



Country-led Evaluation of the Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children 2017-2021 in Cambodia

Final Evaluation Report

December 2021

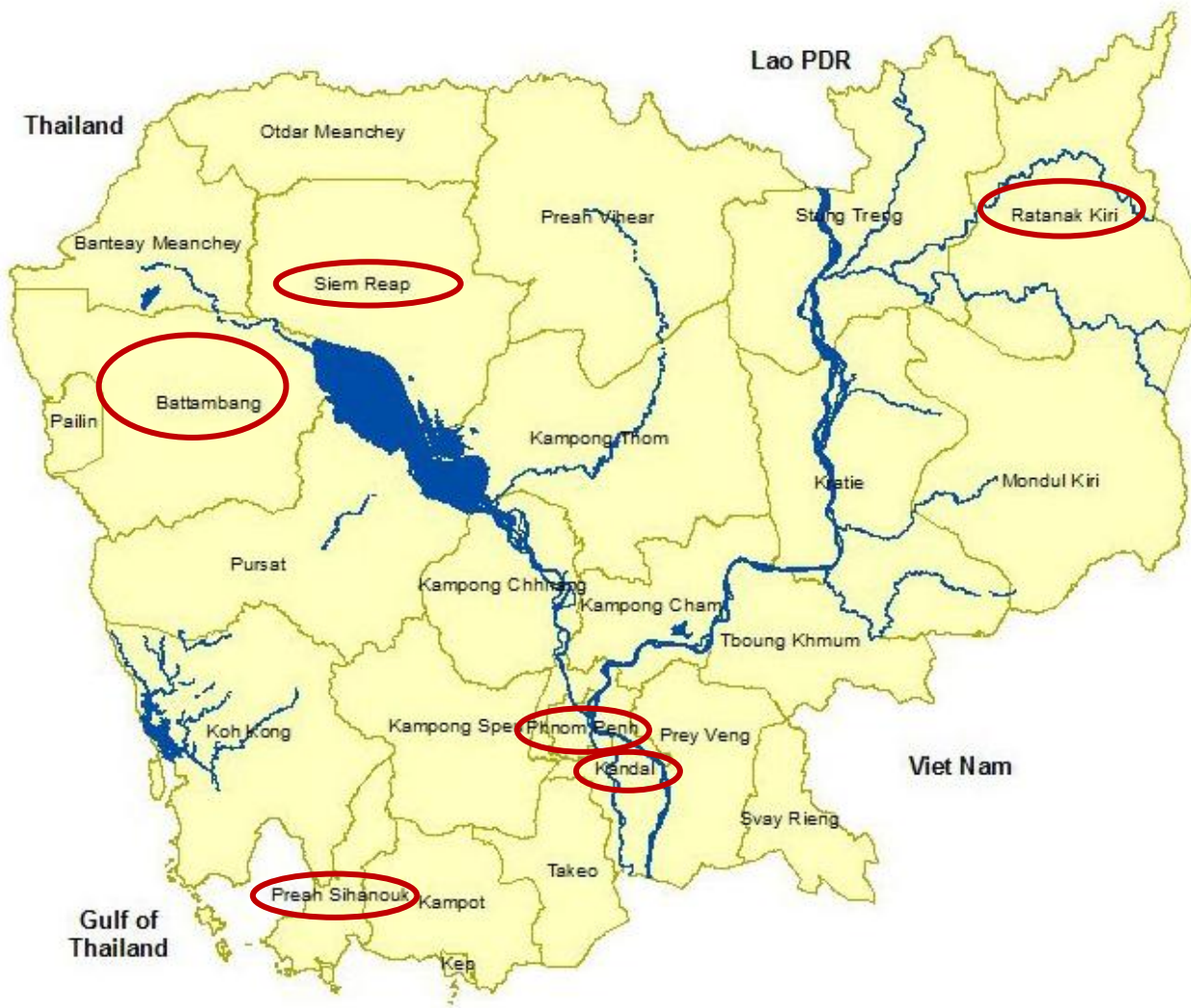
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Map of Cambodia Showing Evaluation's targeted Areas



Legend:  Visited locations

Acronyms

AYRG	Adolescent and Youth Reference Group
AP	Action Plan
ASEAN	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CNCC	Cambodian National Council for Children
CPIMS	Child protection information management system
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CVACS	Cambodia Violence Against Children Survey
CCWC	Commune Committee for Women and Children
EAPRO	UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office
EM	Evaluation Matrix
EMT	Evaluation Management Team
GEEW	Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women
GEROS	Global Evaluation Report Oversight System
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
MoCR	Ministry of Cults and Religion
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoInf	Ministry of Information
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoLVT	Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training
MoP	Ministry of Planning
MoSVY	Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
MoEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport
NAA	National AIDS Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIS	National Institute of Statistics
NSDP	National Strategic Development Plan
OCSE	Online child sexual exploitation
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
QA	Quality Assurance
RG	Reference Group
RO	Regional Office
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
ToA	Theory of Action
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
TWG	Technical Working Group
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV&AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VAC	Violence Against Children
WCCC	Women and Children Consultative Committee
WHO	World Health Organization

