

# **Breaking Through the Clouds:**

**A Participatory Action Research (PAR) Project  
with Migrant Children and Youth  
Along the Borders of  
China, Myanmar and Thailand**

**Save the Children (UK)**



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*We have encountered so many things in our daily lives, but never have talked about them. It has been like dark clouds have covered the sun. After discussions and activities it is as though the sun has begun to come out. We have come to understand things we would have never on our own.*

A young returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

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Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a new and evolving approach to learning, documenting and developing potential for change. Employing PAR principles with children and youth in vulnerable situations and addressing sensitive issues have been both extremely challenging and exciting for the Save the Children (UK) team. Many lessons have been learned and discoveries have emerged that have surprised both the project team and the participants. It would not have been possible to successfully implement this project without the energy, creativity and commitment of all those involved, who brought so much insight to this process and its documentation.

Save the Children (UK) staff, Chris Henessy, Dr. NweNwe Aye and Victor Karunan, conceptualised this project in 1998. The staff documented the critical issues faced by migrant children and youth along the borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand and lack of information and understanding available to advocate on their behalf. Based on these findings, a project proposal was developed and fully funded by DFID (UK) (the Department for International Development).

The project was co-ordinated by Save the Children's Southeast and East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (SEAPRO), a Regional Project Co-ordinator, Therese Caouette with country teams in China, Myanmar and Thailand. The Myanmar team included: Dr. Nwe Nwe Aye as National Co-ordinator and Aung Win, Daw May, Dr. Soe Naing and Dr. Ei Kalya Moore as National Researchers. Nan Noon Sein, Naw Olive, Nan Soe Soe Hla, Sai Tun Aye, Naw Thazin May, Naw Ku Ku, Saw Kapaw Shee, Naw Kay Tu, Nant Aye Aye Min and Si Si Aye as Field Researchers and Daw Mu Mu Winn as Translator. In China the team was comprised of Dr. Leshan Tan as National Co-ordinator, Zhang Jie and Zhang Hong Wen later replaced by Pu Hong Yan as National Researchers, Dong Xin Mei and Shi Qing as Field Research Co-ordinators, Ma Ti Mee as Field Researcher and Stephen L. Watkins as translator. The Thai team members were Suntaree Rangkusone as National Co-ordinator, Awatsayar Panum as National Researcher, Nhum Larshio, Hsengmoon Homhseng, Rattikarn Rehwattanasieikul, Suchart Yehjong, Mana Jiemrum, Shwemia Nanta, Naw Paw Paw, Ayong Saeh-Reh, Juengpang Saelee and Khamnuan Duangkieng as Field Researchers, Jumrong Pun-in as Document Co-ordinator, Udom Worapong and Charmtong Sayfah as Translator and Puerkhon, Adam, and Naw Paw Keh as Youth Volunteers.

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activities beyond the limits of the project, building on the momentum stirred among the children and youth.

Last but, only in hopes of remembering, most of all, the hundreds of children and young persons who so patiently joined us with amazing energy and determination to find words to describe their world and ways to move forward towards a more hopeful future.

## **List of Acronyms**

ADR	-	Adolescent Reproductive Health
CBO	-	Community-Based Organisation
DFID (UK)	-	Department for International Development (UK)
FGD	-	Focus Group Discussion
FRC	-	Field Research Co-ordinator
FR	-	Field Researcher
IDC	-	Immigration Detention Centres
IEC	-	Information, Education and Communication
INGO	-	Intergovernmental Organisations
MOU	-	Memorandum of Understanding
NC	-	National Co-ordinator
NFE	-	Non-Formal Education
NGO	-	Non-Governmental Organisation
NR	-	National Researcher
PAR	-	Participatory Action Research
PRA	-	Participatory Rapid Appraisal
RPC	-	Regional Project Co-ordinator
SC(UK)	-	Save the Children (UK)
SEAPRO	-	Southeast and East Asia and Pacific Regional Office
STDs	-	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
TOT	-	Training of Teachers
UNDCP	-	United Nations Drug Control Programme
UNDP	-	United Nations Development Programme
YR	-	Youth Researcher

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Background**

Over ten million<sup>1</sup> migrants throughout Asia are estimated to be working abroad. The Asian financial crisis of 1997 resulted in a greater percentage of these migrants living without documentation, leaving them even more vulnerable to exploitation.<sup>2</sup> In the early 1980s, most migrants from Asia became labourers in the Middle East or emigrated to North America or Australia.<sup>3</sup> By the mid-1990s, the number of Asians migrating to work in other Asian countries had grown to an estimated 6.5 million. The majority of these migrants work in Japan, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.<sup>4</sup>

During the past ten years, the borders between China, Myanmar and Thailand have witnessed the largest flow of migrants in decades. People are moving in unprecedented numbers between these borders for tourism, trade, business, refuge, employment and other opportunities. Those from Myanmar make up the largest proportion of this mobile population. Few statistics on migrants are available which include figures that take into account individuals without documentation or those overstaying their travel permits. Based on reliable estimates, the numbers involve millions of people.

According to the Thai government, approximately one million undocumented migrants are employed in eight labour sectors in half of the country's provinces. The government's statistics do not include other labour sectors the remaining provinces, or the extended family members accompanying migrant employees.<sup>5</sup> Given the porous borders, migrants' extensive mobility, their hidden and isolated lifestyles and the fact that migrants are often indistinguishable from the local ethnic populations along the border, it is likely that the number of migrants in Thailand far exceeds one million.

While specific statistics on the number of migrants from Myanmar in Thailand are unavailable, the government of Myanmar estimates that 74.1% of those migrating out of the country cross the border into Thailand, with 17.6% crossing into China and the remainder into Bangladesh and India.<sup>6</sup> It is significant that almost 18 percent of migrants

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<sup>1</sup> Not including Chinese nationals migrating to Hong Kong.

<sup>2</sup> Archavanitkul, K. & Guest, P. (1999). *Managing the Flow of Migration: Regional Approaches*. Bangkok: Mahidol University and International Organisation for Migration.

<sup>3</sup> Battistella, G. (1999). *Overview of the Current Situation of Irregular or Undocumented Migration in East and Southeast Asian Region: The Need for a Policy Response Framework*. Bangkok: International Organisation of Migration.

<sup>4</sup> ILO (1998). "The Social Impact of the Asian Financial Crisis". Technical report for discussion at the high-level Tripartite Meeting on Social Responses to the Financial Crisis in East and South East Asian Countries, Bangkok, 22-24 April 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Caouette, T.M. (1998). *Needs Assessment on Cross-Border Trafficking in Women and Children in the Mekong Sub-Region*. Bangkok, Thailand: United Nations.

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Immigration and Population. (1997). *Country Paper presented at the Second Technical Consultation on Transnational Population Movement and HIV/AIDS in South East Asian Countries*.

from Myanmar cross into China. Although the most visible portion of these migrants are seen along the border areas, increasingly reports find migrants from Myanmar throughout China.

Not much data exists on the number of migrants transiting out of China. Although Chinese researchers have found that an increasing number of young people from Yunnan Province (as well as other areas in China) are migrating to Myanmar, Thailand and further abroad.<sup>7</sup> A recent study conducted in China indicates that the numbers of migrants travelling from Yunnan Province into (or through) Thailand increased throughout the 1990s.<sup>8</sup> However, it appears that migration from China to Thailand diminished or became stable following the Asian financial crisis in 1997. According to discussions with local Chinese government officials in Xishuangbanna Prefecture<sup>9</sup>, this resulted from reduced and less profitable jobs and trade, as well as harsher border restrictions imposed by the Chinese and Thai authorities. Yet, the steady influx of Chinese migrants in the Thai Immigration Detention Centres (IDC) at any given time continues. As a Thai immigration official explained, the actual numbers of migrants from China are difficult to ascertain. Consideration must be given to the fact that more migrants are travelling without documentation and if arrested most of those from China claim to be from Myanmar, since it is easier (and cheaper) to be deported there than return to China.

Migration has had a dramatic impact on the ethnic minority populations living along the mountainous border areas between China, Myanmar and Thailand. Each of these major ethnic groups has numerous sub-dialects and cultures within its population. Most of these border populations speak several languages but few are literate in any of them. The major ethnic groups found in China, Myanmar and Thailand are the Shan,<sup>10</sup> Kachin,<sup>11</sup> Kayin,<sup>12</sup> Kayah,<sup>13</sup> Mon, Wa, Pa-O, Akha,<sup>14</sup> Lahu,<sup>15</sup> Lisu and Palaung.<sup>16</sup> In the past, these people lived and moved irrespective of borders. However, previous migration was contained within a small radius compared to the movements that have taken place within the past ten years. In addition, the dominant ethnic population of each country, the Bamar,<sup>17</sup> Han Chinese<sup>18</sup> and Thai,<sup>19</sup> are migrating to the border areas in increasing numbers.

Although it is hard to find age and gender breakdowns within the limited data available, both the countries of origin and destination find that those migrating are largely young

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<sup>7</sup> Yunnan Children Development Centre. (1998). *Analytic Report on Cross-national Outflow of Yunnan Frontier Women into Southeast Asian Countries*. Unpublished research report.

<sup>8</sup> Achavanitkul, K. (1998).

<sup>9</sup> Xishuangbanna means “12 areas” in Shan (Dai) language and is referred to in Thai as “Sipsongpanna.”

<sup>10</sup> Referred to as Dai in China, Tai-Yai in Thailand and Tay in Vietnam.

<sup>11</sup> Referred to as Jingpo in China.

<sup>12</sup> Referred to as Kayin in this report, but also known as Karen.

<sup>13</sup> Referred to as Kayah in this report, but also known as Karrenni.

<sup>14</sup> The Akha are referred to as the Hani in China.

<sup>15</sup> The Lahu are also referred to as the Muse in Myanmar and Thailand.

<sup>16</sup> The Palaung are referred to as the Bulang or Blang in China.

<sup>17</sup> Bamar refers to ethnic Burmese.

<sup>18</sup> Han Chinese refers to ethnic Chinese and will be noted hereafter as Han Chinese.

<sup>19</sup> Thai are the dominant population in Thailand not to be confused with the Dai in China who are referred to as Shan in this report.



people and often include children. According to the number of foreigners detained by the Thai immigration department from March 1995 to August 1997, the average age of those detained was 23 years of age, while 20 percent of the inmates were under the age of eighteen.<sup>20</sup> Current trends of those migrating from Myanmar show more people are coming to Thailand with family members than in the past, including an increasing number of younger children, with more ethnic Bamar migrating from areas deeper inside Myanmar.<sup>21</sup>

There is a significant demand for female labour and a disproportionate number of female migrants without documentation. This is due largely to the types of jobs female migrants undertake, their isolation (due to fear and confinement), the unwillingness of employers to register them and the lack of sensitivities to their particular situations, needs and rights. From July to November 1996, over 300,000 migrants registered with Thai authorities, of which only one third were women.

The Save the Children(UK) Southeast and East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (SEAPRO)<sup>22</sup> is aware of the limited understanding of the impact of migration on children and youth across borders and has initiated possible interventions to address the critical issues they face. In 1997-98, SC(UK)/SEAPRO conducted a study entitled, *An Inventory of Organisations Involved in Cross-border Programming in the Mekong sub-region*,<sup>23</sup> which reveals the limited information available on migrant children and youth in the region. Though many acknowledge the growing numbers of children and youth and/or their families engaged in cross-border migration, there is little awareness as to their concerns and needs, with extremely few interventions undertaken to reach out to them. In an effort to fill this void, SC(UK)/SEAPRO implemented a project for *Participatory Action Research (PAR) with Migrant Children and Youth in Cross-border Areas in China, Myanmar and Thailand*<sup>24</sup> from April 1999-March 2001 with funding from the Department for International Development, United Kingdom (DFID-UK).

## 1.2. Project Profile

The vulnerabilities of migrant children and youth are not only the result of limited understanding and documentation, but also due to the lack of insight into how best to address their realities. Given the situational complexities and migrants' illegal status, few organisations or government agencies have tried to reach out to migrant children and youth. Little is known about what interventions are needed and how they can be

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<sup>20</sup> Archavanitkul, K. (1998).

<sup>21</sup> Beyrer, C. (1999). *The Health and Humanitarian Situations of Burmese Populations Along the Thai-Burma Border*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University.

<sup>22</sup> Hereafter referred to as SCF(UK)/SEAPRO.

<sup>23</sup> Hennessy, C. & Nwe Nwe Aye. (1998). *An Inventory of Organisations Involved in Cross-border Programming in the Mekong sub-region*. Bangkok: Save the Children Fund (UK)Southeast, East Asia & Pacific Regional Office.

<sup>24</sup> *Participatory Action Research with Migrant Children and Youth in Cross-border Areas of China, Myanmar and Thailand Project Proposal* submitted to Department for International Development (DFID) Southeast Asia Development Division (SEADD) in Bangkok, Thailand on February 1, 1999 by Save the Children (UK) Southeast Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (SEAPRO).

implemented, given the position of children and youth in their families, communities and the network of people involved in (and often profiting from) their migration. In some instances, interventions that have focused on migrant children and youth have often led to their further isolation and vulnerability. This is particularly the case for young girls trafficked into the sex-industry, or as domestic workers, those abusing drugs, child beggars and young migrants separated from their family members in immigration detention centres. Although, the few efforts and interventions that have been undertaken to address the issues faced by migrant children and youth are invaluable, there remains an overall lack of understanding regarding their realities, needs and the possibilities for action towards improving their lives.

SC(UK) has found that Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a valuable tool in understanding the complex circumstances and perspectives of migrant children and youth. Such an approach allows researchers and target populations to explore together what actions can be taken to address their concerns and realities. Migrant children and youth come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, speak a variety of languages and dialects and live in tentative and often insecure environments. Their voices and perspectives are easily lost in traditional research models often developed in a framework, culture and language that are foreign to them. PAR provides a means to accommodate cultural and language differences, and a means for breaking through gender and age barriers in environments that tend to isolate and silence girls and young persons. In addition, PAR offers opportunities to listen to communities, youth and children describe the impact of migration in the broader context of their lives and to explore with them the best means of providing support, given their frequently changing circumstances. Documentation and analysis of such exchanges and processes provide the basis for the research component of this project

### 1.3. Project Objectives

The objectives of the *Participatory Action Research with Migrant Children and Youth in Cross-Border Areas of China, Myanmar and Thailand* were stated generally in the project proposal and evolved more concretely as the study unfolded.<sup>25</sup> Below are the objectives that were developed by the research team, based on the preliminary data collected at the field sites, insights of the research team and participants and opportunities and limitations encountered.

**1.3.1. Gather insight into the lives of migrant children and youth, their realities, challenges and decision-making processes** using qualitative research tools. The project's research tools included direct and participatory observations, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and participatory rapid appraisal. The data collected provided an understanding of the sensitive and complex issues surrounding migration and the impact of these issues on the lives of children and youth. The findings were compiled so as to identify vulnerable migrant children and youth and their needs and to develop insight into both the children and youth

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<sup>25</sup> The project objectives did not change in their original focus, but were operationalised with more specific terms and procedures.

as individuals, as well as in relation to other community members and their environment.

**1.3.2. Employ a participatory approach to understanding migrant children's perspectives and needs, and explore appropriate interventions** Participatory Action Research (PAR) activities were developed according to the situation and interests of the children and youth, and included non-formal education, referral to and/or assistance in obtaining services and/or providing creative time. The PAR activities and lessons learned from youth and community members were documented and compiled, together with the data collected from the observations, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and participatory rapid appraisal tools.

**1.3.3. Analyse the data and report the findings.** Each country team conducted its own data translation and analysis, which was then translated into English and collectively compiled for regional analysis.

**1.3.4. Document the findings of the study and the experience with the participatory research approach, and recommend interventions on behalf of migrant children and youth** This project provided insight into participatory approaches to research and an understanding of the limited resources available to migrant children and youth. It offers a wide range of information for a cross-section of researchers and advocates, including those undertaking similar participatory projects, those working with migrant populations, children and/or youth and those addressing sensitive issues.

