crisis Center, in Siem Reap. The meeting focused on two main themes: (1) the programme for the visit (refer to Appendix A) and (2) an overview of labour migration in Cambodia, particularly in the provinces of Siem Reap and Banteay Meanchey. Participants learned that around 7.5 percent of Cambodia's population (around 1 million people) are migrant workers and that they immigrate mainly to 5 countries: Thailand, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan, and Singapore. The highlight of the discussion was learning about Cambodia's Labour Migration Policy, 8 Prakas (ministerial orders), and the reception center at the Poi Pet border crossing. Participants asked representatives from CWCC about how these policies are implemented and what they include. Participants explained that Myanmar labour and migration laws are relatively weak and incomprehensive relative to Cambodian laws.

### **Civil Volunteer Group (GVC)**

Following the meeting with CWCC, CSO delegates paid a visit to the Italian-founded organization Civil Volunteer Group (GVC) in Siem Reap before heading to Poi Pet. The organization started working in Siem Reap in 2006 focusing on the issues of rural development and food security. Since 2014, their projects are working towards promoting safe labour migration while focusing on eradicating poverty. The organization believes economic hardship and poverty are the largest push factors of migration. The organization described two of their programs: one program is called 'Migra-Safe', which is a theater show that involves actors travelling to remote villages in Siem Reap, Banteay Meanchey, and Battambang to perform, and the second program focuses on raising awareness about safe labour migration and providing comprehensive pre-departure education among rural populations. Migra-Safe is carefully designed for people of various ages and levels of education to easily understand migration. They distribute materials such as t-shirts, hats, and calendars, which migrants can take with them. In the calendar, information is expressed through animated animal characters, which not only convey messages to children but also to illiterate adults. The CVG representatives also explained that a large portion of the rural population in Cambodia is illiterate and implementing raising awareness projects about safe migration at the local level is relatively weak. The country visit participants also had the chance to share about their experience with raising awareness on safe migration in Burma/Myanmar. A participant from WE Generation Network explained that many organizations are only able to focus on addressing cases of migrant worker exploitation and not on prevention unsafe migration and protecting migrant rights. The Myanmar Government does not fully protection migrant workers, even those who migrate by means of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

Day 2: Visiting the Battambang Migrant Resource Center & Chairperson of the Banteay Meanchey Provincial Committee for Counter Trafficking

**Battambang Migrant Resource Center (MRC)**

On 15 December, the second day of the visit, the group went to a Migrant Resource Center (MRC) in Battambang. The center provides services to help people find jobs and distribute information on regular and safe migration to work in Thailand and Malaysia. The center offers counseling services, information sharing, and assistance with complaint procedures. During the discussion about complaint mechanisms, one participant asked: “Why are there only a few complaint cases?” An MRC employee explained that many people still do not feel comfortable filing complaints and that there are some other channels apart from the MRC where people can ask for assistance. People who come to the center and access services include members of local communities, internal migrants, and migrant returnees. The host and participants discussed laws regulating recruitment agencies; delegates explained that in Burma/Myanmar there is currently no effective law to prevent agencies from exploiting workers. In Myanmar, agencies are required to pay a registration fee of only USD 5,000 USD, while in Cambodia agencies pay USD 100,000. As a result, agencies operating in Burma/Myanmar are held less accountable as they can relatively easily reregister as a new agency if the government halts their operations. As well, in Burma/Myanmar, the number of MRCs is comparatively small and does not cover most of the country.



Image: Project participants learning about the Battambang Migrant Resource Center.

### **Banteay Meanchey Provincial Committee for Counter Trafficking (PCCT)**

In the afternoon, the delegates travelled to Banteay Meanchey to meet with the Deputy Governor of Banteay Meanchey and Chairperson of the Provincial Committee for Counter Trafficking (PCCT), Her Excellency Ms. Pok Nady. Firstly, the chairperson explained the structure of the counter trafficking committee from national level to provincial level. Participants learned about the six working groups under the PCCT, which focus on: Prevention, Protection, Rehabilitation and Reintegration, Law Enforcement, Access to Justice, Child Affairs, and International Cooperation. A chairperson leads each working group. These chairpersons include government officials, the Provincial Police Chief, the Provincial Court Judge, and the Provincial Department Chief of Social Welfare. Burma/Myanmar CSO delegates were impressed by the fact that NGO and CSO representatives are given the opportunity to actively participate in these working groups as members; this is something participants would like to see transpire in Burma/Myanmar in the future. In addition, participants learned that the PCCT serves as the secretariat for the six working groups, hosts monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings, and reports to the National Committee for Counter Trafficking.