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Evaluation Overview

Characteristics	Description
Name of the Evaluation	Country-Led Evaluation of the Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children 2017-2021 in Cambodia
Timeframe	The evaluation covers the period 2017-2020, with some programmes within the Plan starting before 2017.
Report	Final Evaluation Report
Report Date	June 2021
Name of Evaluation Organisation	Lattanzio KIBS
Name of Evaluators (by position)	Team Leader: Dr. David S. COWNIE National Expert: Mr. OK Amry Support National Expert: Ms. Heng THOU Junior Evaluator: Ms. Ambra COZZI
Name of Commissioning Organisation	UNICEF Cambodia Country Office as agreed by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation

Executive Summary

Introduction and Approach

The **Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children (2017-2021)** is part of a larger effort of the Royal Government of Cambodia to strengthen the national child protection system, and aiming at reducing violence against all children in Cambodia, especially those at risk, through expanded prevention interventions, improved response, increased access to quality services, and multi-sectoral coordination and cooperation.

The **main summative purpose** of the “**Country-led Evaluation of the Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children 2017-2021 (VAC-AP) in Cambodia**” was to “understand and measure the extent to which the VAC-AP has been implemented and how well it has been implemented to tackle violence against children”. A **second formative purpose** was to inform and support evidence-based decision-making processes on the development of a new five-year Action Plan. The evaluation was at Action Plan level, rather than at programme level. The focus was on the value added of the Action Plan (AP) itself and its contribution to VAC policymaking and programming in Cambodia.

The evaluation had six primary **objectives**: 1) extent to which the AP met its objectives; 2) extent to which Theory of Change served the AP, review the strategies and activities implemented under the AP; 3) assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and impact and sustainability of the AP; 4) consider the coherence of the AP and its implementation; 5) document lessons learned, good practices and innovations; and 6) provide reasonable conclusions and recommendations.

Primary audiences of the evaluation comprise a range of stakeholders engaged in child protection in Cambodia, including both rights-holders (girls and boys, students, adolescents and youth and youth activists, parents, caregivers) and duty-bearers. A **utilization-focused approach and a non-experimental, multi-methods** design were used, involving extensive review of documentation, thorough engagement of both rights-holders and duty-bearers, the use of semi-structured tools (see annex I), the implementation of field visits to sites prioritised by the VAC Action Plan, regular engagement with the Evaluation Management Team, presentations to and meetings with the Reference Groups and Youth Groups, and in-depth analysis of eight specific programmes falling under the VAC Action Plan. **A total of 213 stakeholders were interviewed** nationally, internationally, and in six provinces. Ethical protocols as well as strict anti-COVID procedures were followed at each step in the implementation process.

Main Evaluation Findings

The main **relevance** question is the extent to which the VAC Action Plan was suited to the prevention and response to violence against children

Evidence from the evaluation suggests that the **VAC Action Plan’s design, and how implementation proceeded, were relevant to VAC programming**, both in terms of institutional strengthening and systems development and in terms of prevention and response. The main relevance finding regarding the suitability of the VAC Action Plan is linked to the **methodical, careful approach to Action Plan design**, based on considered attention to VAC in the 2010s, the 2013 VAC survey, Cambodia being part of the ASEAN initiative, and Cambodia’s development of a range of policies aimed at child protection and strengthening child rights. Cambodia’s approach is **well aligned** with international normative frameworks and consistent with INSPIRE, and has been adapted to be specifically relevant to the situation in Cambodia. Relevance of actions taken **continued into implementation**, with continued political will and Government engagement, support from a range of development actors, including UNICEF, Cambodia becoming a Pathfinding Country, commitment of Government officials at sub-national level in VAC programming, and progress made in child protection programming more broadly.

In terms of **activities and strategies being consistent with objectives**, none of the materials reviewed nor interviews conducted suggested inconsistencies. The Action Plan is also consistent with international protocols and national objectives when it refers to ‘**all forms of violence**’. However, when the issue of what

constituted violence was raised in discussions with children, parents/caregivers, and local leaders, issues arose with regard to the relevance of the definition of VAC compared to local perceptions.

Regarding the **institutional arrangements**, the evaluation concludes that the design of the institutional set up for operationalizing the plan at both national and sub-national levels appears consistent with the needs of the Action Plan and supportive of strengthening arrangements required for child protection more generally and VAC programming specifically.

The Action Plan is quite comprehensive in the **forms of violence** it covers, and that raises challenges in implementation. During design what was already covered by other plans was duly considered, and the Plan focused on inclusiveness. This has meant higher levels of relevance to dealing with VAC, but complexities in implementation.

The main **effectiveness** question is how effective the support provided by Government, UNICEF and other partners has been in helping to achieve the outcomes of the VAC Action Plan

Overall, **organising the Action Plan around five strategic areas allowed a wide range of actors to clearly identify with the Plan and see where their work ‘fits’**. This was furthered by the elaboration of sixteen outcomes organised around these five strategic areas, while outcome indicators were specific to the priority activities and the availability of service providers to provide support rather than more generally to the outcome overall. The 2019 Progress Report on the VAC Action Plan reported findings by each of the 16 outcomes, although not necessarily by outcome indicator. The evaluators have assessed the availability of useful information and provided a judgement on progress towards the various outcomes. In considering the results of this assessment, there are three key lessons learned: i) **Only part of the evidence required to assess effectiveness is available**, and some of what exists does not offer a critical assessment of progress; ii) Where evidence is available, it suggests that much of what is being done is still early in implementation, and that **more time is required for progress** against outcomes to be achieved; iii) **Progress is being made in terms of prevention and protection** but this is beyond change in legislative and policy frameworks, suggesting that **some outcomes may be written too narrowly to report progress**.