**1.3.5. Disseminate the findings and establish strategies for advocacy** with governments, service providers, intergovernmental organisations (INGOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs) and community leaders, academics and others working on issues related to migrant children and youth in Myanmar, China and Thailand, as well as regionally in the Mekong Sub-region. Advocate for awareness of the vulnerabilities and needs of migrant children and youth and their communities, and recommend strategies for multi-level responses.

Based on these objectives, SC(UK) worked to involve children, youth, their communities and key stakeholders in as many aspects of this project as possible. The project recognised the “ladder of participation”<sup>26</sup> (see below) and the process of working towards increased participation within the context and limitations encountered, such as safety issues, access, language barriers and traditional roles. The “ladder of participation” was introduced to the team and used as a model for developing, monitoring and evaluating participation in this project.

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<sup>26</sup> Hart, R. A. (1997) *Children's Participation: The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care*. London: Earthscan Publications, Ltd.

Field researchers were recruited from the local communities, trained and supported by SC(UK) national staff and a regional co-ordinator. The qualitative research tools used emphasised listening to the perspectives of children and youth and exploring with them their concerns, needs and opportunities for change. This formed the basis for empowering children and youth to define their own problems and initiate appropriate interventions. The activities that emerged further encouraged participation, capacity building, self-esteem and a shifting of ownership from the field researchers to the participants. Unlike traditional research methodologies, PAR is based on gathering information prior to, during and in evaluation of actual interventions, and encouraging researchers and participants to learn from ‘trial and error’ as a means of improving responses, based on research findings and sharing experiences with others.

## **2. THE PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR) PROCESS**

The PAR process that unfolded in this study was similar in all the research sites, although the specific steps taken, the ways of interacting with the participants and the outcomes varied considerably by site, ethnicity, age, gender and local context. The overall process that was followed in all three sites is presented below, with variances noted in subsequent sections of this report.

### **2.1. Ways of Interacting with the Participants**

Children and young persons along many of the border areas throughout the Mekong region are exposed to multiple risks. Therefore, a **holistic understanding of the vulnerabilities of children and young persons impacted by cross-border migration** allowed for a deeper understanding of the pushes and pulls in their lives and the development of effective interventions in response. Working with young migrants, as well as with those around them, helped to provide an understanding of the cycle of exploitation these young people endure, and offered the opportunity to build links with them and other partners in their communities. In many instances, the project team was able to provide young migrants and their communities with information, life skills, protection and support at the local, national and regional levels.

The **participatory research approach** used by SC(UK) encouraged children, young persons and their community to define their concerns and responses themselves with some guidance and support from the research team. The PAR approach allowed for innovative and exciting pilot projects with children and young persons based on an in-depth understanding of their realities and appropriate ways of working with them that empowered, rather than victimised the participants. Children, youth and community participation at all the sites was difficult. It took the participants a great deal of time to establish trust, creativity and confidence before actively engaging with SC(UK). Eventually, SC(UK) was able to increase the degree of participation among children and young persons, with the trust of their parents and community. This allowed the activities to increase both in number and size, as well as expand to new areas. Emphasising a slow and long-term approach provided the time and opportunity for community involvement and ownership in the interventions, ultimately ensuring project sustainability.

Given the difficulties of working with vulnerable populations and addressing sensitive issues in already tenuous border areas, the project teams sought to **identify entry points into communities** that were least threatening. These involved a variety of strategies. Although, these approaches differed between countries, borders and sites, certain entry points were found along all three borders. These included introducing HIV/AIDS and other health messages, and providing support for ethnic celebrations. Both of these strategies served as a means of introducing participatory approaches to organising activities, raising awareness on critical issues and exploring other opportunities for future collaboration. At several of the sites, field researchers assisted teachers and/or other community groups explore current conditions, concerns and possible interventions with community members.

The project was able to **build partnerships** through strengthening existing innovative groups found among the migrant communities and supporting the establishment of such groups. These local groups were different at each site and included well-established community-based organisations, as well as loosely formed community associations. SC(UK) worked with government and privately-based health providers, religious bodies, village leaders, local cultural networks (well established among many of the ethnic minority communities), community protection networks and other non-governmental organisations in the area. In addition, SC(UK) built and **participated in regional networks**. These networks included both formal as well as informal contacts that strengthened a broad-based understanding and response to the ways in which migration impacts the lives of children and young persons.

Given the dynamics of the border areas throughout the Mekong region, **flexibility was critical** for adapting to the mobility of the migrant community, seasonal work demands and changing political and economic dynamics. Flexibility by all those involved helped to ensure sustainability of the project and to develop appropriate interventions. A participatory approach requires ability to adjust to respondents' experiences and concerns and helps build trust and confidence among target populations and those surrounding them. As noted earlier, the process is a slow and difficult one, with many setbacks that cannot be foreseen or controlled, requiring a wide-range of responses and approaches. Responses that are sensitive to this process allow for a creativity that during this project provided SC(UK) teams and those working with them an opportunity to incorporate the lessons learned so as to establish truly effective interventions and political changes.

This project developed **cross-border** links and opportunities for collaboration and exchanges that resulted in interventions and insight into migration that was not limited by national boundaries. Country teams met regularly with teams on the other side of the border and regionally once a year.

A critical aspect of this project was **to build an understanding (and acceptance) of the issues, of ways of interacting with the participants, and the opportunities available for change**. The PAR process provided field-based perspectives of participants' realities and linked communities to the broader discourse of the issues they were facing. Only

through slow and patient work with governmental departments and officials at many levels was SC(UK) able to successfully implement this project. The root causes and effects of migration and the vulnerabilities of migrants to exploitation and violence needs to be acknowledged and addressed by governments, especially through their policies and programmes. By working with government officials at various levels, the project was able to strengthen the sensitivity of governments to the critical issues faced by migrants, particularly children and youth along the border areas. Official recognition and Memorandums of Understanding were established between SC(UK) and governmental agencies working along the border areas. This helped to increase support and links to other resources available at the local, national and regional levels.

## **2.2. Implementation Strategy**

A critical aspect of this research was the effort placed on the diversity of ethnic populations, cultures and languages. Full time translators were employed to work with each country team, prepare training materials, facilitate data collection and oversee and provide translations.<sup>27</sup> The proceedings at all of the regional workshops were translated into English, Thai, Chinese and Burmese, as well as into minority languages and dialects such as Shan, Kachin, Mon and Karen, as needed.. Efforts were made to translate materials well in advance of the workshops and to translate in all four languages all follow-up discussions so as to provide comprehensive communication of new terms and concepts that can be easily lost with each translation.

The project was implemented in the following four phases:

### **Phase One: Project preparation and data collection (April – September 1999)**

Before any site visits were undertaken, meetings were held with the Regional Project Co-ordinator (RPC) and the research team<sup>28</sup> to standardise the research tools, provide training in the research process and address potential obstacles, limitations and ethical considerations. Research was then conducted in each country, the data was translated and analysed and the findings were presented to all country teams and support staff at a series of regional conferences.

### **Phase Two: Developing PAR interventions (October 1999 – June 2000)**

Documentation, transcription and translation of the research activities were a critical component of this phase. Concurrent with these activities, research teams worked with participants and their communities to develop interventions. At the end of this phase, a participatory review of the entire research process was conducted and strategies were recommended for possible long-term interventions.

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<sup>27</sup> Given that each country team was working with several languages and the skills of documentation among team members varied considerably, the role of a team translator overseeing the entire documentation process was invaluable.

<sup>28</sup> The specific roles of these individuals will be discussed below.

### Phase Three: Analysis, reporting and consultation on project findings (July–December 2000)

A regional meeting with all country research team members and regional support staff was held to present the, preliminary findings, participatory review and PAR interventions. The process for analysing data, preparing interim country reports and providing translations was developed and implemented by each country team. Data was maintained in the national languages to allow for a richer database, more in-depth analysis and to develop research skills among the field and national staff. Country reports were prepared and translated and then compiled into two regional reports; the first of which provides background information and the research findings and the second documents the PAR process, activities and lessons learned. A draft of each report was submitted to each country team to review and to verify the findings, data analysis, and overall presentation, taking into account respondents' sensitivities and vulnerabilities.

### Phase Four: Initial Dissemination of Research Findings (January –March, 2001)

A dissemination strategy for presenting the project findings was prepared by the research team with input from stakeholders and donors. While the final regional reports were being completed and translated, SC(UK)/SEAPRO disseminated initial findings and its experience with PAR at the local, national and regional levels. Data dissemination was provided to non-government organisations, service providers, community based groups and leaders, academics, governmental officials and agencies and others working on issues related to migration, children/youth and participatory research.

The dissemination also included a discussion of creative ways of bringing the findings back to the children, youth and community involved in this project, such as through. cartoons, posters, newsletters, theatre pieces and music in minority languages.

## **2.3. Ethical Considerations**

The ethical considerations for conducting research and working on sensitive issues with vulnerable populations were discussed at length among the research team, and appropriate approaches to the project developed for each site. Discussion and revisions of these considerations (and others as they emerged) were established on an ongoing basis to accommodate the dynamic border situations and unforeseen incidences as they arose.

**Security of those involved in the study was one of the most important and difficult aspects of this research.** This project focused largely on cross border migrants, communities living along the border affected by migration, those vulnerable to possible migration, and migrants who had recently returned to their country of origin. Given the undocumented status of most of these people and the unofficial means by which they travelled and obtained employment, their vulnerability to arrest and exploitation was a constant consideration. Participation and documentation depended on the extent to which

it could be done without risk to the participants. At times, this often resulted in the inability to ask certain questions. Issues of security limited the areas where the team was able to work. In some places, work was stopped temporarily until the situation calmed and at one project site the work had to be terminated due to perceived security risks.

From the outset of the project, the **strategy for assuring confidentiality was established**. In general, each team member carefully explained the project to every respondent and the means established for ensuring confidentiality before requesting their participation. All data was coded by using numbers and descriptions, leaving out the respondents' names and personal details. Each researcher was equipped with a secure, locked place to keep data and safe channels were established to transfer the materials between team members.

**Addressing highly sensitive issues and vulnerable populations draws attention to the situation that may have adverse affects.** HIV/AIDS and trafficking were two issues that had been foreseen and required a planned strategy for discussion and intervention. HIV/AIDS remains a sensitive issue in many of the areas of the Mekong region, but is slowly being accepted as a matter that needs to be addressed. HIV/AIDS was for many researchers an 'official' opportunity to enter the community without threatening the local authorities and leaders with abstract plans for research. Although it was an opportunity, it was also a limitation in that it identified many of the researchers with this issue and influenced the interventions. The focus on trafficked persons and sex workers was difficult given the stigma associated to both and the extreme vulnerability and mobility of these individuals, who were most often girls and young women. The research team often had to rely on contacts with the girl or young woman's family or the co-operation with the brothel bosses and pimps to make contact with them. Only over time was it possible to develop activities with them based on their interests and input. Drug related issues emerged as a rampant and complex reality along all the border areas and required more insight than originally foreseen at the outset of this study.

Although all of the country teams recognised the problem of **child beggars**, only one site was able to find safe channels to reach this group given the tight control over them, high levels of fear and mistrust among them, and the unwillingness by the authorities to address their presence. Child beggars are an extremely vulnerable group that will require more creative approaches and extensive advocacy efforts in order to reach them.

The **illegal status** of undocumented migrants has forced many to rely on extra-legal means to negotiate their travel, residence and employment. As a result, many migrants end up connected to or involved with other **illegal activities**, such as drugs, trafficking (of persons or narcotics), black market trading and other criminal activity. This made gathering information and implementing PAR activities among migrant children and youth particularly difficult and often resulted in an inability to work with the most vulnerable persons.

Due to the vulnerability of participants and sensitivity of the issues involved, the **project sites were closely monitored by the authorities**. This posed an ongoing challenge for



the research teams and, at times, interfered with the ability to work in a specific area or with certain populations.

**The permission and involvement of government officials necessary to conduct this research varied between countries and was a constant consideration.** The centralised nature of governing (particularly in China and Myanmar), with its hierarchical organisation extending from the national level all the way to the sub-village level, meant that all fields of activity were under government jurisdiction. Therefore, the project had not only to be cognisant, but also accepting, of these limitations. A great deal of time and resources in preliminary work were often required to establish the trust of both government authorities and the community. The researchers had to be flexible and cautious in their approach so as not to jeopardise their safety or that of the participants and surrounding communities.

**Suspicion and uneasiness on the part of community members was necessary and important to acknowledge and respect.** Choosing to work on cross-border migration as an issue and cross-border migrants as a target group gave rise to suspicion and uneasiness within the community. Initially, people tended to distance themselves from the researchers. Consequently, a great deal of care was taken in choosing and training the researchers to ensure their understanding of the project objectives and approaches to working with the community.

**Many research sites were areas of on-going political and/or ethnic conflict.** Research team members had to anticipate possible tensions and discrimination, and design flexible plans to adapt to unpredictable situations and/or responses from participants. This made research in some areas extremely sensitive and dangerous, requiring constant concern for neutrality. Unfortunately, it was difficult to maintain a balance along the borders amidst the diverse ethnic and religious groups and wide-range of social and economic status found. The research team could not possibly include all languages, religious beliefs, social and economic backgrounds equally, as a result some groups felt under-represented and at times even excluded which was not the intention of the team members.

## **2.4. Selection of Research Teams**

A Regional Project Co-ordinator employed by SEAPRO worked together with SCF(UK) country teams in China, Myanmar and Thailand to facilitate a regional approach. Each country team appointed a SCF(UK) senior staff as the national co-ordinator, one or two national researchers<sup>29</sup> and between six to eight field researchers. It is important to highlight that field researchers were identified from the communities along the border either migrants themselves or members of communities impacted by migration. The field researchers were literate in their own language and had at least verbal communication skills of the national language. All had finished at least the fourth grade and resided in the

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<sup>29</sup> In Myanmar, two national researchers were permanently employed as SCF(UK) programme staff. In China, two national researchers from The Yunnan Institute of Sociology worked in collaboration with SCF(UK) on this project. Thailand employed one national research from the migrant community who had previous experience in research and program implementation.

border communities. None of the field researchers had ever conducted research prior to this initiative and were actively involved in training that both developed their skills and drew on their experiences and knowledge throughout the project.

Full time translators were employed to work with each country team throughout the research process to facilitate data collection, documentation and oversee and provide translations. The translators participated fully in training and worked closely with the teams in developing and implementing the project and its documentation.

During Phase Two, several field sites appointed youth researchers who volunteered or worked for minimum support for PAR interventions. General terms of reference were outlined and adapted by each country. Although the positions and titles of team members appear rather hierarchical, the emphasis was on a team approach with all members involved in all stages of project preparation, implementation and analysis. In addition, also during Phase Two, the China employed a Field Research Co-ordinator to facilitate on site support, given the difficulty and distances of travel and communication between both field and national researchers based in Kunming.

Each country team designated one accountant responsible for the project budget and all financial requirements were reviewed in detail. An outline of the quarterly reporting timetable was presented to each team and responsibilities divided. The national co-ordinators prepared quarterly forecasts and reviewed with the accountants the quarterly expense reports before submitting them to the Regional Project Co-ordinator, who worked with the SEAPRO's regional accountant to prepare financial reports for SCF(UK) headquarters and Department for International Development (DFID). the major funder of this project SCF(UK) headquarters submitted the financial reports directly to DFID's UK office and SEAPRO submitted the narratives and copies of the financial report to DFID in Bangkok. The challenges of combining three countries (and four accounting systems) into one required a substantial amount of additional time to compile all the figures and reconcile ledgers.

Co-ordination between the research teams was facilitated by the Regional Project Co-ordinator during regional workshops, field visits and exchanges among the teams. Constant communication between the project teams and the Regional Project Co-ordinator provided a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of the various experiences and realities faced by migrants on all sides of the borders. Finally, the obstacles and opportunities encountered by each team were shared, offering creative exchanges and options for implementation of the project. In many instances, team members from each country were able to work together in support of the PAR activities and to develop an expertise of knowledge and insight into the situation on each side of the border migrants must continually negotiate.