Image: The Chairperson of the PCCT meeting with Burma/Myanmar CSO delegates.

Day 3: Meeting with Banteay Meanchey-based CSOs and NGOs working on migration issues & Evaluation/Reflection Session

**Meeting with CSOs and NGOs working on migration issues**

On the third day of the visit, there was a meeting with Cambodian CSOs and NGOs at the CWCC office in Poi Pet. Five organizations – Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO), Krousar Thmey (New Family), Cambodian Hope Organization (CHO), Damnok Toek (Drop of Water), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) – came to share information about their work with Burma/Myanmar CSO delegates. LICADHO is a well-known human rights organization in Cambodia focusing on monitoring human rights abuses and violations. They have three main programs that focus on monitoring human rights situations, advocacy, and health care. In terms of monitoring human rights, LICADHO focuses on women and children, including issues of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and trafficking. Their findings and advocacy actions are directed towards local authorities, village headmen, commune chiefs, and courts. They also work to address land-grabbing issues and assist people with bringing their cases to court by providing legal and documentation assistance and support when speaking with government officials and the media. The organization also acts as a watchdog for torture cases, drug dealings, and other human rights exploitations. LICADHO is also an active member of Human Rights Watch Committee in Cambodia. Out of all of the land-related cases LICADHO takes to court, their success rate is twenty out of one hundred. In some cases, lawsuits take many years and it is difficult for people to follow.

Krousar Thmey (meaning ‘New Family’ in English) was formed in 1991 and now has seven offices across Cambodia with a head office in Phnom Penh. Their 3 main programs include Education for Deaf and Blind Children, Child Welfare, and Cultural and Artistic Development. Education for Deaf and Blind Children is a well-known program and the first of its kind to be established in Cambodia. At the moment, Krousar Thmey has a total of five schools based in Siem Reap, Kambucha, and other towns, which provide financial and emotional support to deaf and blind children. The second program is a drop-in center that supports children on the move; the center acts as a shelter providing children with a place to stay for three to six months. After this time Krousar Thmey refers the children to other organizations. At the center, Krousar Thmey also provides non-formal education, such as life skills and small business trainings, and counselling. They also distribute scholarships and small grants to support people’s pursuit of their life choices. Simultaneously, Krousar Thmey educates children deportees from Thailand in Poi Pet about child trafficking. The organization’s Cultural and Artistic Development Program provides lessons to children to learn how to play traditional musical instruments, dance, draw, and paint.

One participant asked about the challenges faced at the Krousar Thmey Drop-In Center. Staff explained that, in some cases, the behaviour of the children is a challenge. Sometimes, the children are not interested in education and it is hard for the staff to keep them in school. There is also a language barrier as some children spend most of their life in Thailand and cannot communicate in Khmer. The center strives to address these challenges by offering family training for the children who have behavioural issues. Participants also inquired about Krousar Thmey's advocacy strategies for supporting the education of blind and deaf children. In earlier years, the Cambodian government did not provide any support specifically for children who are blind or deaf within the education system. During this time, Krousar Thmey lobbied the government, which resulted in the government enacting a specific law for disabled persons. The organization conducted research prior to their lobbying efforts and raised awareness among the public about disabled children's education. Recently, they received support from the King.

Cambodian Hope Organization (CHO) is a Christian organization that provides assistance largely to women and children living along the Cambodian-Thai border. One of their programs, which is called School on the Mat, provides informal education to children who are unable to attend public schools. They also have programs that focus on self-reliance, trafficking prevention, awareness raising, income generation, and self-help groups which provide loans to villagers.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Poi Pet provides Cambodian police with information on the departure and reintegration of migrants, and information on safe migration to local populations through a Migrant Resource Center (MRC).