The analysis conducted has clearly demonstrated the role played by UNICEF in the implementation of the Action Plan and thus in providing technical assistance for the achievements of the expected Plan’s outcomes, consistently with UNICEF’s broader remit in terms of child protection programming.

Overall, **effectiveness of delivery within the remit of programming under the Action Plan was felt to be good**. The evaluation found no significant differences across provinces, with the exception of Ratanakiri, where the particular programmatic focus related to child marriage, is different than in the other locations. For the future, there are specific **threats** to the effectiveness of the Action Plan that warrant considered attention: i) The extent to which VAC does not permeate non-core ministries that have a mandate in supporting VAC programming and child protection can undermine the effectiveness of the Action Plan over time; ii) Legal change takes time, and legal reach even in a strengthened legal environment takes even longer. Any future action planning must recognise this, and set outcomes accordingly; iii) The gap between what the Plan regards as violence and what rights-holders and local level duty-bearers view as violence. There is cause for optimism in the long term on being able to mitigate this threat.

The main **coherence** question is the extent to which there are synergies and interlinkages between the VAC Action Plan interventions and other interventions

For **design** considerable efforts were made to support coherence, and **this proved largely successful**. The Action Plan was able to bring together actors and actions under a single framework that was developed in a manner that supported buy-in. Financing partners were supportive of this. Coordination mechanisms were established to draft the Action Plan, including a Technical Working Group to move it forward. These actors helped drive the development of the Action Plan, including the detailed work required in developing the Results Framework. There was also widespread agreement that the functioning of the Action Plan had **built trust across different actors** across sectors within Government and within civil society in a way that would not have been as effective without the Plan.

For **implementation, coherence proved more challenging**, given the breadth of actions under the Action Plan, with a range of work streams emerging led by an array of sectoral ministries, and engaging with a range of provincial and district governments and communes. Evidence suggests that cross-sectoral engagement does not necessarily exist beyond more senior levels in Government and, to a lesser extent, civil society in areas where they are involved in specific programming. Nevertheless, a variety of actors have worked very

hard to build linkages across different agencies needed in particular for response. There is also **progress at an operational level at commune level**. Further, significant investments have been made in strengthening child protection systems more broadly, which will support the objectives of the Action Plan.

In terms of **programme complementarity**, the range of actions aimed at strengthening response reflected a coherence in programming consistent with the care taken during Action Plan design. Strengthening the health service response, progressing on child protection legislation, systems development at provincial, district and commune levels, engagement of activists and building activist networks for case identification and making provision for referral and support (for example for reintegration) are all examples of this broader coherence. For primary prevention, however, coherence has proven more challenging, in part because programmes that would have logical overlap (positive discipline in schools and positive parenting) often took place in different locations, and even when they took place in the same locations, were not well coordinated because they fell across multiple ministries.

Efficiency largely focuses on cost effectiveness, that is, the best use of resources, i.e. how efficient was the management of the VAC Action Plan to ensure timely and efficient use of resources.

For an evaluation of the Action Plan as a multi-sectoral, multi-programme tool, the question is less about whether each programme was cost effective and more about whether the full range of **programming falling under the Action Plan was more cost effective than if individual programming had taken place without the Action Plan**. Findings strongly suggest that the existence of the Action Plan yielded improved cost effectiveness compared to what was happening before the Action Plan was in place, and what would have happened had the Action Plan not been developed. The Action Plan allowed considered attention to be focused on sequencing the delivery of different Plan inputs aimed at building stronger programming to prevent and respond to VAC. There are nevertheless questions arising around the relative allocation of funds across strategy areas, specifically the costs associated with VAC response as it is currently handled.

Questions were also raised around cost effectiveness in terms of **programme overlap** that warrant further attention. Positive discipline in schools, for example, has led to some concerns by parents who feel that it means that children are not being kept in line and are therefore not learning. In this regard, positive parenting could well build on the benefits arising from positive discipline in schools, and vice versa. Key informants tended to feel that the **infrastructure did not appear to be well suited to the efficient operation of a multi-sectoral response**. With regard to **operational efficiency**, strengthening the annual Plan-level reporting system would assist in this regard, with specific attention to results-monitoring and means of mitigation for problems identified.

Impact considers the positive or negative, intended or unintended, high-level effects.