## **2.5. Identification of Sites and Participants**

Preliminary visits were made by each country team to identify possible project sites impacted by migration and potential partners. Based on these preliminary visits, project

sites were selected. Not all sites were able to begin data collection at the same time, and at least one site in each country combined Phases One and Two as a result of delays or decisions to include additional sites. The specific sites in this study are not identified by name, given the vulnerability of the migrants and the sensitivities of the issues involved. A description of the general areas where this project was implemented is provided below.

Research sites and pilot interventions were located within communities of migrants' countries of origin, cross border towns, and countries of destination. In the countries of origin, SC(UK) worked in Xishuangbanna Prefecture of China and the Northern Shan, Kayin and Mon States of Myanmar. SC(UK) also established a presence in numerous border towns on all sides of the China, Myanmar and Thai borders. The countries of destination were primarily Thailand and China. In Thailand, the work focused on migrant children and youth living along the Thai border provinces of Chiangrai, Chaingmai, Mae Hong Son and Tak.

The children and youth included in this study either migrated themselves or were impacted by the migration that surrounds them.<sup>30</sup> No specific ages were used to define the children and youth participating in the project. Most youth groups formed in China, Myanmar and Thailand (in fact all of Southeast Asia) are inclusive of young people well above the age of eighteen. In this study youth were typically 24 years old or less. An age limit was never strictly enforced, though the aim of this study was to focus on the most vulnerable and encourage children, youth and community members to define for themselves their roles and participation. Young married couples were also included as youth in this project.

The project relied on key informants from the migrants' community, including other migrants, as well as community leaders, health providers, government officials, educators and others who are in contact with or influence migrants' lives. A variety of partners were also involved in collaborating or co-ordinating various aspects of the project. Finally, initial data collection and many PAR activities involved the broader communities as is the nature of village life and at times as necessary for the support and acceptance of the project.

## **2.6. Establishing Guidelines**

Research guidelines were established through team exercises that reviewed: 1) definitions and understandings of terms being used; 2) secondary data and contacts; and 3) the current situation as perceived at the local, national and regional levels. A brainstorming list was developed regarding existing literature and information on migrant children and youth; types of information lacking; and the gaps of knowledge that remain.

An outline of the issues that would be addressed in this project was developed based on the brainstorming list, the proposal and preliminary site visits. The three country teams

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<sup>30</sup> It was assumed at the outset of this project that most of the participants from Myanmar would be Shan, given their predominant presence along the border area. However, the study found that the Shan were only one among numerous ethnic populations and not necessarily the most vulnerable.

came up with similar issues to be explored and populations to be approached. However, the strategies for how they would approach the various populations, when and with what types of questions varied between countries. Each country team developed research guidelines<sup>31</sup> according to the various research tools to be used and types of participants at each site (key informants, community members, youth and children).

Research topics included in all the research guidelines were background on culture and community, migration, trafficking, health (including sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS), violence, drug and alcohol abuse, children specific issues (such as education, child-soldiers and child labour), future aspirations and existing responses and knowledge gaps.<sup>32</sup> The guidelines were translated into the various languages and then field-tested. Necessary revisions were made to adapt the topics to the language, culture and sensitivities of each field site. The national researchers provided follow-up support to the field researchers and the entire research team met each month to share their work, raise questions and receive feedback and additional training as necessary.

A proposed guideline for implementation of PAR was presented at the Phase One Regional Workshop. This guideline was based on proposals and review components that helped define and direct the purpose, process and outcomes of the activities. It included a description of the activities, participants, aims and outcomes, obstacles encountered and how they were addressed, recommendations and future plans. The PAR guideline was translated and adapted throughout Phase Two by each country and field team as necessary.

The PAR Guideline was used to support the planning, implementation, documentation and evaluation of the project activities. A separate report has been published from this study presenting those activities in detail. This report incorporates the general experiences and lessons learned in conducting PAR at each of the research sites, together with methods of data analysis.

## **2.7. Data Collection Tools**

As noted above, the data collection process was undertaken in two phases. The first phase emphasised gathering information and understanding the issues that impact migrants and their communities. Phase two, using a participatory action approach, worked with groups of children and youth in implementing activities together and documenting the process and outcomes as part of the research. The two phases were not exclusive and data collection strategies introduced in Phase One continued throughout Phase Two. The data collection approach included an orientation to research, training in the use of qualitative research tools, development of research guidelines, and the co-ordination of documentation and translations, all of which are discussed in further detail below.

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<sup>31</sup> The guideline questions were readapted to each field site so as to be linguistically understood and culturally acceptable.

<sup>32</sup> The research guidelines for each country team are available upon request, but are not appended to this report due to their length and repetition.

The research teams evaluated qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to determine their applicability for this project. The research teams agreed that qualitative research tools would give the researchers the descriptive insight needed to reach the project's objectives. They chose to use the following research tools to collect data for this study: observations, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participatory rapid assessment and participatory action research (PAR). Basic demographic data was taken for all the respondents (such as the date and place of the interview, the characteristics of the respondent(s) and the research tools used)., No identifying details of the respondents (such as name, address or work place) were noted down. Rather, codes were used to refer to the participants and data collection sites to avoid the tracing of any documentation.

### *Observations*

Direct and participatory observations were emphasised at the beginning of the research to gather insight into the physical and social environments of children and youth in the project sites. General observation guidelines were developed to guide the researchers and were adapted as the research unfolded. The guidelines included numerous observation points under such headings as: description of the physical and emotional environment, visual assessment of the health situation, children and young people's daily activities and interactions, and migration specific factors. Ongoing observations were conducted throughout the study to document what was not verbalised, an important tool in working with children and young people.

### *In-Depth Interviews (IDI)*

After building rapport with the community, each team conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDI) with children and youth, community members and key-informants. Guidelines were established for each sub-group and categories were kept consistent between each of the country teams (despite having developed them separately). However, the specific breakdown of questions within each category was addressed slightly different by each team and for each sub-group, as the team felt was culturally appropriate. The main categories of the IDI guidelines were background history, migration experiences, health problems, concerns and care-seeking behaviour, reproductive health and sexuality, HIV/AIDS, drug and alcohol use, child related-issues, encounters of violence and future aspirations. Interviewees were asked permission to record the interviews with pen and paper since the teams found that tape-recorders were not acceptable to any of the participants. Interviews often took place during two or more visits due to the limited time of many participants and the complex issues addressed.

### *Focus Group Discussions (FGD)*

Focus group discussions (FGD) offered an opportunity to explore the interactions and range of perspectives among participants. FGD guidelines included many of the same issues as the in-depth interviews, but focused discussion on norms and values versus individual or personal experiences. FGDs were difficult to schedule given the unpredictability of the participants' days, work demands, and so forth. Most FGDs were

conducted in natural settings without prior arrangement, though some were organised via contacts made during the in-depth interviews. For example, FGDs were held among women participating in the Lent services at temple, with sex workers and pimps at teashops near brothels, with migrants while travelling or preparing to travel. FGD were typically held with one researcher leading the group discussion and another researcher recording the exchanges. In some instances, when a number of “outsiders” joined the FGD<sup>33</sup>, the researchers divided the groups and conducted separate FGDs or interviews with them. The FGDs ranged in size from three persons to twenty. Six to eight participants are usually an ideal number for FGDs.

#### *Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA)*<sup>34</sup>

Participatory rapid appraisal (PRA) offers a wide range of methods to enable people to express and share information, and to stimulate discussions and analysis. Most of these methods are visually based and gave children and youth fun and easy ways to explore how they understand and view their lives and environment. Some of the PRA methods used in this project included mapping, diagrams, ranking and scoring (often using matrixes or grids), time lines, drawings, games, role playing and a wide-range of other activities that are often adapted and created according to the situation, resources, and skills and interests of the participants. In addition, PRA offered the opportunity to introduce more active and participatory approaches to research.

#### *Participatory Action Research (PAR)*<sup>35</sup>

Participatory action research (PAR) is an evolving research process that has taken on a wide spectrum of interpretation and application. In realising the limitations of this study, the vulnerability of the client or target (whichever word you prefer) population, and the sensitivity of the issues being addressed, a rather conservative approach to PAR was taken. The definition of PAR used for this study was “people in the organisation or community under study will participate actively with the researchers throughout the research process from the initial design to the final presentation of the results and discussion of their action implications.”<sup>36</sup> The underlying value of PAR, calls for people to take action themselves to improve their social and economic status and ensure their right to produce their own knowledge to guide such action.<sup>37</sup> This definition and underlying value of PAR guided the project.

Based on the information gathered during Phase One of this study, PAR activities were developed in each of the project sites. The activities were discussed, planned,

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<sup>33</sup> It is traditional custom (in all three countries) for all of the villagers to gather for any kind of meeting and often exclusive forums are not acceptable and raise suspicion.

<sup>34</sup> PRA (Participatory Rapid Assessment) is not the same as PAR (Participatory Action Research). PRA is a tool for collecting information that is used in the PAR process.

<sup>35</sup> Given the research focus of this study, the term Participatory Action Research (PAR) was selected instead of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), another more expansive participatory approach.

<sup>36</sup> Whyte, W.F. (1991). *Participatory Action Research*. London: Sage Publications.

<sup>37</sup> Rahman, A. (1989). *Grassroots Participation and Self-reliance – Experiences from South and Southeast Asia*. Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishers.

implemented, documented and evaluated by the field researchers and the children and youth participants involved. A wide-range of activities were implemented and documented in an effort to explore what the children and youth perceived as their needs, how they wanted to respond to them and to document the lessons they learned in the process. It was emphasised that there were no “failures” in this study. The motto “failing forward” was used to encourage the learning process and objectives of this project in understanding the concerns, realities and needs from the children and youth impacted by migration and explore with them possible interventions.

### *Participatory Review*

A participatory review of the entire research project was conducted with as many project participants and partners as possible, emphasising input from the children and youth directly involved in the project activities. The research team used creative ways to gather input for the review that included critical thinking and problem solving exercises, group discussions and participatory rapid appraisal activities.

The objectives of the participatory review were to:

- Receive feedback from project participants and researchers and to assess their understanding of the project’s objectives and research methodology, as well as to solicit their input into what aspects of the project were most beneficial and what could have been done differently to improve this type of research.
- Identify the lessons learned and assess the project’s approach and interventions, and recommend areas for improving and implementing similar projects in other countries and regions in the future.
- Evaluate the project activities and develop strategies for future interventions with young migrants and their communities by SCF and/or other organisations.

The participatory review documented and analysed all of the data collected in this study. In addition, the review was used as a process for exploring ongoing SCF country programs in the project sites.

## **2.8. Documentation**

The validity of qualitative data lies in the ability of the researchers to clearly identify sources of information and distinguish the meaning of this data separate from their own perspectives and interpretations.

Methods for documenting the various qualitative research tools were demonstrated and an outline of issues for organising and translating the data were presented to each team for their review. Researchers’ input was considered invaluable and referenced accordingly. The principal documentation tools used in this project were notebooks for recording the contents of all interviews and observations. Researchers were encouraged to divide the pages of the notebooks with a narrow right hand column for their comments

and insights. Several types of qualitative data and reports were presented and discussed to exemplify the need for accurate documentation. Basic demographic information was collected for all participants in order to provide a basic profile of the data sources. Finally, each country team developed strategies for organising their notes and translations.

Throughout the data collection process, field researchers were required to use three separate notebooks: one for compiling the qualitative data collected, a second to specifically document PAR activities, and a third for documentation of daily tasks undertaken by each team member throughout the project.

Due to the sensitive nature of many of the interview questions and the illegal status of the migrants, many participants requested that the researchers not take any notes. As mentioned earlier, all the participants requested that tape recorders not be used. Therefore, the research team recorded all their findings in the national language, every afternoon following daily interviews and observations. At those field sites with more than one field researcher, daily team meetings were held among the research team to discuss their findings, and plan the next day's activities.

## **2.9. Translations**

A proposed guide for translations was prepared and substantially revised by each country team to address the many languages and obstacles encountered. Translation of data posed a number of critical issues due to the many ethnic languages involved.<sup>38</sup> It was not feasible to translate ethnic languages directly into English for several reasons. First, there were only a few people available who could translate from the minority languages into written English. Secondly, if field data was directly translated into English the other team members (including both field researchers and national researchers) would not have been able to read or give input into the data, analysis or report writing process. The possibility of translating the data from ethnic languages into the national script and then to English was discussed, but was found to be unrealistic considering the time and expenses such a process would involve. Therefore, all country teams agreed to translate all the data into the national language with samples of the data translated into English for the Regional Project Co-ordinator and other country teams for their input. The country reports were translated into English upon completion<sup>39</sup> and compiled into a regional project report. Finally, the regional report was translated back into the national languages, and a summary was prepared in the various local languages.

## **2.10. Country and Regional Workshops**

Orientation, training and development of data collection strategies were undertaken at the regional, national and field levels. The Regional Project Co-ordinator met with each national team in their country twice during each phase of the project and collectively as a

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<sup>38</sup> These barriers are discussed later in the report in the section on obstacles and limitations.

<sup>39</sup> With the exception of the Myanmar report, which was written in English following an analysis of all the data in Burmese.



regional team at the end of Phases One and Two. Based on these workshops, field trainings were implemented and adapted to the local context and languages, as necessary. An outline of the various workshops is provided below in order to give more insight into the ongoing assessment and evaluation of the research process that was sustained throughout the course of this study.

### *Phase One Country Workshops*

Workshops in each of the three countries were held at the beginning and towards the end of Phase One.

The first workshops were held with the Regional Project Co-ordinator and members of each country team during the first months of the project. In each country, a similar five-day workshop was held that was adapted to the specific research experience, stage of implementation, and various concerns and limitations of each site. The objectives of these workshops were to: 1) orientate the teams to the project, 2) develop data collection strategies and skills and 3) review mechanisms for financial and narrative reporting.<sup>40</sup>

The “Phase One Workshop Agenda” was revised and translated as necessary for use in the training of new team researchers as they were identified. Country workshops towards the end of the phase focused on how to organise, analyse and present the data collected.

### *Phase One Regional Workshop*

- A Regional Workshop was held September 27 – October 1, 1999 in Chiangmai, Thailand. An outline of the objectives and expectations of the workshop were presented at the beginning of the workshop and participants were asked to provide any additional suggestions and agenda items not already noted. The following is a summary of the workshop objectives and expectations that were agreed upon by all the workshop participants: exchange information, experiences and resources on the research process and issues related to migrant children and youth gathered during Phase One.
- Discuss the language barriers between countries and ethnic groups living along the border areas of the three countries.
- Develop an understanding of PAR principles and explore how to apply them creatively in this project.
- Evaluate levels of participation and methods for enhancing communication with children and youth.
- Review the ethical considerations necessary for conducting work with vulnerable populations and in politically sensitive areas.
- Present documentation methods for Phase Two.
- Prepare a plan of action for each country team and for those doing cross-border research.
- Develop an overall project plan for Phase Two.
- Build collaboration across borders between teams and other stakeholders.

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<sup>40</sup> See Appendix Two: Phase One Workshop Agenda.

Translation was one of the biggest challenges of this regional meeting as participants' primary working language was either Chinese, English or Thai. As a result, it was necessary for discussions and small group brainstorming sessions to be translated into all three languages and to prepare trilingual written materials.. After a speaker gave their full presentation, translation was provided in the other two languages. In addition, translators were asked to be available to participants during breaks and in the evenings to facilitate informal exchanges between the participants. Fortunately, the person recording the workshop's proceedings was extremely well informed about the issues being discussed and all three national contexts in which this project was being implemented. This facilitated the translation, documentation and follow-up necessary for the final workshop report.<sup>41</sup>

Field visits in Thailand were conducted on several occasions and offered all the teams insight into the realities of migrant communities and some of the work of the Thai team. These opportunities allowed participants to discuss with migrants their situation and concerns, and provided a further understanding of the lives of migrants across the border (in the country of destination).

Each country team submitted a draft report on Phase One activities to the Regional Project Co-ordinator at the Regional Workshop. Team meetings were then held and the Regional Project Co-ordinator reviewed the reports for clarification and to provide feedback.