Damnok Toek (meaning 'Drop of Water' in English) was founded in 1999 and operates three offices in Phnom Penh, Poi Pet, and Neak Lea. The organization's drop-in center provides shelter for vulnerable children for one to two weeks. A mid-term center provides children with a place to stay for 6 months up to one year. Their long-term shelter allows children to stay for up to 18 months. Damnok Toek also operates a hotline and Child Safe Center (CSC), which acts as a deportation reception center where staff screen children deportees and assist them with the process of securing support from various government offices and NGOs. Children can also receive informal education from grade one to six from Damnok Toek. The organization also supports children's reintegration into public schools.



Image: Project participants having a fruitful discussion with NGOs and CSOs based in Poi Pet at the CWCC Poi Pet office.

### **Evaluation/Reflection Session**

On the last evening of the Cambodia country visit, CSO delegates participated in a session to reflect on the visit. CSO delegates explained that they learned a great deal about national policies regarding labour rights, migrant rights, and the regulation of recruitment agencies. Based on discussions, participants claimed that Cambodia's labour migration policies are more comprehensive than policies in Burma/Myanmar. After speaking with representatives from the Battambang MRC, they also believed that Cambodian policies regulating recruitment agencies better protect migrant workers than Myanmar policies. The visit instilled in participants a better understanding of the significance of effective labour migration policies enacted in countries of origin. Some of the participating organizations expressed that they will use the information they gained from the Cambodia country visit to advocate for the Myanmar Government to change national migration and labour laws. Overall, participants were satisfied with the visit, but wished they could have had more time to share with and learn from Cambodian CSOs and NGOs.

## Appendix A

### Burma/Myanmar CSO Country Visit to Cambodia

#### Agenda

Date: 13-17 December 2016

Location: Siem Reap, Poi Pet, and Battambang, Cambodia

Host Organization: Cambodian Women's Crisis Center (CWCC)

13 December 2016		
Time	Agenda	Logistics
	Participants arrive in Siem Reap; check in at the hotel	Neak Pean Hotel
	Free evening	
14 December 2016		
8:30	Leave the hotel	Meet at the hotel lobby; travel by van
9:00-11:00	Visit Cambodian Women's Crisis Center <i>*Overview of migration situation in Cambodia, particularly in Siem Reap and Banteay Meanchey</i> <i>*Return to the hotel for checking out</i>	CWCC office, Siem Reap
12:00-13:00	Lunch	
13:30-14:30	Visit Civil Volunteer Group (CWCC's partner organization)	GVC office in Siem Reap
14:30-17:00	Leave Siem Reap and travel to Poi Pet	Travel by a van
17:00	Check in at hotel Ly Heng Chhay	
15 December 2016		
8:00	Leave the hotel and travel to Battambang	Meet at the hotel lobby; travel by van
10:00-11:30	Visit Migrant Resource Center <i>*Visit, discussion, Q&amp;A about the roles of MRC in promoting regular and safe migration</i>	MRC Battambang established by ILO and run by MOLVT
11:30-13:00	Lunch	
13:00	Leave Battambang and travel to Banteay Meanchey	

14:10-15:30	Meet with the Chairperson of Provincial Committee for Counter Trafficking (PCCT) <i>*Discussion about the government's role in promoting safe migration and combating human trafficking</i>	PCCT office, Banteay Meanchey
<b>16 December 2016</b>		
8:30	Leave the hotel	Meet at the lobby Travel to CWCC's office
9:00-11:00	Meet with CSOs working on migration issue based in Banteay Meanchey. <i>*Learn about their strategies for promoting safe migration, assisting migrant returnees, and protecting the rights of migrants and their families</i>	CWCC's office, Poi Pet (IOM, Krousar Thmey, Damnok Toek, CHO, ADHOC, LICADHO, CWCC)
12:00-13:00	Lunch	
15:30	Leave Poi Pet and travel to Siem Reap	
20:00	Reflection Session on Cambodia Country Visit	Siem Reap
<b>17 December 2016</b>		
8:00	Check out of hotel and leave for the airport	Siem Reap
11:00	Departure	