Regarding the contribution to a reduction in violence against children, despite the important commitment of multiple ministries in order to fill the gap, the **relative dearth of robust evidence presently remains a constraint** in the assessment of impacts. While there are opinions about the efficacy of the various actions under the Action Plan, and some programme-level data collection that suggests that some programmes have proven effective where they have reached target populations, the systematic collection of data is largely absent. And where data are presented, they tend to focus on where programming has been successful. At this juncture, it is therefore not possible to comment on the magnitude of impacts of the Action Plan on levels of violence, save **the likelihood of positive trends in some of the locations reached by programmes under the Plan** as noted by those close to and knowledgeable about the programming. There are three themes worth noting: i) a sense among those at sub-national level that things are improving, above all in three areas, i.e. reintegration, child labour, positive discipline in schools; ii) an overall feeling among interviewees knowledgeable about the Action Plan that, while proof is still not clear, there are early signs of results that give cause for optimism; and iii) recognition that it will take time for impacts to manifest with something as difficult to change as VAC.

The need to **enhance capacity and strengthen systems** to effect long-term change and eventually progress towards impacts is consistent with the Action Plan intent and is recognised as the only way to effect change in the longer-run. Ensuring that those who deliver services at local level, and who support service delivery at district and provincial level, are adequately skilled is especially critical, as is the current expansion in the number and quality of social service providers at sub-national level.

Sustainability considers the possibility of the Plan overall offering continued benefits in the long-term, with or without the Action Plan.

Evaluation findings suggest that **sustainability is currently limited, despite continued momentum and hard work on delivery**. Respondents were positive on the *idea* of the Action Plan as a means to support sustainability, but negative on whether the current Action Plan, as implemented, had supported sustainability in practice. The issue was not ‘doing away with’ the Action Plan. Rather, there was a desire to ‘go to scale’, a demand for significant expansion in Government financing, and overcoming major roadblocks such as needed legal reform and expanded human resourcing, strengthening child protection infrastructure at sub-national level as per current child protection systems strengthening, strengthening implementation at commune level, and improving ministry integration into ministry programming as well as improving cross-sectoral responses.

Overall there were three concerns related to Government’s role: 1) pressure on **commune-level bodies** to perform critical on-the-ground roles when they didn’t have the skills or time to do so; 2) **shortages of skilled and experienced human resources at local government level** to be able to engage commune-level bodies and effectively manage referrals through agreed standard operating procedures; and 3) a heavy reliance on development partners for financing and implementation and **inadequate financing from Government**. Significant advancements in child protection are important for the future of any VAC action planning, but direct financial support for the VAC Action Plan is also required.

Cross-cutting issues were analysed under each evaluation criteria. Further information was yielded by the evaluation and is presented here.

There is clear evidence that **Action Plan design devoted careful attention to cross-cutting issues** associated with vulnerability and the different consequences of violence, with due consideration of gender, ethnicity, disability, and other relevant factors. This is reflected in the contents of the Action Plan, as well as noted by key informants. The Action Plan specifies objectives aimed at supporting equity. Equity is considered most specifically in the Action Plan considering differential risk to violence, and the need to respond to these differences. Indicators are specified in terms of measuring progress for girls and boys and females and males, as well as some indicators focused on especially vulnerable children. Regarding Action Plan **implementation**, there are three key findings: i) Concerted attention has been devoted to VAC programming based on an **understanding of the different risks and needs** of girls versus boys, children living in rural versus urban areas, children who had migrated, children living outside a family environment, and working children. Gender considerations permeated virtually all programmes, while consideration of other types of vulnerabilities tended to fall under targeted programming (e.g., reintegrated children, children in contact with the law); ii) **Both primary prevention and response to VAC programming were responsive to gender issues in materials design, messaging, reach, and tailored programming** to meet the varied needs of girls and boys and females and males. This did not extend to a detailed focus on vulnerable groups, however, in these general programmes; iii) **Action Plan programming aimed at specific vulnerable populations** (e.g., children in contact with the law, working children, children with disabilities, children living outside of families, children from ethnic minorities, etc.) focused due attention on their particular target groups, and retained that focus throughout.

Conclusions

Conclusions are presented here below against the objectives contained in the Action Plan (as per the first evaluation objective “assess the extent to which the Action Plan has met its specific objectives”), as well as against the evaluation criteria (as per the evaluation objectives 2-5).

Observations are summarised following a six-point scale from ‘very positive’ to ‘very negative’. It is worth noting that this is not a rating of effort, rather it is a rating of progress. Some may have lower ratings because of the difficulty of the task, of the long-term nature of change in this regard. Conclusions regarding the ToC are also added.

The **VAC Action Plan has five objectives** associated with improved systems strengthening (coordination and cooperation, monitoring and evaluation), improved framework conditions (law and policy formulation), and building effective VAC programming (primary prevention, responding to VAC). The overall conclusion of the evaluation against these objectives is that this is the right focus to respond to a problem with deep roots that will take considerable time and energy to counter. **All five objectives are both sound and are core to any effective VAC programming**. More specifically:

- **Objective 1** - multi-sectoral institutional framework for child protection, coordinating primary prevention and response strategies with ministries and institutions targeting key actors and settings for positive change – **was rated ‘somewhat positive’**
- **Objective 2** - primary prevention - **was rated ‘somewhat positive’**
- **Objective 3** - responding to violence **was rated ‘somewhat positive’**
- **Objective 4** - law and policy – **was rated ‘slightly positive’ (policy); ‘slightly negative’ (legal)**
- **Objective 5** - monitoring and evaluation – **was rated ‘slightly negative’**