### *Phase Two Country Workshops*

Country workshops were held twice during Phase Two. The first workshops took place in the months following the Phase One Regional Workshop. The Regional Project Co-ordinator visited each of the country teams to update them on the current status of the project, review the schedule and work plan, discuss PAR approaches, relevant materials, guidelines, documentation, translation and preparation for financial reporting. In addition, new researchers were orientated to the research project. The second country workshops took place five months later and focused on developing a participatory review of the project's progress to date. The review gathered input from all those directly and indirectly involved in the project, with emphasis on feedback from the children and youth involved in the PAR activities. A suggested participatory review outline was presented for discussion and adaptation by each team. In addition, this workshop also involved presentation and discussion on PAR activities, methods of documentation, strategies for analysis and translation and report writing.

### *Phase Two Regional Workshop*

The Phase Two Regional Workshop took place in Mae Sai with the entire research team including all, but five of the field researchers.<sup>42</sup> In addition, one staff member and one NGO partner of SCF(UK) Laos attended in preparation for conducting similar work

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<sup>41</sup> The final workshop report was distributed to all teams as a reference for Phase Two and as a background introduction for new team members.

<sup>42</sup> Five researchers were unable to attend due to difficulties in obtaining documentation to travel.

among migrants along Laos' borders with China and Thailand. The greatest challenge in preparing this meeting was the arrangement of travel documents for all of the participants. SCF(UK) staff had to go to great extents to prepare requests and obtain travel documents, in addition to arranging the actual travel from many of the remote field sites. The objectives for this workshop were:

- Meet the members of the research teams in each country
- Present country reports of PAR activities and experiences
- Present the participatory review findings from each country
- Provide input into ongoing SCF(UK) programs
- Prepare a work plan for Phases Three and Four of the project
- Hold informal team- to- team meetings

This regional meeting required translation into four languages: Thai, Chinese, Burmese and English. In addition, smaller groups were formed to assist in translation into other languages for clarification. Employing the same translators throughout this project was critical in effectively following the presentations, discussions and analysis. The workshop was recorded, with a summary of the presentations annexed to this report as well as the PAR activities conducted at the various field sites.

#### *Phase Three Country Workshops*

A workshop was held in each of the three project countries where each research team submitted two reports; one documenting the data collection process and findings, and one specifically focused on the PAR activities implemented during Phase Two of the project. These individual country reports were then compiled into one regional report that was presented to each team for feedback and for editing and revision purposes. Each country workshop developed a dissemination strategy for the translation, distribution and advocacy strategies of the project findings.

### **2.11. Analysis, Method of Reporting Findings and Dissemination Strategy**

An effort was made to include the field researchers and youth volunteers in the analysis process. A workshop was held to review and revise the findings and recommendations. The final reports were translated back into local languages in publications and media that are most suitable to each community. In addition, the final reports have been used for advocacy efforts to address the critical issues faced by migrant children and youth along these borders and to provide insight, through the experiences encountered, to others in reaching out to migrant children and youth elsewhere.

#### *Analysis*

Given the long period of data collection required for this study, the analysis and reporting of findings was done at the completion of both Phases One and Two. The first country workshops presented an overview of qualitative analysis and an outline of the Phase One

Country Reports that were expected. The analysis process was done by hand<sup>43</sup> and provided researchers with insight into organising, analysing and reporting qualitative data. This knowledge gave all team members an understanding of the research process and instilled respect for detailed documentation. It also provided a mid-project feedback to the research and a means for dealing with the data before it became too cumbersome. Research teams were also able to identify gaps in the data to be addressed during the second phase of the project.

Data analysis was done using a computer program for qualitative research called Ethnograph 5. This program was obtained for each country team and training in this software was provided. Problems emerged with its application in the Burmese and Thai scripts.<sup>44</sup> After communication with the programme designer it became apparent that Ethnograph 4 was the only version compatible with non-roman scripts. A patch was provided to convert the Thai script programme to allow it to run properly. However, no such patch was available for the Burmese script. The Myanmar team, therefore, decided to translate their data into English before running the data analysis programme since it would save time in translating the many local languages spoken in the various field sites.

The Ethnograph programme requires all data to be coded and a list of categories identified based on the objectives of the study, interview guidelines and issues identified during data collection. Each interview and observation was documented by the researcher, translated into the national language and typed into a word processing program. The data was then divided into the identified categories and entered into Ethnograph noting the source of the information. This approach to organising the data provided a means for analysing each topic, returning to a particular source for more information and also preventing overlap between various categories of information.<sup>45</sup>

### *Method of Reporting the Findings*

Each country team presented their Phase One report at the Regional Workshop. These reports were distributed between country teams, but kept confidential given the sensitive nature of the data and the process that need to be agreed upon by each team determining how to disseminate the information. The country reports were then compiled into a regional report and distributed to all teams for internal review and comments.<sup>46</sup>

The Phase Two reports were also analysed and prepared first as country reports and then compiled together with Phase One reports into regional reports. Two regional reports were written and published during Phases Three and Four. The first report presents the

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<sup>43</sup> The data analysis process during Phase One was done entirely by hand. Although Ethnograph had been introduced, initial problems with foreign languages and computer competency made its use at this stage unfeasible.

<sup>44</sup> Chinese script was compatible with the Ethnograph 5 programme because the transliteration of Chinese characters is based on roman script.

<sup>45</sup> In the Ethnograph programme, the categories and data are entered and the breakdown and source are provided automatically.

<sup>46</sup> Phase One reports were for internal use only and not part of SC(UK)'s commitment to the donor or for external circulation.

findings of the data collected at all of the field sites. The second report focuses on the PAR activities and lessons learned. Both reports were written in English first, and then translations prepared according to the agreed upon dissemination strategy for each country.

### *Dissemination Strategy*

Following a review of the regional analysis undertaken during Phase Three, a dissemination strategy was planned together with all teams with sufficient time allotted to gather comments and input from migrant communities, children and youth involved in the project. Based on this, preliminary draft reports were reviewed and discussed.

The preliminary findings of this study were presented to regional partners and donors in a workshop forum. Both written and oral presentations were given with time for comments, questions and recommendations both in the workshop and during follow-up meetings afterwards. These exchanges also provided critical suggestions and support for the dissemination and advocacy initiatives.

The dissemination strategy agreed upon called for publishing two separate regional reports. This report focuses on the PAR approach and process; the other report highlights the findings of the study through a narrative analysis of the data, with recommendations developed by the project team and participants. Both of the regional reports were published in English and then back-translated into Thai, Bamar and Han Chinese. The findings were also translated into minority languages through a variety of mediums that local communities identified as more accessible to them, such as newsletters, cartoons, songs and theatre scripts, among others.

These two publications provide the contextual background for developing SC(UK)'s ongoing work with migrant children and youth along these borders and elsewhere in the Mekong Region.

### 2.12. Obstacles and Limitations

As in all research there are numerous limitations to the research that must be acknowledged and considered when interpreting the findings. The following presents the common obstacles encountered by all country teams and found to be critical to conducting this type of research and addressing sensitive issues among vulnerable populations, especially children and youth.

**Numerous languages and dialects along the borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand** presented a constant challenge in the implementation of this research. Although local field researchers could speak several minority languages between them, it was not possible to cover all the languages and dialects spoken in the various research sites. Therefore, some of the smaller ethnic populations were not included in the study.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> In some instances, translators were used in the interviews or discussions which slowed down the exchanges and limited the ease and flow of the exchange.

Communication problems emerged from the language differences within each country team as well as across borders. **Difficulties in communicating technical terms or international ideas and methodologies** were experienced by all the researchers. Often many of the national and ethnic languages did not have clear terms for many of the issues and approaches presented in English. There were many instances of mistranslation and misunderstanding that required time and patience to resolve. Due to these language and communication problems team trainings were frequently followed-up with on site visits, activities and visual aids. This naturally slowed the project's progress.

**The need to undertake several translations hindered the research documentation process.** Each country team included numerous minority languages that were then translated to the national language of the country and then into English. It is inevitable that the accuracy of the data suffered with each translation regardless of how carefully the translations were undertaken. Working in several languages required constant attention to translations as well as the monitoring of how they were interpreted.

**Many of the field researchers employed among the migrant communities had limited literacy skills in the national language of the country they were working.** This clearly limited their understanding of and input into the research process.

**Ethnic and cultural differences were ever present with attention and time needed to accommodate and balance the various perspectives.** In addition, some sites faced religious prejudices that had to be acknowledged with attention paid to balancing the various beliefs. Regardless, there was often suspicion and feelings of discrimination that impacted on participation and understandings necessary to conduct this research.

**Co-ordination within the team was difficult due to the distances of the field sites and lack of communication channels, with little or no assurance of confidentiality.** The monthly meeting and site visits were the primary form of communication often causing delays and difficulties in addressing problems as they arose.

**The migrants were extremely mobile** and often relocated depending on their sense of personal security and job opportunities. Although, once in a given job or location migrants typically did not move around, but were often hidden and isolated from the larger community.

**Young people were the hardest to reach** as most of them had migrated beyond the border further into the country of destination. They often resided at their place of work, were closely watched by their employer and feared venturing out. There was an absence of youth reported in the border communities in all three countries making it difficult to implement PAR activities.

**Statistical information regarding migrant populations was limited** (especially cross-border migration) and though the needs were great and visible along the entire border region, quantifying the problems remained a barrier to analysis.

**The people in the community had little or no free time** for interviews or activities as they typically worked from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m. with no days off unless granted special permission from their employer. The only time researchers could meet with community members was from 9 p.m. to 11 p.m. Even in communities of self-employed farmers, most of the youth and adults were very busy, often working in fields far from their residence or engaged in trade that required them to travel for extended periods of time.

**Children and youth had many household responsibilities in addition to their work to earn an income.** Often activities that took children and youth away from their tasks resulted in a loss of income and hardships for the family. Thus, it was difficult (and at times impossible) to negotiate the participation of children and youth in this project.

**Girls and young women typically had more family responsibilities,** especially those that were married, making it increasingly more difficult to involve them in the project. In addition, girls and young women faced more restrictions, such as participating in events in the evening or outside the village.

**The country teams found it difficult to make the transition from data collection in Phase One to implementing PAR activities in Phase Two of the project.** It generally took each team about three months to prepare their approach, create the opportunities for participation and develop interventions at the project sites.

**Limited partners** in the field sites. In addition, time was needed to assess potential partners, their relationship with the community and other allegiances. It was difficult to develop trust and collaboration at the field level and this often took months and more than one year at some sites.

**There were also many delays that were both seasonal and unpredictable.** There were holidays (Shan New Year in January, Chinese New Year in February and Water Sprinkling Festival in April celebrated in all three countries), crackdowns and deportations of undocumented migrants, civil unrest and floods that temporarily interrupted the project.

**Overall, members of the research team, most of whom were migrants themselves, had limited qualitative research experience.** There was a need to closely follow the documentation and translation processes, giving frequent feedback and follow-up training. The teams also had limited exposure to and experience in qualitative data analysis and report writing. The effort to involve the research team in the data analysis and report writing process allowed for more input and improved the entire research process. However, this required more time and a learning curve that inevitably had some shortcomings and delays in its implementation.

**This research was undertaken during 1999 - 2000 and can only provide a snapshot of the realities at this point in time.** It is necessary to understand that ever- fluctuating

situations based on political and economic dynamics within and between each country will continue to have a direct impact on these border communities.

### **3. PAR Interventions and Findings**

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) process provided opportunities for children and youth to identify their concerns, vulnerabilities, needs and interests. Based on these findings, participants were encouraged to plan interventions, take responsibility for implementation and document the process as a means of learning and educating others about their lives and concerns. Given that few (if any) interventions have been undertaken with migrant children and youth along these borders, this approach provided a great deal of insight and interest among community members, partners and advocates in the national and regional arenas.

The pilot interventions undertaken included a wide-range of activities and a variety of implementation strategies. Each activity had far-reaching benefits not only to the children and youth directly involved, but also to others in their community. The wheel below created by the Myanmar research team illustrates the diverse ways in which this project has reached children, youth and their community (the inner-spokes) and addressed the larger concerns for programme development (the outer frame). It is important to note that the inner-wheel rotates to enhance the various programme goals.

The PAR activities undertaken in this project are presented in the following categories: strengthening social structures, awareness raising, capacity building, life skills development, outreach services and networking. Although the activities have been divided, the fact is that each activity had numerous aims and often extended far beyond those intended. Although similar interventions were undertaken in different sites, the specifics of their implementation differed.<sup>48</sup> The various types of activities are provided below in a summary of examples, highlighting how different communities, children and youth groups along the borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand identified, planned and addressed their concerns.

#### **3.1. Strengthening Social Structures**

Extensive migration and broader socio-economic dynamics have undermined family and societal structures in many communities. When feasible this project empowered existing traditional youth groups, peer educators or supported those interested in their efforts to mobilise children and young people to take responsibility for their community's needs.

- The youth in Mon State identified the most immediate need in their village as repairing an old bridge. Without this bridge, most children could not go to school and the community was isolated from others, markets and services, especially during the

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<sup>48</sup> Though each activity has been well documented, they are not presented here in their entirety. This was decided based on the realisation that no activity can be duplicated in detail, but only considered more generally and adapted by each group to their particular concerns, realities and aspirations. In addition, a full account of each activity would have resulted in an extremely lengthy report.



rainy season. The youth in the village organised the work plans, necessary materials and oversaw the repairing of the bridge.

- PAR activities along all borders focused on creating alternatives to alcohol, drugs and longing to go to the city among children and youth. The pilot interventions involved clearing and preparing sports fields, establishing football and volleyball teams, forming music groups with lessons and performances, art activities and exploring opportunities for selling their products such as greeting cards, baskets, knitted and sewn items and woven cloth.
- Young persons in a Kayin village organised a cultural dance competition as a means of coming together themselves and strengthening their cultural traditions. The majority of participants were returnees from Thailand who felt strongly that their traditions were being lost. The returnees identified traditions as an important part of their lives that they had missed during their migration.
- In another village, youth built sanitary latrines and dug an additional well for the school, health centre and poorest families in the village headed by women. The construction was planned and implemented by the youth in the village.
- Efforts at many of the sites included supporting partners of ethnic culture and literacy groups through preparation for traditional and cultural events and literacy training and language classes. Out of these efforts came many initiatives, for example a traditional Shan weaving training programme.
- In Xishuangbanna, the PAR project was implemented in partnership with the Women and Children's Centre, the Prefecture Women's Federation and Judicial Bureau. This approach encouraged the Women and Children's Centre in Xishuangbanna to expand both their coverage to ethnic minority populations in remote areas and also their scope of work to include critical issues related to migration. The collaboration of the Women and Children's Centre allowed for a sustainable programme that continues to be supported by SC(UK) but no longer relies on SC(UK)'s direct involvement for its implementation.
- Evenings of entertainment were organised by youth in Xishuangbanna to bring together young persons in the village. Traditional performances were held and games based on Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) techniques that raised critical issues for information exchange and discussion. Though the evenings often involved many people in the village, they were organised by and focused on children and youth. Time was allotted at the end to give feedback to the evening and plan future initiatives among the young persons in the village.
- Children and young persons at all the sites were eager to come together to plan traditional holidays with games and activities for their communities. These included for example, Shan New Year, Karen Youth Days, Kachin New Year, the Water Festival and even the Thai King's Birthday. Children and youth were active in displaying bulletin boards, preparing newsletters and distributing pamphlets, cartons, T-shirts, hats, calendars, condoms, key chains and other items addressing critical issues faced by the community. Other youth groups made up songs and skits to present the issues. Some of the items were sold or admission was charged to raise money for future youth group activities.
- PRA activities that involved drawing, painting and other art projects were undertaken with migrant children from Myanmar living along the Thai border. Through this

medium issues such as drugs, education, family, health and safety were addressed. The activities were generally held on the weekends, though one community used a classroom in co-operation with the teachers.

### **3.2. Awareness Raising**

Awareness raising activities were implemented at almost every site where PAR was conducted. The PAR activities included workshops, developing information, education and communication (IEC) materials (such as posters, flyers, newsletters, cartoons, etc.) into local languages, theatre and musical messages, holding exhibitions and campaigns during festivals or at other community gatherings. These activities sought to inform children, youth and their communities on issues related to general health, reproductive and sexual health, HIV/AIDS, trafficking, drugs, environmental concerns and their basic rights. Examples of awareness raising activities developed under this project include:

- A Dai<sup>49</sup> youth theatre group who performed a well-known traditional folk singing show called “Zhangha.” The theatre group prepared and presented a variety of plays on critical issues relating to migration such as the importance of schooling, gambling, family problems, disadvantages of early-marriage, family planning, AIDS prevention, alcohol and drug abuse, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and national laws. The Dai theatre group has performed in over 22 villages since December of 1999 and has received support from the Prefecture’s Committee on Education. Following each performance an evaluative questionnaire was distributed. Of over 700 questionnaires distributed, 300 were returned giving feedback to the value of the performances and suggested topics for future events.
- PAR activities also involved raising awareness of the nuances and exploitation involved in trafficking. The ways of methods of working with migrant children and youth on issues directly and indirectly associated with trafficking varied from site to site. In some areas, researchers worked at the local level with children, youth groups, and community-based organisations, in other areas they worked with local leaders and officials. This allowed for the flexibility and low-profile approach necessary in cross-border contexts. Exhibitions and campaign activities during festivals, adaptation of IEC materials into local language workshops and other activities were undertaken relating to reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and trafficking. The workshops were used as an entry into the village without raising suspicion and close monitoring.
- In border towns of Dehong Prefecture in China, activities focused on sex workers, predominantly from Central Myanmar. Reproductive health workshops with sex workers and their networks of pimps and brothel owners included extensive information about HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Through these workshops sex workers gained knowledge, a wider community and increased self-confidence while project staff won their trust. As the sex workers became more comfortable with the weekly workshops, they began to articulate their needs and concerns. The workshops have since evolved to reflect this with a wider range of sex workers’ interests included as well as opportunities to come together to rest and relax.

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<sup>49</sup> The Dai minority group in China is ethnically related to the Shan population along the Thai-Myanmar border.

Providing these workshops on an ongoing basis was often not possible due to crackdowns and suspicions among brothel owners and authorities. Therefore, a major part of the project was finding ways to communicate with and educate other stakeholders in the value of the workshops and the participation of sex workers.

- Collaboration with teams across borders provided a wide-range of opportunities and understandings that are critical in working with migrant children, young persons and their communities. Some are very practical realities such as dealing with language and cultural barriers, being able to relate to migrants' many concerns and fears that are not delineated by physical borders and providing information that spans across borders to the broader community of the migrant. The cross-border approach also addressed many undercurrents of mistrust, suspicion and fears that are so influential in many decisions made by children and young persons.
- Information, education and communication (IEC) materials on a wide-range of issues and numerous languages were published such as cartoon leaflets, magazines, and newsletters to raise awareness on women rights, abuse, trafficking and HIV/AIDS transmission from mother to children. These resources were made available in many of the minority languages of those migrants with high illiteracy rates, particularly children, young persons and women. In addition, these materials were exchanged across borders and trainings in the use of the resources were given to field workers and youth speaking the same language. These exchanges helped to slowly establish links and networks to address many of the more complex and sensitive issues.
- Trafficked survivors in several communities participated as resource persons in training venues so that they were able to raise awareness of trafficking to children-at-risk. At the same time, returnees were supported in their reintegration by seeking out their involvement in the planning, implementation and review of the PAR activities.

### **3.3. Capacity Building**

The PAR project was able to support and encourage active youth participation in community life and help youth creatively consider options for their futures. Bringing researchers, youth and community members together to plan and implement events, activities and projects created a focus, and allowed migrant children and youth to develop skills and confidence. Many migrant children and young people were also able to learn skills through planning, implementation and documentation of various activities. Although, not all the activities were successful, youth were excited by the opportunity to come together and explore options to address their concerns. The exchanges between children and young persons allowed them time to share experiences, explore options and seek more information and skills in making their life choices, and to build leadership capacity.

- Numerous workshops were held among children and youth living along the China-Myanmar border in Xishuangbanna Prefecture that included participatory activities and exchanges between diverse ethnic populations. These workshops focused on a variety of issues related to health, border laws, farming and technical skills training. Interactions between youth at different sites and of different ethnic populations included dances, discussions and comparisons of cultures and lives through role-

playing, drawing, sports, and art performance activities. Exchanges between youth from different villages and with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds provided rare opportunities for the youth to share their personal experiences and information relating to cross-border migration. Through these activities village youth became organised and their needs and concerns more visible and better understood.

- Youth in Xishuangbanna organised to collect firewood and sell it in the market to raise their own funds. The funds earned were used to fund future activities. The project was very exhausting and time consuming which was a problem, as most of the youth could not afford to take this amount of time away from their other agriculture and household tasks. However, they were able to raise the money to see this activity through to its completion, and used the funds to hold a youth entertainment evening for other children and youth in surrounding villages.
- Literacy classes in Han Chinese language were held for youth along the China-Myanmar border in Xishuangbanna Prefecture. The classes made an effort to include those in the village who had returned from Thailand. Preparation for these classes involved the youth in constructing a community centre for the literacy classes and other events. A government literacy test was given after four months of study which the majority of the class passed. By taking on responsibilities, improving their language skills and learning to be more articulate, village elders came to recognise the youths' abilities and invited them to take on greater leadership roles in the community committees.
- In 1999, SC(UK) Myanmar developed an adolescent reproductive health curriculum. The core participants of the Training of Teachers (TOT) Workshop held their own workshops among midwives and peers in their respective townships and villages. During the first year, the peer education programme held over 150 workshops involving 3,600 youth, 574 midwives and 640 peer educators.<sup>50</sup> The workshops have been conducted in collaboration with community-based organisations and other health associations and departments throughout the Shan, Mon and Karen States.
- A culture-based Adolescent Reproductive Health (ARH) peer education curriculum was developed and adapted into Shan, Mon and Kayin languages. Trainers distributed a pamphlet entitled, '100 questions and answers on HIV/AIDS' published originally in Myanmar by UNICEF and National AIDS Programme as background information for peer educators and health providers to complement the curriculum. These questions and answers were also translated into Kayin, Mon and Shan languages and distributed to local trainers in the three States. The PAR activities were able to support technology and match contributions to local youth groups for production of IEC materials on trafficking, HIV/AIDS, drugs and other critical issues in their own language. One direct outlet for wide dissemination of these promotional items was the HIV/AIDS awareness raising campaigns during the 1999 and 2000 Water Festivals and other traditional festivals that included youth as peer educators in the planning and implementation of the festivals. SC(UK) in collaboration with local literacy and culture associations and youth groups have already held eight cultural exhibitions in

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<sup>50</sup> Peer educators include a wide range of young persons: local youth, young migrant workers, commercial sex workers, truck drivers, young Catholic novices, young Buddhist monks, etc. The ethnic groups covered in this programme include Shan, Kachin, Palaung, Lisu, Kolon Lishaw, Chinese, Bamar, Kayin, Pa-O, Mon, and ethnic Indian.

- Shan, Kayin and Mon in minority and national languages.
- A trainer from Myanmar's Teacher's Training College conducted a two-week training course in participatory methods for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> standard students in Mon State.. Those trained were then sent to various villages for the summer to provide summer courses to children in border villages who were falling behind in math and English and unable to afford private tutors. In addition, a teacher training on 'Promoting Effective Learning' was provided in Northern Shan State by staff from the Teacher Training College. Many young persons and community members were included in the training to give them a deeper understanding of participatory methods.
  - There are many areas along the Thai-Myanmar border where youth have actively played a role in community dialogue and peer discussions. These exchanges, which took place in the village and work places, focused on health, youth concerns and needs for support. As a result of these initiatives, several village committees and larger community organisations invited youth to participate in discussing critical issues, and asked for their suggestions and support to address the community's problems and needs. The youth were very excited about these changes and felt an increased confidence, power, knowledge base and ability to respond to their realities.

### 3.4.Life Skills Development

A common complaint among many of the youth and children involved in education classes or initiatives was the lack of relevance of the textbooks and skills they learned. Many children and youth noted the need to learn practical life skills more applicable for their future. Consequently, many PAR activities focused on exploring what life skills would be most viable and how to implement them in relevant ways for children and youth in the context of lives so strongly impacted by migration.

- A culture-based curriculum for peer education on adolescent reproductive health entitled, *Fledglings: Teens in Myanmar*<sup>51</sup> was developed with adolescents and community members from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The principle of the curriculum is to use traditional themes and culture as the framework to build peer education on sexual and reproductive health issues among young people. The curriculum is flexible and based on participatory learning activities that examine their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours influenced by culture and society and to learn life skills towards safe and healthy practices.
- Youth in fifteen communities in Shan, Mon and Karen States in Myanmar established non-formal education (NFE) programmes that reached a total of 965 children (469 boys and 496 girls) between the ages of six and seventeen.. The classes focused on literacy and basic math skills. The NFE classes were held at times that were most convenient for children and allowed for flexible time schedules taking into consideration other demands and obstacles faced by participants. The NFE activities in these rural areas were conducted by volunteer teachers, including Buddhist monks who had received training on effective learning methodologies in basic math and language instructions. During the summer holiday, efforts were made to provide

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<sup>51</sup> NweNwe Aye, Aye Aye Tun. (2000). *Fledglings: Teens in Myanmar*. Yangon: Save the Children (UK). This publication is available in English, Bamar, Shan and Karen languages.

primary education training for monks and youth volunteers from monastic schools and village primary schools, as well as early childhood development training for youth volunteers of ethnic minority groups. Many of the youth that volunteered to teach or assist in the non-formal education classes received the opportunity to participate in other skills training programs.

- Some interventions were designed to develop technical life skills that could offer alternatives to migration and the risk of being trafficked. Examples include various forms of non-formal education activities, literacy and language classes, capacity building, training on social development work, and child rights and youth mobilisation activities to children and young persons at risk. A culture-based life skills curriculum was recently developed in Myanmar and adapted into Kayin, Mon and Shan languages. Through extensive partnership with community-based organisations such as local literary and culture associations, many of these initiatives have been replicated and incorporated into village life far beyond the reach of SC(UK) presence. Ethnic literacy movements, which take place every year to teach Shan, Kayin, Mon literacy, emerged as an effective means for a low cost, high coverage strategy since youth voluntary teachers took part as peer educators in capacity building workshops.
- A planning workshop was held for migrant youth interested in planning projects to address the needs of their communities. The focus was on learning about various government offices, non-government organisations and donor agencies and training youth on project planning, proposal writing, financial recording, documentation of programmes and preparation of project reports. The two-day training was conducted in collaboration with other non-governmental organisations.
- Communities in Myanmar, Thailand and China introduced non-formal education, literacy and skills training opportunities to children and young persons in many remote areas. Basic primary education opportunities were provided to young children in the day, and language and math classes to youth in the evenings. Classes were held at locations and times that were sensitive to young people's situation and other demands. Activities were conducted in collaboration with village leaders, other educated villagers, community, literacy and cultural groups. and other partners in the local government schools and temples. SC(UK) was able to reach large numbers of migrant children and young persons as well as other members of their families and communities through these educational initiatives.
- Migrant youth from Shan State organised a mobile education programme to reach out to those living in isolated work sites. The mobile education programme reached young children during the day and young people and adults after working hours. The classes included basic literacy, various language studies and math. Activities, as those described above, were conducted in collaboration with village leaders and community, literacy and cultural groups and other partners in the local government schools and temples. Together the youth and these partners were able to reach large numbers of migrant children and young persons.
- Several pilot interventions focusing on vocational training and other life skills were initiated among youth along the borders of the three countries in this project. These included vocational training in agriculture such as raising pigs, fish, chickens and growing vegetables and mushrooms, as well as training in blacksmith, sewing, mosaic

gem painting and weaving skills. The youths' aims were to develop other skills that would be marketable and provide them with an alternative to migration. There remains a problem in many sites for marketing their products. Many of the agriculture initiatives lost money, as it was very difficult for small-scale farmers to enter into the business largely controlled by large-scale producers. Only vegetables grown for local consumption such as those for the temple orphans and school lunch programmes were sustainable. In many sites, these life skill initiatives brought together both returnees and local village children and youth. This offered opportunities for informal exchanges and discussions about migration and life across the border.

### **3.5. Outreach Services**

Many of the migrant communities in China, Myanmar and Thailand are located in isolated and remote areas with limited or no access to basic services (such as education, health care and legal aid), or resources (such as water, communication channels and adequate shelter) and few economic opportunities. This project was designed, in part, to mitigate some of these hardships through PAR activities such as those described below.

- A drop-in centre was created as a teashop where young people working in the area would be allowed to go without raising suspicions. A drop-in atmosphere was an approach that worked best with youth that had little time off and could not predict in advance when it would be. The centre offered a place to meet, leave messages, make contacts and hold discussions with others about their situation and the dynamics of the larger context surrounding them. A network was formed with representatives from various factories acting as intermediaries and outreach workers in their various work sites. This network sought to address issues of health, basic rights in the work place and plans for initiatives that would improve the situation and future of migrant youth.
- Sports were introduced by youth in many communities as a means of reaching out to more children and youth and creating alternative environments to drugs and other unhealthy activities. At many of the sites, children and youth organised groups to clean playground areas, establish sports fields and organise teams and even tournaments that played other youth teams in the area. Though many sites found it hard to include girls and young women in the sports initiatives, an ongoing awareness and emphasis was made to develop sports activities that would be of interest to them. However, most females had little free time and often feared the risk of co-mingling with boys and young men in the village.
- Sex workers from Myanmar along the China border requested counselling and assistance in dealing with the Chinese health providers. In response, a confidential HIV/AIDS/STD clinic was established that provides HIV/AIDS pre- and post- testing counselling, sexually transmitted disease (STD) diagnosis and primary treatment, and other reproductive health services.
- Music programmes were initiated by youth in two different migrant communities involving many children and youth keenly interested in developing their own skills. The programme involved children from age six to young people in their mid-twenties. As a result of this programme, a Kachin youth music group was formed and songs

were written to address community issues and encourage positive actions in response. However, even this initiative found it difficult to involve female participants.

- Young migrants from Myanmar working as trolley conductors along the China border collectively organised themselves to address the constant debts they faced. Since they had to rent trolleys to do their work, they were unable to make much profit and many days went into debt to cover the rental costs. They prepared a plan and joint bank account to work towards buying their own trolleys in the future. Their plan included a request to SC(UK) to provide two trolleys with which funds could be saved to purchase additional trolleys. A similar outreach project was undertaken with Myanmar youth working in metal shops. All of them had to rent the equipment for their trade and were unable to get out of debt or seek to expand their work. A group of metal workers prepared a plan for organising themselves with an initial input of tools that would allow them to save and purchase additional tools in the future.
- Cross-border co-ordination established channels and means for returning home safely, with local support for the reintegration. Establishing such channels is extremely difficult and requires a flexibility and on-the-ground network on both sides of the border to ensure the safety and support necessary for a successful repatriation. This project has only just begun to explore return and reintegration efforts. Given the vulnerability of those returning and the sensitivities involved at many different levels (family, village, official, trafficking networks in both the country of origin and destination) these efforts have been slow. The reintegration efforts that have taken place returning girls and young women to Myanmar and China have begun to establish channels and strategies for furthering these initiatives in the future.
- In regard to specific protection objectives, one of the project's initiatives was to explore and refine the protection mandate of the existing community self-help protection groups or village welfare groups. This was done through awareness raising activities addressing broader trafficking issues and training within the Convention on the Rights of the Child in a culturally sensitive way.

### **3.6. Networking and Advocacy**

It did not take long before children and youth realised that many of the factors influencing their lives and the realities in their communities extend beyond to other stakeholders and decision makers. The need to build networks outside of their immediate surroundings and develop strategies for advocating for change was an essential part of overcoming their vulnerabilities.