On the whole, the Action Plan was rated ‘positive’ against the evaluation criteria, but with some differentiations. More specifically:

- Ratings associated with design were more **positive** than ratings against implementation for **relevance and cross-cutting issues**.
- **Effectiveness** varied in terms of achieving objectives, i.e. **‘somewhat positive’, and ‘slightly positive’** for some outcomes.
- **Coherence was rated ‘somewhat positive’**, reflecting the considered efforts to how to ‘make sense’ of the various actions in the overall Action Plan framework.
- **Efficiency in terms of cost-effectiveness was rated ‘somewhat positive’** since the VAC programming under the Action Plan was more cost effective than if the programming had been delivered without the umbrella of the Action Plan
- While it was also **rated ‘slightly positive’ for impact**, the absence of clear and convincing evidence means that this conclusion should be considered with caution.
- **Sustainability** was **‘somewhat positive’** in terms of the implications of design, but showed serious limitations during implementation and was rated **‘slightly negative’**.

Lastly, the development of the Theory of Change (ToC) on VAC in Cambodia as a whole was noted by those involved in the process as important to agreeing on the determinants of violence against children, considering what child protection actions can best contribute to preventing VAC. Overall, **there was broad-based satisfaction with the process of ToC development. Nevertheless, the ToC was not directly linked to the implementation of the Action Plan and did not include testable hypotheses** that would have supported learning.

Lessons Learned

1. The evaluation has highlighted the **important role that strong design** and continued support during implementation has played in the successes of the Action Plan. This in turn underlines the **importance of continued partnership between international actors and national governmental and civil society actors and rights-holders**.
2. **Learning from regional and international experience and guiding protocols is critical while adapting approaches based on local conditions** and norms helps connect these to effective programming within Cambodia.
3. While it is important to be ambitious about the need to counter high levels of violence against children, it is equally important to recognise the profound challenges in reducing levels of violence, and the **central role that robust systems and strong institutions play in effecting long-term change**.

Recommendations

A thorough process of co-development of the recommendations was promoted, through four sessions of joint reflection held with the main stakeholders. The final recommendations, presented along a scale of priority, are summarised as follows; full recommendations are found in Section 13.3. Three priority recommendations are first presented, as they are critical for Action Plan extension. This is followed by recommendations that warrant attention when identifying actions, outputs and outcomes under the next action plan.

Priority Recommendations for Action Plan Extension:

1. **Priority 1:** Proceed with VAC Action Plan extension and with preparations for and further action planning
2. **Priority 2:** Retain the five strategic areas, but restructure objectives
3. **Priority 3:** Strengthen M&E through building Results Monitoring into all programme and Action Plan monitoring systems, strengthening the emphasis on learning and documenting learning, and reporting on progress and regress

At Action Plan strategic level:

4. Update the Theory of Change and adapt approach to make it an effective implementation tool
5. Engage in further efforts in overall systems strengthening, legal and policy reform, and cross-sectoral integration
6. Strengthen Multi-Sectoral Structures

At Action Plan operational level:

7. Set up an impact evaluation component for the next Action Plan
8. Establish means to further track expenditures and determine unit costs

At Programmatic level:

9. Strengthen the engagement of rights-holders
10. Devote additional attention to primary prevention roll-out and linked coverage
11. Devote additional attention to the integrated response to VAC

1 Context and Background of the Evaluation

1.1 Introduction

This is the **Evaluation Report of the “Country-led Evaluation of the Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children 2017-2021 in Cambodia”**.

This is an evaluation of a multi-sectoral, multi-faceted Action Plan, and it operates at the level of the **Plan as a system of responses**, with evaluation criteria assessed at Plan level overall. It has been further informed by rapid project level assessments of eight projects that fall under the Plan¹, aimed at further informing an overall assessment of the Plan and at providing insights at project level.

This report consists of 13 sections. This first section provides the context and background to the evaluation and is followed by section two that presents the object of the evaluation, by section three that discusses the evaluation purpose, objectives and scope and by section four that provides considerations on the Theory of Change. Section five introduces the evaluation approach and methodology. Sections from six to 12 present the main findings on the evaluation criteria specified in the terms of reference (ToR) for this evaluation. Section 13 presents conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations. Annexes are included at the end of the Report.

1.2 Country Background

The Kingdom of Cambodia is a constitutional monarchy located in Southeast Asia with a sub-national administration of 24 provinces in addition to the Capital City Phnom Penh. It has a population of 15,552,211 people, with 46,6 per cent below the age of 25 years and 29.4 per cent below the age of 15 years. In the last decade, the Royal Government of Cambodia has strengthened peace and political stability, which in turn have boosted stable economic growth. The Rectangular Strategy of the Royal Government of Cambodia has contributed to stabilizing macro-economic features in the short time and medium term with 2.5% inflation rate. Life expectancy among Cambodia's population has increased from 62.4 in 2008 to 75.5 in 2019, while infant mortality rate has reduced from 26 among 1,000 live births to 19 in 2019. The literacy and numeracy rate among Cambodian population at 7 years of age and above has increased from 78.4 per cent in 2008 to 88.7 per cent in 2019 and adult literacy rate in Cambodia has increased from 77.6 per cent in 2008 to 87.7 per cent in 2019. More specifically, urban adult literacy rate was 93.3 per cent while rural adult literacy rate was 83.8 per cent². This progress is especially remarkable given Cambodia's recent history. The legacy of insecurity from the 1970s lasted well into the 1990s, while the destruction of family life under the Khmer Rouge continues to resonate today.