- Youth from various ethnic groups and areas along the China-Myanmar border in Xishuangbanna Prefecture were brought together for a three-day 'youth gathering' during the dry season. The aim of the gathering was to promote friendship between the various ethnic groups (Palaung, Dai and Akha) and exchange experiences and information between the various sites. Youth from each site were responsible for different aspects of the gathering. PRA activities, performances and games were played. Tasks such as preparations, cooking ethnic foods and cleaning also offered – opportunities for communication and exchanges.



- Migrant populations were found to be at high risk of HIV/AIDS. SC(UK) organised a cross-border training and exposure visit for five Shan Buddhist monks and two partners from literacy and cultural associations in Shan State to a project in Thailand where Buddhist monks take an active role in the fight against HIV/AIDS. This visit was made in December 2000 offering insight into opportunities to explore how monks can approach and adapt similar responses to HIV/AIDS in their own communities.
- Youth organisations were formed at several sites in Thailand among migrants from Myanmar. The youth groups took an active role in identifying their communities' problems and concerns and planned initiatives to address them. For example, they trained peer educators who then organised health discussions in their isolated work places (factories, agricultural plantations, construction sites, etc.). As youth became more organised, they were asked to participate in community meetings. The youth felt an increased responsibility and leadership role in their communities and developed an increased knowledge base as a result of their activities and a youth network they formed..
- Partnerships were established with Buddhist monks in Shan, Kayin and Mon States, who have traditionally played an important role as teachers, guardians, and mentors in HIV/AIDS prevention work but also in the repatriation of trafficked survivors. Cross-border repatriation of trafficked children from Mae Sot in Thailand to Myawaddy in Myanmar have been organised through an influential Buddhist monk in Myawaddy. Though the numbers who have actually returned are small, these efforts have helped to develop links and co-operation between countries in actually bringing trafficked and /or exploited children and youth home. The efforts have also led to initial interventions that support the reintegration of those returning by involving them in existing activities in the community and providing counselling and other services, as requested. Discussions with organisations in Thailand with experience working on issues related to trafficking have resulted in exchanges of resources, strategies for implementation and training in practical skills of SC(UK) staff and partners. Through this project links were also established with UN agencies and networks addressing trafficking issues at the national and regional levels.
- SC(UK) in Myanmar held advocacy workshops and informal ongoing discussions with staff from the Department of Social Welfare and the Department of Health (at the national and local levels) on minimising discrimination against marginalised children and children infected or affected by HIV/AIDS, migration and trafficking issues. As a result of this dialogue, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the Department of Health, signed in 2000, which provides government approval and support for SC(UK) to implement projects to combat HIV infection through awareness raising, education and condom promotion, and to reduce discrimination and marginalisation of people living with AIDS.
- Issues such as HIV/AIDS, sex work, drug addiction, and cross-border trafficking in narcotics and persons were very sensitive, particularly when involving international organisations. Initially the PAR activities in China were conducted under the auspices of the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences in order to obtain access to the community, slowly build an understanding of PAR and develop a relationship with SC(UK). As the project unfolded and a number of training workshops were

conducted for local government officials, the government gradually had a better understanding of SC(UK) and the project. In discussions prior to and throughout the PAR project, SC(UK) was able to develop support for and obtain a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Ruili City government in China. This is the first Memorandum of Understanding that the Ruili City Government has ever signed with an international NGO on HIV/AIDS/STD prevention. As part of the MOU, SC(UK) established the Ruili Women and Children's Development Centre together with the Dehong Prefecture's Women's Federation and Ruili City Government. The close collaboration between SC(UK) and local government has led to a proposal submission to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which focuses on a holistic approach to HIV/AIDS care and prevention in the surrounding areas.

- Throughout this project the country teams and participants worked to establish links with local officials and partners. In many instances, these exchanges were through informal discussions of issues. Such formal exchanges offered opportunities for explaining the project and critical issues involved, for example when requesting permission to work with government initiatives, or undertaking certain activities or obtaining travel permits for participants who often lacked adequate documents. Although these efforts have been slow, clearly support at the local level has developed and SC(UK) and their partners have been able to work with more ease and creativity than in the past.
- Exchange visits were held during this project both across the borders (prior to or following the regional workshops) and between project sites within each country. These exchanges facilitated learning among team members of the situation and experiences of migrants from across the borders (where many of the migrants had been or had come from). They also provided an opportunity to learn about people in areas of the country of origin or destination that had not been identified by the project in the past (for example, migrants from China in Thailand and ethnic Bamar migrants in China and Thailand). Given the limited opportunities to legally travel across the borders, many of the exchanges were limited to other sites within each country. Although not originally planned, these exchanges were extremely useful in learning about ethnic populations, cultures and circumstances of others in similar situations. These exchanges provided a picture of the scale and magnitude of the problems and a realisation that the consequences are not simply the ill luck of a village or individual. The sharing of interventions were a useful resource in encouraging team members and youth to be creative and more active in their responses.
- Given the limited resources, interventions such as skills training and alternative livelihoods (which were beyond the scope of this project and SC(UK)'s capacity to address), were linked to other organisations for further technical and financial support. Nevertheless, the project's PAR activities were able function as a springboard for developing longer-term interventions and programmes with the community and partner organisations. SC(UK) has continued to support many of these initiatives and continues to work towards increasing ownership and responsibility for them by local children and youth with support from their communities. However, some initiatives were outside of SC(UK)'s mandate, therefore, SC(UK) worked as a liaison with the community and other channels of external support. An example of this was a Kachin village youth group proposal to set

up a coffee plantation as an alternative to opium cultivation that surrounded their village. PAR intervention was able to support the youth group in the initial planning and proposal writing and SC(UK) then proceeded to introduce the group to UNDCP (United Nations Drug Control Programme) and other non-government agencies with technical skills and capacity to support such a project.

- The PAR teams worked together with Save the Children Alliance efforts to document the legal frameworks used by each country in Southeast Asia to address trafficking. This initiative resulted in a publication that documents the laws related to trafficking of each country, comparisons throughout the region and analysis of the findings. This publication provides a resource with which to build on-going advocacy initiatives for change at the local, national and regional levels.

Bringing children and youth together to take responsibility for identifying and responding to their own realities took a great deal of time, patience and energy. In many sites this process took many months, with the actual momentum for the project coming only in the last few months of project implementation. As noted above, a wide-range of activities were planned, implemented and evaluated together with youth and children. Not all of the interventions were successful, but the focus was on ‘falling forward’ by learning from the experiences and considering new plans and actions that will be more effective in reaching vulnerable populations, such as children and youth.

#### **4. Participatory Review**

A participatory review was conducted towards the end of the research phase of this project. The review process and outcomes are summarised below.

##### **4.1.Review Aims**

The goal of the review was to receive feedback from the research teams, participants and partners on the process and impact of the project. The overall aims of the review were:

- To assess the understanding of the project objectives and research tools employed.
- To solicit researchers, participants and partners input into what was most beneficial and what could be done differently to improve this type of project in the future?
- To identify the lessons learned and assess the approach and interventions undertaken during the implementation of the project.
- To evaluate the activities undertaken, prioritise and develop strategies for future interventions by SCF or other organisations, together with migrant children and youth and those in their community.

The review provided the project teams and SC(UK) with an understanding of how their work was perceived, ways for improvement and input for future planning that would

better meet the needs of migrant youth and children. In addition, the review offered considerations and lessons learned to others interested in implementing similar projects in other communities and countries.

## **4.2.Review Guidelines**

The project teams used creative ways of gathering input for the review that included critical thinking, problem solving, group discussions and PRA activities.

The following review questions were compiled by the country teams to be used as guidelines for developing review activities and discussions. It was emphasised that the points raised in this guideline should not be exclusive of other concerns and issues that emerged during the research phase nor should they be presented in any particular order, but adapted according to the participants, site and situation.

### **◆ Research Tools**

- Describe the usefulness and limitations of the project's qualitative research tools to understand the sensitive issues raised with key informants, community members, youth and children.
- Did the training and follow-up support give you the understanding and skills necessary to use these tools?
- Were the research guidelines developed by each country team helpful in conducting the research?
- How could these (or other) research tools be better developed and used within the communities in the future?

### **◆ PAR**

- Why were PAR interventions implemented?
- What PAR interventions have been most successful? Why?
- What PAR interventions have been least successful? Why?
- What are the positive aspects of PAR?
- What are the negative aspects of PAR?
- How could PAR be better implemented in the future?

### **◆ Documentation, Translations, Analysis and Report Writing**

- Why was this research conducted? Did the research tools and process meet these aims?
- What did you appreciate most about participating in this research process?
- What did you find most frustrating while participating in this research?
- What remains unclear about the research process?
- How could the research be more effective and the process improved?

### **◆ Community Participation, Project Teams and Regional Collaboration**

- To what extent do you feel active participation among children, youth and their communities was established (consider the *Ladder of Participation* developed by Hart<sup>52</sup>)? What were the obstacles to participation?
- Was the project and country team structure effective? How could it be improved?
- What partnerships have been developed? How should they be further incorporated into ongoing interventions?
- What were the benefits of co-ordinating and exchanging information with teams across the borders?
- Should regional collaboration be developed further? How?
- What approaches for advocacy of the issues raised in this research would be most effective?

◆ Recommendations for Future Strategies

- What were the major constraints and limitations in your work?
- Was the time frame and budget for this project appropriate?
- What considerations should be noted for future PAR projects among migrant populations?
- What do you hope will be the result of this research? Please be as specific as possible.
- Based on this PAR project what recommendations do you have for SCF(UK)/SEAPRO?

### 4.3. Review Approach and Tools

The review was undertaken by the researchers, participants and staff as a self-evaluation during group discussions with participants and during various PAR interventions. the first year of the project. Each field researcher (FR) was responsible for conducting the review in the communities in which they worked. The national researchers (NR) compiled the country review and together with their national co-ordinator (NC) worked with their teams to prepare a presentation of their findings and a written report at the regional cross-border workshop. The Regional Project Co-ordinator (RPC) was responsible for leading the regional analysis, compiling the findings and submitting the results back to the country teams for their discussion and comments. The notes of these discussions and comments were returned to the RPC and the final review completed.

The tools used in this review were adapted by each country team, within each site and according to the characteristics of the participants. The researchers used research tools they were already familiar with including observations, in-depth interviews (IDI), focus group discussions (FGD) and participatory rapid assessment (PRA) activities. They then adapted them to address the review questions. Each country team discussed and recommended research tools that were considered most effective in the communities where they were working and could best facilitate the review process. Throughout the review process, an emphasis was placed on a participatory approach that encouraged

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<sup>52</sup> See “ladder of participation” presented in Section One of this report.

participants to openly discuss their experiences and perspectives regarding this project and to go beyond the specific review questions noted above.

#### **4.4. Summary of Review Outcomes**

The research was gathered and analysed by each individual site. The findings were then presented and compiled by each country team. The country teams combined the findings into country reports that were prepared for presentation at the regional cross-border workshop. The results were then discussed and further summarised by all those present at the regional cross-border workshop and presented back to each team and field site for their discussion and comments.

The following is a summary of the review presented and discussed by each country team. The breakdown of feedback by country and site has been retained in order to provide a deeper understanding of the particular issues and findings found in various communities. Though many points overlap, some are specific to a given environment and worth noting separately.

##### 4.4.1. Myanmar

The Myanmar team was divided into two field areas: one in Northern Shan State and the other in the Kayin and Mon States jointly. The review was conducted, compiled and analysed in each area and is presented here as such.

##### *Northern Shan State*

##### ***Research Tools:***

- Useful in getting an insight into problems of children and youth while providing an opportunity to build a relationship with them.
- Limited by political and ethnic sensitivities.
- Lack of community's exposure to non-governmental and international organisations that resulted in not only a lack of trust among participants, but often misunderstandings about what the project and organisation could provide.
- The team members learned many valuable research skills, but more refresher courses would be helpful to further develop their skills.
- Most of the questions in the guidelines were useful in collecting data.
- Some guideline questions were sensitive to the community (for example those related to reproductive health, drugs and violence) and offered a means for discussing difficult issues.
- In order to work closely with target communities it was necessary to live near them or stay with them for extended periods of time.
- It is important to collaborate with partners already accepted by the community.

##### ***PAR Interventions:***

- Effective in encouraging children and youth to be involved in solving their own problems.

- Reproductive health workshops and capacity building activities were accepted not only by youth but also elders, as they benefit all and were easily replicated.
- Chinese language classes were the most difficult to implement because participants could not afford the time. In addition, the teaching method was not practical. Consequently, most people dropped out and lost interest.
- Need more strategies for what to do if participation is weak and deal with situations where elders do not approve.
- The PAR activities sometimes raised false hopes (for example some youth hoped they could get funds to study and asked for things the organisation could not provide).
- It would be helpful to make prompt decisions on proposals (because slow decisions led to difficulties and frustrations between the community and field researchers)
- Building a network of contacts to support proposals that cannot be supported by this project or SC(UK) is critical.

***Documentation Translation, Analysis and Report Writing:***

- PAR interventions and methods for collecting information were very effective and provided a means for understanding the far-reaching impact of migration on children, youth and their communities.
- Information, education and communication (IEC) materials (such as T-shirts, key rings, hats, and pamphlets) made the work more concrete and community members showed more interest in participating when they were available.
- It was difficult to translate the large amount of information from minority to national languages and then into English, then back again to inform the participants.
- More material support such as cameras and tape recorders would be helpful in conducting the research (if the community is able to accept such support).
- It was difficult to focus on the documentation, analysis and report writing without a clear plan for future work in these communities.

***Community Participation, Project Teams and Regional Collaboration:***

- The team felt that participation was at level four to six on Hart's "ladder of participation."<sup>53</sup>
- "Participation" was an unfamiliar approach for the community. Community members were more accustomed to people coming in from outside and making decisions for them.
- "Adults" were often a barrier in efforts to discuss or address sensitive issues (for example, in the reproductive health workshops, when young people have to draw a body).
- The team structures were effective, but needed more field supervision, as the field researcher in this project had to work alone. It would be helpful to have someone there to work together with and provide more guidance.

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<sup>53</sup> See "ladder of participation" presented in Section One of this report.

- It is useful to discuss and exchange experiences on a regular basis among team members in other sites. It would be useful to have even more exchanges with teams in other areas in the country and across borders.
- Sharing information, resources and providing technical assistance across borders was very useful and effective in reaching migrant children and young persons.
- Collaboration with partners is important in strengthening dissemination and developing strategies for advocacy.

***Recommendation for Future Strategies:***

- Be aware of political sensitivity and government scrutiny of youth activities.
- Increase both the time frame and budget for future interventions to have a meaningful impact.
- PAR activities should work towards reaching the most marginalised children and youth.
- Expand PAR activities to new sites.
- Support children and youth groups formed beyond the PAR activities, especially when promoting the protection of trafficked and/or exploited children.
- Explore how this project could assist migrant communities in accessing health services.
- Improve non-formal education programmes for migrant and local populations that are flexible to their time constraints and applicable to their lives.
- Establish sub-offices in the field sites.

***Kayin and Mon States***

***Research Tools:***

- Know the community's status – social, economic, political situation, health, transportation, culture, and behaviour of youth (particularly problems of migrants in Thailand and the health problems they encounter).
- Be aware of conflict in the area. Villagers were suspicious of people asking questions with paper in their hands.
- Drug problems among youth made it difficult to reach out to them as they were secretive and suspicious of those outside their group.
- Cultural attitudes resulted in youth feeling inhibited to talk about certain issues, particularly those related to reproductive and sexual health.
- Lack of trust in organisations (local and foreign) is widely felt because these organisations create false hopes. Communities wanted support in terms of money or infrastructure rather than participating in research or small-scale activities.
- Need a deeper understanding of qualitative research methods and skills to conduct research.
- Some questions were hard to answer because the culture does not talk about some of these issues openly.
- Some were embarrassed to respond and admit to bad experiences in Thailand.
- Need more time to gain the trust of the community.



- Frequent turnover of staff was a difficult problem (field researchers need experience, skills, and must adapt to local cultures, so when one field researcher leaves it is not a problem)
- Need more prompt decisions on proposals (if not within the framework of SC(UK)'s programme strategy, then other partners should be found).

***Documentation:***

- It was important to identify the target population, their problems and needs, and then to publish and disseminate the information to others who are interested in the issues.
- Carrying out PAR activities was helpful in facilitating close contact with youth and allowed for good participation.
- PAR activities were often delayed as a result of having to wait for decisions on the acceptance or rejection of participants' proposals. This was very frustrating.
- It was unclear about what the PAR activities would lead to. Need a vision of the future.
- Teams within the country, for example in Shan, Kayin and Mon States, should meet often to exchange experiences. Sometimes people were not clear about different ways of implementing PAR. They should meet often to discuss and improve their understandings.
- There was a need to recruit volunteers from remote villages, because in some areas strangers were not accepted by the community members.
- Guidelines should be developed and translated with words that are used in everyday life for each ethnic group.

**PAR Interventions:**

- Enabled communities to identify their problems and find solutions themselves with encouragement and support.
- Built trust and partnerships with migrant children and youth living in tentative situations facing sensitive issues.
- Gave young people encouragement to solve problems themselves and develop life skills. Supported youths' abilities, interests and needs.
- Initiated small interventions for communities to identify their own resources and strengthen their abilities.
- Built good relationships with communities and partnerships with other stakeholders.
- Took time. This project pushed a schedule that was faster than many communities were able to proceed.
- Communities lost trust when their proposals could not be carried out (for example some proposals were not considered to be in line with SC(UK)'s country and programme strategy plans).
- PRA should be done thoroughly (in one Karen village, the PRA was not done properly and a Karen literacy class had to be abandoned when most villagers stopped attending. This was the time when people were leaving for Thailand).

- The number of villages within the project should be limited so the field researchers do not get over extended.
- Need more technical assistance and loan money for young people to start their own businesses that offer an alternative to migration.

***Participation, Teams and Collaboration:***

- The team felt they were able to attain levels four to six on Hart's "ladder of participation."<sup>54</sup>
- Delays in proposal decisions led to misunderstandings and discouragement of participants.
- It took a long time for field researchers to develop trust with the children, youth and their communities. Need village elders' approval ( field researchers are young and often suspected as spies).
- Authorities did not like youth to become organised because of different political factions in certain areas.
- The project team structure was effective because there were only a few PAR interventions. If the project would be further developed it would have to change by delegating more responsibilities to the field sites.
- There was good collaboration with other community-based, national and international organisations.
- Conducting PAR interventions raised awareness on critical issues in the local community, and at the district and national levels.
- Most of the communities struggle with economic hardships (even though farmers do subsistence farming, they often have to sell a quota of rice to the government at fixed prices. This results in a loss. They also have to pay porter fees and taxes to various political factions).
- The political situation led to distrust and suspicions of outsiders, particularly among those conducting cross-border activities..
- There was an absence of young people in villages due to migration. The youth remaining in villages have to struggle to meet their daily needs.
- Diversity of ethnic groups, languages, cultures and priorities creates a constant challenge in implementing this project.
- There were many difficulties and obstacles to communicating, especially during the rainy season.
- More money is needed if this project is to expand and is to avoid gaps between the momentum it has built and ongoing support for pilot projects.

***Recommendations:***

- Provide training to field researchers in the care and counselling of migrants and returnees. Many difficult and sensitive experiences were drawn out and field researchers often felt unable to deal with them.
- Need advice and support from the SC(UK) regional office.
- Better logistic support is needed in the field sites, for example a small vehicle (motorcycle) for transportation.

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<sup>54</sup> See "ladder of participation" presented in Section One of this report.

- Office space was needed in the field sites for contacts and as a meeting place for migrants who were often unable to move about freely.
- Provide opportunities for exchanges between teams within each country and across borders since this helps give much needed input and feedback from others with similar experiences.
- Field researchers needed more training in data management, analysis and report writing skills.
- It is important to develop advocacy efforts on the issues raised by participants in this research project.

The Thai team was divided into seven sites and due to the vast amount of detail and significant overlap, the team compiled their review results as presented below.

***Children's Opinions:***

- We liked the painting activity very much. We gained more knowledge, learned more language and were able to apply our skills in our daily life.
- The second activity we liked was drawing. We learned to draw and express what we felt. We could imagine and learn how to work with other friends.
- We want to study. We want our teachers to teach us more than they do, because the teaching hours were too short.
- We hope there will be a long-term project to teach languages, because we want to be educated like others.
- We are happy when we have these activities to do.

***Youths' Opinions:***

- We are very happy to participate in the activities. We have more friends and have learned about traditional culture.
- We want more opportunity for other youth to participate.
- We want this to be an ongoing project.
- We want to plan more activities, including workshops, seminars and other training to learn about computers, music, publications, and vocational skills.
- If possible, we would like SC(UK) to teach English and computer skills as a long-term project.
- We want SC(UK) to support weaving and sewing activities, because they are skills we can use in the future.
- We want support for different groups who stay in different places to participate in cultural activities together.
- Members of this group feel more confident and proud of themselves as a result of the PAR project.

***Teachers' Opinions:***

- All the activities were good and benefited the children. However, the pig-breeding activities had problems. We did not get what we expected. It needed a lot of funding and the youth were not very interested in working as a group. This created problems.

- Some youth had no free time, because they had to help their parents and do homework. Some children follow their parents to work in towns or farms. There should be some support for them too. We need more time for this group of youth who are not in school and work long hours. Maybe we can support them in the future.
- At the present, the government has already provided a school for the villagers. It is not a good idea to open a school for small children, but to support the existing schools with teaching materials.
- We want a small health centre or clinic where medicine and treatment can be provided. It is very difficult for us when there is a car or motorbike accident, as there is no transportation or person to accompany the patients to the hospital. Health care is very far from our village. If possible we support a plan to build a small health centre.
- The activities supported by SC(UK) have been good and gave people more chances to participate. Most of the participants were ethnic minority people whose needs have often been ignored. These people lack an opportunity for education and other basic knowledge that makes it very difficult for them to function at the present time in our society.
- No one has offered help for this village. Not many people care about this group of people. The people in this village never get any rights and benefits like other people in this society.
- The research was successful on many levels. Given the familiarity and comfort between the children and youth and researchers the interviews and focus group discussions were able to explore issues encouraging the depth and nuance of experiences by the participants. It would be good if there could have been two field researchers at each site. The work would have been completed faster and there would have been more support for the field researcher.
- There should be an ongoing project in the future, because the activities in the past lasted for too short a period. They were a good beginning for developing future activities.

#### ***Community Leaders' Opinions:***

- It was good to have had proper research before beginning any large-scale programme. If there was no research, we would not have learned about the situation in the first place, then we would not have known the reasons for the problems, and we might have made mistakes. If we are going to do anything, we should really do our best.
- We should all continue to work together to bring more activities for youth and children. They are our country's future generation. If they do not know how to live together, it will be very difficult to develop our community in the future.
- The youth and children are staying in an undeveloped area, so of course there is a lack of education. They do not know who they are, where they are from, and how to work in a group. They have never learned how to respect each other, and there is no trust among them. Therefore, if we hold a group activity immediately, it may be difficult for them. It takes time to change all the attitudes and teach them new skills.

- SC(UK) work was well done. No one has supported us like this before. In the future, if you want any suggestions or if we can provide anything, you are welcome to contact us.

***Partners' Opinions:***

- The SC(UK)'s activities were helpful in developing the village. Some activities were good to do in a short period, but some activities cannot be satisfactory unless they are undertaken over a longer period of time. Working with partners is the best way.
- Having a revolving fund for the villagers was good, but SC(UK) should increase the budget when the field researchers write the proposal. This would give participants more chance to learn the entire process including budget management and they will be more proud of their work. Projects should be organised for migrants who migrated several years ago, or who will not move to other places. If we try to organise activities for groups who always move from place to place, the project might stop when people move on.
- If field researchers had to go back to their hometown for several days, the activities had to stop because there was no one to take responsibility for the activities. If the person who was doing the networking was not a local person, sometimes they faced difficulties in their work with the people in the village. Sometimes, some people in the village were doing some illegal work, and when a stranger came into their village and wanted to talk to them, they were afraid and refused to give any information.
- The SC(UK) research should place more effort on organising the migrants who just arrived. We should support the local villagers to help them to find some work that can earn a small income. These people need support from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and governmental agencies.
- When SC(UK) holds monthly meetings or regional workshops, Shan NGOs who are working along the border should be invited to participate. This will enable them to share their experiences and get clearer information.
- These were good activities for youth and children, but some youth could not spend their time in the activities. They had to work in order to survive. However, even though the activities were slow, they have been successful.
- The activities in the past were very useful. They have fostered closer relationships and unity among youth. The youth have learned to work together and see themselves as a community. They have become more responsible, gained confidence and learned to share their opinions.
- The music and sports activities for drug prevention were very useful for the community. When the youth and children have free time with nothing to do, they tend to get involved with drugs. Therefore, everyone appreciated all the activities in the village.
- The music training for youth and children was very useful, as they really tried hard and were very interested. The community also paid attention to this training. They preferred their children to play and study music rather than use drugs.
- The development of the community did not only depend on outside help, but on the people in the community itself. Other organisations and agencies should work

together with the villagers to develop the community. Also, there should be transparency and participatory decision-making about all funds raised from projects.

- Communities should be encouraged to promote their traditional culture.
- SC(UK) should work harder in the community, as there are still many developmental and educational needs. If SC(UK) does not have clear and accurate information about problems, then no one will want to help our village.
- Youth and children were satisfied with the activities, because they acquired more skills and could do fund raising. We should also not forget about the work that can earn some income for them. There should not only be music training, but also more training in other life skills, so that they can find work and survive. People in our village are moving to the towns to find work. We want to solve this problem.

### ***PAR Interventions:***

- Monthly visits to sites by the national researcher helped us to learn about our weaknesses and receive good suggestions about how to improve the support from the national researcher. The exchange visits from the field researchers helped the villagers gain more trust and confidence in this project. Also, the field researchers friends were helpful in suggesting solutions to problems and pointing out weaknesses in each area.
- It was helpful for the field researchers to meet monthly and share their work experience and data from each area. The field researchers were also able to learn from their colleagues and gather input for their own areas.
- Field researchers wrote better reports when they were given guidelines.
- There should be training for field researchers to develop their understanding of SC(UK) policy and programmes.
- Field researchers need more guidelines and materials on topics such as observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory rapid assessment.
- Questions about each issue should be short and easy to understand.
- Field researchers require more of the following skills:
  - Basic research methods
  - Writing reports
  - Writing project proposals
  - Accounting
  - Group dynamics
  - PRA
  - How to integrate field work with the guidelines
- Making available translation of the materials was very important and allowed more people to understand what was on the paper.
- Youth were happy to participate in group discussions and to try to identify their problems and plan ways to address them.
- The people in the villages agreed to let their children study, but many were not so enthusiastic. However, the children were very interested and studied hard.
- Many community members, teachers and monks requested English language training and other life skills that are practical for building the future generation.

- It was very worthwhile sharing opinions and information with teams in three other countries. It is important to try and understand the situation on the other sides of the border.
- We are proud of the activities we were able to initiate in every research area. Even the ones that were not so successful brought children and youth together and encouraged them to improve their lives and benefit the community.
- It has been helpful to build co-operation between different ethnic groups and nationalities and work towards helping each other instead of competing or discriminating.
- The PAR activities encouraged children and youth to develop their skills and think creatively.
- PAR activities provided opportunities to discuss sensitive issues such as drugs and trafficking and migrant labour among children, youth, parents, and other family and community members. This is the first step in preventing child abuse, child labour and trafficking in children.

#### **4.4.3. China**

The China team began their work in Xishuangbanna Prefecture with communities impacted by migration to Thailand. Six months into this project, the Myanmar team requested the China team to develop participatory research in Dehong Prefecture along the Myanmar border across from Shan State (where the Myanmar team was working). The China team responded to this request by hiring an additional national researcher and field researcher to reach out to migrant children and youth from Myanmar in vulnerable situations in China. The Dehong team proceeded to work with migrant sex workers from Myanmar who were young, isolated and faced with many difficulties. These two project sites were distinctly different. Thus, their reviews are presented separately below.

##### *Dehong Prefecture*

##### ***Research methodology:***

- The most important method of gaining information was in-depth interviews.
- There needs to be more training of the team in PRA and PAR. It was very difficult anyway to work with the target group (i.e., sex workers), as they felt so threatened and insecure. The national researcher did not receive proper training since he had joined the project after the training was completed.
- Language was a major obstacle. This made group discussions very difficult, as there needed to be an interpreter at all times.
- Entirely new research guidelines had to be developed, as those used in Xishuangbanna Prefecture focused on migration to Thailand through Myanmar. In Dehong Prefecture the situation was totally different.

##### ***Obstacles Encountered:***

- The Burmese community in Ruili was largely underground, extremely complex and had to be approached with constant sensitivity.
- The local government treated the issues among migrants as taboo. This made it very difficult to get their understanding and support.
- The target group felt a strong threat from anyone in an authority position.
- The majority of sex workers from Myanmar were under the strict control of the brothel owners.
- The target group was highly mobile and many were part of the floating population that makes a living through a variety of illegal activities.
- There were numerous language and cultural barriers.
- The project activities were neither completely secret nor completely in the open.
- The project lacked partners, as SC(UK) was the only other NGO working in the area and government collaboration was not yet forthcoming.

***Suggestions for Future Work:***

- Health services and education are greatly needed and an appropriate form of intervention. The sex workers themselves requested reproductive health services for two reasons: first, they saw themselves as doing this work temporarily and wanted to get out of it healthy. Secondly, their good health also determined their ability to work since it was a requirement of the brothel owners.
- The team must continue to build the understanding and co-operation of the local government. This is particularly necessary when certain brothel owners refuse to co-operate with the team.
- Relations between the brothel owners and Bamar elders in the community should be dealt with very carefully. (During the implementation of this project, a 16 year-old sex worker from Myanmar was found HIV positive and requested the team to help her return home. At first her owner was approached and agreed to allow her to go home, but at the last minute he changed his mind. The team asked the local Bamar leader to step in and help, but he lost his temper with the owner and hit him. This had negative repercussions among other owners. In the end, to appease the owner, arrangements were made to find him a girl from another owner, so he would still have some income). These arrangements were unacceptable and unforeseen. More work must be undertaken to find better ways to deal with the realities and dynamics among migrant communities.
- Qualified personnel should be found among the Burmese to help implement this work. The sex workers gave feedback to the team that they would like training activities to be more fun, with singing, dancing and video. The field researchers should explore ways of trying to find more opportunities for the sex workers to be involved in the planning and implementation of these activities, taking increasing responsibility as is possible in this context.
- Cross-border exchanges between teams should be increased, particularly with the Myanmar team in Shan State.

*Xishuangbanna Prefecture*



***Research Methodology:***

- The PAR methodology was found to be most effective in communicating with children and youth.
- Interviewees were extremely mobile, making it difficult to arrange and conduct research.
- Children and youth were quite receptive to the use of games combined with group discussions as a means of gathering information and sharing knowledge.
- Field researchers were clear as to the aim of project. They all felt that the training they had received helped them work more competently.
- It was agreed that since children and youth are a part of the community, it was necessary to receive the approval of community members if activities are to be sustainable.
- Interviewees often felt uncomfortable about field researchers recording the interviews, even though the reasons for doing so were carefully explained and permission granted.
- The field researchers had too much responsibility for all the translations and lacked the time and skills to do it effectively.
- Some of the terminology used created misunderstanding. For example, "influence" or "impact" (*yinxiang*) was understood by children and youth to have only negative connotations, meaning "bad influence." Therefore, great care must be taken in keeping the terms and translations in a language that was commonly understood.