Moreover, the country reached lower middle-income status in 2016, based on rapid economic growth and significant investments in social development from the early 1990s and aspiring to attain Upper Middle-Income status by 2030 and High-Income status by 2050. Indeed, Cambodia has become one of the fastest-growing economies in the world with an average growth rate of 8% between 1998 and 2018, which remained strong also in 2019 (7.1%)³. Nevertheless, COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted Cambodia's economy in 2020, eroding the most important economic sectors: tourism, manufacturing exports, and construction, thus seriously hindering the growth outlook and potentially increasing poverty in the Country⁴. Indeed, while in 2009 Cambodia achieved the Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty and the proportion of Cambodians living in poverty fell from 47.8% in 2007 to 13.5% in 2014, according to the last statistics from the Asian Development Bank, 12.9% of the population was still living under the National Poverty Line in 2018⁵, the majority of them living in rural areas. Therefore, the exposure to socio-economic and natural shocks may product the resurgence of the poverty rate by affecting various areas of life at the

¹ Five projects were indicated by the TOR, additional three projects were selected by the Evaluation Management Team during the inception phase of the evaluation.

² Source of this information is the Royal Government of Cambodia.

³ The World Bank, Cambodia Economic Update: Recent Economic Developments and Outlook, May 2019.

⁴ The World Bank, Cambodia Economic Update: Restrained Recovery - Special Focus Adapting to COVID-19 in an Uncertain World, November 2020.

⁵ Asian Development Bank, Basic Statistics 2020, April 2020.

same time, such as education, health and participation, considering that poverty stands out as a multidimensional phenomenon.

Cambodia's long-term development vision is currently guided by the Rectangular Strategy (RS) for Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency, now in its fourth phase, together with the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2019–2023, which makes the RS's agenda operational and guides Cambodia's path towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In terms of **legal framework for social protection**, the Royal Government of Cambodia recently committed towards enhanced social protection schemes, acknowledging the relevance of poverty reduction and better living standards in shaping the future of the country. In 2017, the Council of Ministers endorsed the National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF) 2016-2025, an overarching social insurance, social assistance and health protection programme which aims to support vulnerable people through integrated social protection services. For its proper implementation, the NSPPF is complemented by a National Social Protection Council chaired by the Minister of Economy and Finance. In particular, while standardising the existing social protection system, the NSPPF entails cash transfers for children and pregnant women, scholarships and allowances for people with disabilities.

Nevertheless, **a significant proportion of the population is disadvantaged by a lack of adequate services**, including access to education and health centres, as well as scarce investment in public infrastructures. To name but a few, eight out of ten people in the poorest rural households still defecate in the open, and one in two rural health facilities does not have an adequate water supply throughout the year⁶. Persevering inequalities, shocks and inefficiencies within the socioeconomic system are also challenging people's vulnerability to food insecurity. Undernutrition persists as a public health concern in the country counting some 2.2 million undernourished people in the year 2017-2019⁷. These facts classify Cambodia as a country with "serious hunger"⁸. This situation is further exacerbated by the fact that Cambodia ranks as the 8th most at-risk country exposed to natural disasters⁹, as the Country has historically experienced recurring floods and droughts. The aftermath of extreme weather severely damages both the agricultural production and the stability of the country's food system¹⁰, leaving thousands of people in food insecurity¹¹.

As regards **child rights** in particular, Cambodia has made considerable advancements since the 1990s, with the mention dramatic decreases in under-five mortality rates and infant mortality. Maternal mortality has also fallen threefold, and life expectancy continues to improve. Sound policy development and implementation and the investment of Government and international resources have all contributed to these social development gains. Despite overall progress, **vulnerability and deprivation among children remain very high**. Socio-economic factors such as poverty, inadequate education of caregivers, orphan status and poor living conditions pose several challenges. Family dysfunction and separation cause further difficulties. Despite comprehensive progress in human development, Cambodia's growth is still hampered by persistent socioeconomic inequalities which affect especially the most vulnerable people, including women, children and people with disabilities.

A formative evaluation of UNICEF's Child Protection Programme concluded that "Cambodia's history of armed conflict and political instability has had a heavy impact on children and their families ... Many survivors from that generation remain traumatised or victimised by this legacy"¹². The destruction of social and physical infrastructure has further challenged recovery. As a result, despite the above-mentioned progress, Cambodia still performs poorly compared to other nations in the sub-region, in terms of access to services, food security, levels of poverty, gender equality, disability inclusion, and levels of violence. And these challenges have been intensified by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the potential to reverse important gains.

⁶ UNICEF, UNICEF Cambodia Country Programme 2019-2023 – Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, August 2019.

⁷ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and others, The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020: Transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets, 2020.

⁸ World Food Programme, Cambodia Country Strategic Plan (2019-2023), February 2019.

⁹ World Economic Forum, The Global Risks Report 2017.

¹⁰ World Bank Group, Cambodia: Sustaining Strong Growth for the Benefit of All. Systematic Country Diagnostic, May 2017.

¹¹ Floodlist, Cambodia – Floods Affect Over 240,000 in 19 Provinces, October 2020.

¹² UNICEF - Coram International, Formative Evaluation on the UNICEF Cambodia Child Protection Programme 2016-2018, 2018.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Violence Against Children (VAC) is a worldwide problem. The 2020 Global Status Report on Preventing Violence Against Children found that, at the global level, one out of two children – or an estimated one billion children – aged 2-17 is a victim of various forms of violence every year¹³. Violence against children remains largely unreported and punishment of perpetrators is rare, with physical abuse some seventy-five times higher than official data would indicate, and sexual abuse thirty times higher¹⁴. VAC is detrimental to all aspects of a child's development and has lifelong repercussions, including further violence against children, patterns of risk behaviours, and mental health challenges¹⁵.

A survey was conducted on violence against children in Cambodia in 2013 (CVACS). The survey covered males and females aged 13-24 to establish lifetime prevalence and current prevalence (12 months prior to the study). The survey found that over half of all children had been subject to physical violence from an intimate partner, parent or adult relative, or other community member. Some one-quarter had been subjected to emotional violence, with overlap between physical and emotional abuse. Over 5% of those aged 13-17 reported at least one experience of childhood sexual abuse. In most cases violence was not once off and occurred over time. Violence was common for both girls and boys, although perpetrators differed and age at first abuse varied¹⁶.

In elaborating the forms of violence common in Cambodia, the Action Plan notes key determinants of violence in the country. Noting that VAC is 'driven by multiple factors at the family, community, and societal level(s)' (page 4), it notes key determinants as:

- Those with authority over children exercising this authority through physical violence
- The acceptability of many forms of physical violence as necessary discipline
- Lack of knowledge of, or practical experience with, other forms of discipline
- Lack of accountability for perpetrators of sexual violence, who often continue to exercise fear as a weapon against reporting
- Non-recognition of emotional violence as violence
- Children engaged in bullying without consequence
- The anonymity of online bullying protecting cyber-bullies
- Neglect arising from a range of factors, including lack of examples of positive parenting, the stresses of single parenting, teenage pregnancy, having to care for a child that is not yours and that you did not want or expect to care for, inadequate resources to care for children, and the exercise of negative power over children. In recent decades in Cambodia this has included sending children to facilities for institutional care for a range of reasons
- Child marriage arising from lack of access to family planning and high levels of teenage pregnancy, poor access to education and health services especially among girls, social norms especially in minority communities that accept child marriage especially if it gives economic advancement to the broader family, and child neglect
- Children involved in excessive labour and in dangerous working conditions arising from what the Action Plan refers to as 'socio-economic conditions and social attitudes', children living in very low-income households where the need for income supplementation is extreme
- Children trafficked for economic gain
- Children whose conditions or circumstances make them especially at risk of violence (disabilities, residential care, children living and/or working on the streets, sexual minorities, migrant children and children of migrant families, children from ethnic minorities, children in contact with the law, etc.

These sometimes pattern differently across boys and girls, with boys especially likely to be bullied in schools and to face harsh physical punishment, and being subject to sexual violence at rates as high as girls despite

¹³ WHO (2020). Global status report on preventing violence against children, World Health Organisation, Geneva, Switzerland.

¹⁴ WHO (2016). INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children, World Health Organisation, Geneva, Switzerland

¹⁵ DRN (2015). Protecting Children from Violence: A Comprehensive Evaluation of UNICEF's Strategies and Programme Performance, prepared by Development Researchers' Network, Rome, Italy, for the United Nations Children's Fund, New York

¹⁶ Steering Committee on Violence Against Children (2014). Findings from Cambodia's Violence Against Children Survey 2013. Government Commitment to End Violence Against Children, prepared under the supervision of the Steering Committee on Violence Against Children, Secretariat: UNICEF Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

little recognition of the risk among many stakeholders. Girls face the heaviest burdens associated with teenage pregnancy and child marriage, withdrawal from school and engagement in child labour, and trafficking.

Internationally, in 2015 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the global framework for development. Three are specifically relevant to VAC:

- SDG 16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children
- SDG 5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation
- SDG 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere

Additional SDGs are relevant to child rights more generally, and cover risk factors associated with VAC. These build on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, where Article 19 refers to 'protection from all forms of violence', and where Article 28 on the right to education refers to the absence of violence and the threat of violence in the education environment¹⁷.

The international response has been further informed by INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children, which is "an essential tool to help achieve Sustainable Development Target 16.2"¹⁸: I – Implementation and enforcement of laws; N – Norms and values; S – Safe environment; P – Parent and caregiver support; I – Income and economic strengthening; R – Response and support services; and E – Education and life skills.