***PAR activities:***

- PAR activities began as simple entertainment and gradually evolved into a type of training in physical education and performing arts as well as a discourse on life that sought to establish what people's developmental needs were.
- The field researchers were able to help youth gain a deeper understanding on a range of topics, such as growing-up, communication and co-operation with others, how to grasp an opportunity and develop sustainable interventions.
- Youth were able to improve their skills in speaking and taking active roles among their peers and in their communities.
- The field researchers discovered their potential and developed self-confidence.
- With regards to content, timing, and persons involved in activities, problems were discovered, questions were made and young women began to participate. All of this involved young people in critical thinking and problem solving.
- The support of youth and other members of the community was vital to the success of the project.
- Low education was in itself a severe limitation.
- Some Chinese concepts were difficult to express in ethnic minority languages, and translators found it difficult to translate concepts from ethnic minority languages into Chinese.
- It was difficult to conduct discussion with children and youth about what can be done to increase the value of the project.

- There were limits to what kind of contributions children and youth could seek. The team also could not always respond to their needs, as it was not always financially possible.
- The children and youth need more life-skills and it is hard to wait for them to make requests as to what they need as they themselves are not so clear. They often just ask for more skills to improve their future.
- The team should give more material support to recreational and sports activities.
- It is hoped that not only the field researcher but the children and youth as well will be able to receive training in PAR methodology.
- An activity was once conducted including children and youth from all three sites. This was one of the activities most appreciated by children and youth. This was the only time that such an organised, purposeful activity had been conducted. There is a lot of support among the children and youth for this activity to be continued.
- The desire that activities be continued exists among children and youth in neighbouring villages of the sites as well. People in the chosen communities were frequently asked, "How were you chosen to be a project site?" It is hoped therefore that these activities can be expanded beyond the currently rather narrow target sites.
- There was a serious lack of space for holding activities. Activities often took place outside and were exposed to wind, rain and mosquitoes. Also weddings and funerals in the villages popped up and conflicted with planned activities. This caused frequent schedule changes and dampened the mood of the participants.

#### ***Participation:***

- The field researchers felt they were able to reach levels four to eight on the ladder introduced by Hart. They were given instructions on how to do things, including guidelines, training and revisions, and work plans. Training was undertaken in a spirit of consultation and interaction, after which the field researchers transmitted the results to children and youth. The children and youth became interested and often were able to carry their ideas forward with support from the field researchers.
- The children and youth that participated in this project were asked to draw pictures showing their perceptions of the project. These pictures were very varied and imaginative. Many pictures showed positive aspects of the projects. For example, one picture showed a bird in a cage and then freed from a cage. This represented youth before the project (in a cage) and then after the project (freed). Other positive depictions of the project were a healthy environment, youth stopping smoking and drinking, different ethnic groups co-operating together and the gaining of knowledge.
- Some pictures showed problems with the projects. For example, one picture showed the project taking place outside the village, in other words it was not integrated into the community.

#### ***Overall Discoveries:***

- Cultural differences were the greatest obstacles in communication and co-operation in conducting PAR.

- It was difficult to come to a common understanding on many things during the PAR process. It was clear that a deeper discourse must be developed on the cultural forces determining the choices people make even as reflected in seemingly "simple" phenomena of migration.
- A closer look should be taken at the connection between systems and behaviours.
- It is difficult, in a short period of time, to get children and youth to understand the aims and significance of this project. Because of this, it made sense for the field researchers to come up with their own methods for communicating in their own language. Thus, more training and support in implementing PAR is need for the field researchers to be assured the translations and approaches are well understood and implemented. For example, the field researchers do not always exhibit the spirit of equality and participation emphasised in PAR.
- Because the field researchers were all farmers and had to work in the field, they were not able to spend a lot of their time on the PAR process nor could their continuous participation in the project be assured.

The response to the PAR was summed up in the words of a youth in Xishuangbanna Prefecture:

*It would be wonderful to have more of this kind of activity, because it allows us to understand the world outside the village without actually leaving it and to learn many things. Before we were like songbirds in a cage, now we can fly out and see many things. We feel happy to have these opportunities.*

The review presentations and discussions that followed were documented in the *Cross-Border Regional Workshop Report*<sup>55</sup> and published by Save the Children (UK).

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

PAR offered opportunities to learn about the perspectives, concerns and needs of migrant children, youth and their communities as well as gather insight into ways researchers and communities can work together in various environments. In addition, the participants found the participatory approach extremely effective in developing their own skills and confidence.

The research teams and project participants compiled a summary of their recommendations and conclusions based on their experiences in implementing PAR, as presented below.

### 5.1. Methods of working with migrant children and youth

- Participatory approach to research

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<sup>55</sup> Save the Children (UK). (2000). *Cross-Border Regional Workshop Report: Participatory Action Research (PAR) with Migrant Children and Youth Along the Borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand*. Bangkok: Authors.

- Include children and youth participation in the various levels of decision-making using innovative, practical and culturally acceptable ways to involve them in identifying and responding to their experiences and environment.
  - Encourage children to identify their own problems and develop interventions together with governmental and NGO agencies and community-based organisations to ensure sustainability by providing skills and knowledge to grow beyond current projects.
  - Take time to develop trust and confidence among participants. Provide opportunities to develop self-esteem and a sense of responsibility among participants.
  - Realise direct participation is an unfamiliar approach for many migrants and their surrounding communities and provide ongoing guidance and training in participatory approaches that is adaptive to their experiences, skills and environment.
  - Recognise that the diversity of participants and realities of each project site requires time and patience to explore.
  - Implement and review pilot initiatives to help participants take responsibility for and learn from project interventions.
  - PAR is fun and playful while also providing practical solutions to problems and concerns of community members.
- Flexibility Required
    - Respond with a wide range of approaches that are appropriate to the situation.
    - Develop flexible ways to measure impact among highly mobile, isolated, diverse and vulnerable children and youth.
    - Realise it may not be possible to predict the timeframe for implementation of projects with undocumented migrant populations along the border. Many unforeseen political, economic, military or social events may interrupt the best of plans.
    - Ensure the participation, as well as the safety, of those involved with a sensitive and flexible approach.
- Remain inclusive of ethnic diversity and marginalised groups
    - Translate materials and information into local languages.
    - Honour and establish respect for cultural differences by adapting resources accordingly.
    - Acknowledge the high degree of illiteracy, especially among the most vulnerable and seek to include this population in outreach initiatives.
    - Explore ways to reach children and communities who are considered 'illegal' as a result of their lack of documentation or their occupation. These individuals are often isolated and live in vulnerable circumstances.
    - Develop awareness of and sensitivity to the fears of migrants regardless of how valid or appropriate they may appear.
    - Establish measures to ensure security and confidentiality of participants.

- Seek to identify those who are often not included in activities, making a special effort to reach children and young persons not easily accessible.
  - Recognise that children and youth often have little free time available due to long working hours and numerous family responsibilities.
  - Establish ways of working that are inclusive of all family members, especially young women and girl children.
  - Adapt interventions to the high mobility and unpredictable events that are common among migrants and often beyond their control.
- Cross-border Collaboration
    - Facilitate cross-border links, exchanges and sharing of resources in order to learn from the situation on the other side and co-ordinate cross-border programmes.
    - Provide cross-border perspectives and strategies necessary for understanding the spectrum of issues and strategies for interventions.
    - Gather insight and understandings of the situation on the other side of the border and work at building partnerships that break down discriminating attitudes.
- Build Partnerships
    - Establish partnerships between non-governmental and governmental stakeholders at the community, provincial, national and cross-border levels.
    - Hold clear expectations and take an active role in monitoring unrealistic expectations between partners maintaining neutrality between competing political and other interest groups.
    - Provide referrals to children and young persons and their communities that address issues or concerns that are not a component of the current project.
    - Create flexible ways of working that include both the private and public sectors of the community.
    - Increase awareness of critical issues related to migration such as immigration and labour law, and provide information on appropriate channels for contacting agencies that provide emergency assistance.

## ***5.2. Effective Interventions***

- Research Process
  - Introduce qualitative methods for gathering information and participatory approaches to identifying, planning and implementing interventions.
  - Ensure that the assumptions of those outside the village and the realities and perspectives of the communities impacted by migration are understood. This is particularly important for the most vulnerable and isolated such as children, young persons and females.
  - Seek to include qualitative data that can transcend assumptions and incorporate the voices and perspectives of participants.

- Develop skills among local community members that allow them to take an active role in developing, implementing, analysing, writing and disseminating the research. This not only improves research skills, but also provides more nuance and in-depth understanding of the issues, values, perspectives and decision-making considerations.
- National and regional workshops were very useful for reviewing work, receiving feedback and providing further training.
- Documentation and Dissemination
  - Employ full time team translators who understand PAR thoroughly and who will actively participate in the entire project. For several teams, the team translator was also responsible for organising and compiling all the data and preparing analysis for the final reports. Many teams felt the analysis and report writing was too time consuming and felt more staff should be employed to document the research.
  - Provide situation updates that exchange information and cross-border experiences.
- Life skills and literacy
  - Support intervention strategies that decrease vulnerabilities associated with low levels of life skills such as literacy, language, basic math skills, and knowledge of reproductive health (including HIV/AIDS), laws, children's rights and basic rights, together with recognition of strategies for rights' enforcement.
  - Through PAR it was possible to assess the skills of the participants and develop practical ways to reach out to their interests and build their leadership capacity.
  - Support youth mobilisation projects that include community-based, sports and art activities to encourage creativity, focus energy and build confidence in the whole person.
  - Encourage positive cultural identification, literacy and values that bind families and communities together.
- Protection and securing safe returns
  - Strengthen existing cross-border links.
  - Establish safe channels for returning based on cross-border networks.
  - Develop and adapt interview guidelines to assess the protection needs and concerns of trafficked persons.
  - Provide individuals with a clear understanding of their options in relation to their status as migrants.
  - Assist in developing basic outreach and emergency services that reach the most vulnerable, either directly or by linking them with training and other support initiatives.
  - Ensure that services are safe and accessible to the community.
- Support for reintegration

- Secure appropriate counselling and care services to assist in reintegration and provide training and support to service providers.
- Assist returnees with information and life skills training that provide both knowledge and establish (or re-establish) connections with other community members.
- Establish private sector collaboration in developing long-term strategies for securing better employment opportunities.
- Engage families and communities in reintegration initiatives in order to sensitise them to the realities of trafficking and to help prevent further trafficking and re-trafficking.

### ***5.3. Advocacy and public policy***

- Build slow and gradual government collaboration with partners at many levels that creatively address the sensitive issues surrounding undocumented migration.
- Carefully plan and implement interventions that do not depend too much on external input or overwhelm the indigenous and migrant populations along the border areas by providing overtly visible assistance that may compromise sustainable interventions in the long term.
- Translate critical documentation and training materials to broaden discourse among policy makers and program implementers and expand awareness of the issues and appropriate responses to the vulnerabilities of children and young persons impacted by migration.
- Use both political and development frameworks to address the root causes of trafficking and the worst forms of exploitation and abuse. These efforts must include top-level government commitment throughout the Mekong sub-region in order to develop appropriate responses.
- Encourage participation in (and where necessary development of) local, national, cross-border and regional networks that include governmental, non-governmental, community-based and international collaborations.
- Increase awareness and provide technical training to partners in both civil society and government.
- Provide practical and technical input to networks and partnerships in the Mekong region.

### ***5.4. Identifying vulnerable populations***

The participatory action research (PAR) conducted over the last two years allowed SC(UK) and the research team to identify many types of vulnerable children living in the cross-border areas of China, Myanmar and Thailand. PAR provided a holistic approach to effectively address migrant children's concerns and vulnerabilities, and took into account that many children are exposed to a number of issues at any one time. Limited resources and the sensitivities of migrant youth, however, precluded SC(UK) from addressing all these issues. SC(UK) believes that an appropriate strategy for working with vulnerable populations, like migrant children and youth, is to link children who are not participating

in existing programmes to other agencies that specialise in addressing their needs. This requires strengthening the capacity of local community-based groups to reach these populations. The children SC(UK) identified as particularly vulnerable include the following (although it should be noted that this list is not inexhaustible):

- Young sex workers in Myanmar and Thailand<sup>56</sup>
- Domestic workers in Thailand
- Factory workers in Thailand
- Child labourers along all the borders
- Slave wives, particularly into China
- Street children along all the borders
- Child beggars, particularly in border towns and urban areas along all the borders
- Child scavengers along all the borders
- Orphaned and abandoned children along all the borders (including those institutionalised)
- Children and youth engaged in using, trafficking and/or producing drugs
- Child soldiers
- Children in confinement (detention centres, police stations or prisons)
- Children with special needs such as (physically, mentally or psychologically handicapped)
- Children in refugee camps and displaced or relocated communities

### ***5.5. Critical issues requiring further research***

This project was unable to explore in the depth a number of issues that are critical to developing sustainable partnerships and appropriate interventions. In addition, the project participants expressed concern that there is no adequate information or documentation available to address these issues. SC(UK), therefore, recommends further research be conducted in the following areas:

1. Explore the impacts, nuances and responses to drug abuse and trafficking among children and youth along the border areas, especially as to what extent migration increases their vulnerability and impedes interventions.
2. Document the entire ‘spectrum of trafficking’ (beyond direct sex work), including those trafficked into domestic or entertainment services, factories, ‘slave marriages,’ adoption, begging rackets, and other forced and abusive arrangements.
3. Develop strategies for identifying and prosecuting those who profit from the trafficking of children and persons, while simultaneously ensuring the protection and safety of the victims.

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<sup>56</sup> Current projects along the China-Myanmar border are working with sex workers, both from Myanmar and China, in China border towns.



4. Identify to what extent migration has resulted in increased domestic violence; the impact domestic violence has on children and young persons and what approaches are possible to address these abuses, without further escalating the tensions and jeopardising the victims.

### **5.6. Expanding research and interventions to other vulnerable border areas**

The participatory approach to research is an effective way to identify, understand and develop appropriate interventions among vulnerable populations. The approach provides researchers with a means of addressing sensitive and complex issues. SC(UK) recommends that participatory action research (PAR) be used in other border areas in the Mekong region impacted by migration that have received little attention, and few, if any, interventions. These areas include:

- Vietnam- China border areas
- Lao –China and Lao-Thai border areas
- Myanmar- Thai border with Eastern Shan State
- Migrants from China in Thailand

### **5.7. Closing Summary**

The participants of this PAR project strongly recommend this approach as an effective way to reach vulnerable children and youth. The participatory approach to research not only allows for a more in-depth understanding of the nuances and complexities of migrant lives and their decision-making processes, but also facilitates partnerships in addressing the many sensitive issues migrants face. As one field researcher summed up:

*Children and youth determined what kind of activities we organised and how. But, it's their interests that makes them come and participate in the first place. Our role should be like a piece of paper or a bolt of cloth, a medium to be written or sewn as the writer or tailor sees fit.*

A Field Research from Xishuangbanna Prefecture

All the sites concluded that the time frame allotted for implementing participatory interventions and means of documentation was too short. The country teams felt that it took a good part of the first year to develop the trust and understanding of participatory ways of working, just at the point where the project was beginning to implement its review and closure. A longer time frame for this project would have allowed the development of strategies for project sustainability and ongoing SC(UK) programme planning. The participants in this project were also frustrated with the gap that transpired between the PAR project and ongoing SC(UK) programme plans. Though many groups of participants sought to continue the initiatives started, they found that most community members did have the skills, contacts and sense of confidence to continue activities initiated under the project. Many of the activities faltered from this lack of support in the

transition between the conclusion of PAR and the development of other channels for ongoing support.

Based on these findings and recommendations, SC(UK) has begun to develop programmes, partnerships and advocacy efforts to address the critical issues that deny migrant children and youth some of life's most basic securities and indivisible rights. In addition, SC(UK) has published a report based on the findings of this project in an effort to provide a context for others seeking to understand, reach out and advocate on behalf of migrant children and youth along the borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand.

Finally, it is our hope that this report will facilitate the development of participatory approaches that address sensitive issues regarding children, youth and their communities within the vulnerable environments in which they find themselves. That others may learn from and adapt these experiences to their own areas of work so that they can be advocates for others whose voices are not easily heard or understood.

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