Cambodia's response to VAC is clearly enabled by the country's ratification of the 1992 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as well as other international rights conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Rights of Indigenous People.

The national legislative environment has been strengthened over time, with legislation on violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect, education, protection, family life and alternative care, and the protection of children in contact or in trouble with the law. There are laws and a number of statutes that protect children and regulate their rights within the country's legal framework, starting from articles 31, 47, 48 and 73 of the Cambodian Constitution that provide the basis for the protection of all children, requiring the State to recognise and respect human rights conventions and to protect children's rights¹⁹.

In particular, in order to face specific types of violence against children, the Royal Government of Cambodia has issued separate Action plans, including i) the National Action Plan on the Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labour (2016 – 2025), overseen by the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, which aims at creating a roadmap to the complete eradication of the worst forms of child labour by 2025 in various sectors and adopts an integrated, cross-sectoral approach to child labour reduction, while envisaging the active involvement of all key stakeholders; and ii) the National Action Plan on the Suppression of Human Trafficking, Smuggling, Labour and Sexual Exploitation. Particularly important is also the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women adopted by the Ministry of Women's Affairs which aims at the reduction of violence against women and girls through four focus areas, that is: prevention, legal protection and multi-sectoral services, formulation and implementation of laws and policies, and review, monitoring and evaluation.

Cambodia's framework for child protection has been further enabled by the establishment of a response infrastructure involving state and non-state actors at national and sub-national levels.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the status of VAC worldwide, especially increasing the risk of children being vulnerable to within-family violence perpetrated by parents and caregivers and to forms of online abuses with long-term detrimental repercussions. A number of research papers and studies have been conducted and are currently conducted in Cambodia, looking at COVID-19 impacts, including its

¹⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

¹⁸ WHO (2016). INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children, World Health Organisation

¹⁹ The existing Cambodian National Laws and Policies on Children's Rights comprise specific instruments such as the National Action Plan on Child Development (2016-2018), the National Social Protection Strategy for the Poor and Vulnerable, the National Strategic Development Plan, the Juvenile Justice Law (2016), but also laws on domestic violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect, laws on education and welfare; laws on family and alternative care, and laws on the justice system. All these documents include elements related to the protection of children in different aspects of their lives.

consequences on child protection. In particular, partners on the ground have reported negative impacts on different aspects of child wellbeing, including violence.

2 Object of the Evaluation: The Cambodia Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children 2017-2021

2.1 Overview

Cambodia was the first country in East Asia and the Pacific to undertake the already mentioned national prevalence study on violence against children. The results of the 2013 Survey (CVACS) offered insights into the level and nature of violence against children in Cambodia, and helped to marshal attention and resources aimed at reducing levels of violence, and in providing services to affected children and, as relevant, families. In response to the findings of the CVACS and following the INSPIRE strategies for ending violence against children, 13 ministries and institutions presented the Core Commitment to Prevent and Respond to Violence against Children in Cambodia, which informed the drafting of an **Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children (2017-2021)**, as part of a larger effort to strengthen the national child protection system, both in terms of child-friendly prevention strategies, as well as improved service provision for all Cambodians, especially for children, both boys and girls, who experience violence. A multi-sectoral coalition involving state and non-state actors, led by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY) formed a Steering Committee²⁰ and oversaw the preparation of the Action Plan, herein after referred to as the Plan.

The Executive Summary in the Action Plan notes that “The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has set a strong resolve in this Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children 2017-2021 (Action Plan) to join the global movement to end violence against children”, with the Executive Summary concluding that “The RGC and many multi-sectoral stakeholders all have important roles to play in implementing the Action Plan and shaping Cambodia’s future as one in which all children are protected and can live free of violence”²¹. To this end, the Plan covers the following types of VAC: physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence, child neglect, child marriage, child labour, child trafficking, and online child sexual exploitation. It also highlights how risk of VAC varied across circumstances, and specifically for Children Living with Disabilities and HIV, Children in Residential Care, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Children, Children Living or Working on the Streets, Out-of-School Children, Child Migrants and Children of Migrating Families, Children Living in Rural or Remote Areas, Children from Indigenous or Ethnic or Religious Minority communities, Children in Contact with the Law, and Children of Incarcerated Women.

On the basis of these key principles and of the overall aim, the Plan elaborated **five strategic areas**:

- Co-ordination and co-operation – to ensure an effective response (Strategic Area I)
- Primary prevention – focused on making the environment less conducive for violence to occur (Strategic Area II)
- Multi-sectoral child protection response – ensuring that all sectors commit to child protection (Strategic Area III)
- Law and policy formulation – ensuring a legal and policy environment that can affect prevention and respond to VAC (Strategic Area IV)
- Monitoring and evaluation – carefully and accurately tracking activities and outputs, tracking progress against outcomes, and considering impacts, learning from what works and what does not, and sound and effective knowledge management (Strategic Area V).

²⁰ The Steering Committee on Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children issued the Plan and was then dissolved. Membership included the lead Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation and the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, as well as Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Tourism, Cambodia National Council for Children, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Interior, National AIDS Authority, Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Cult and Religion.

²¹ Royal Government of Cambodia (2017). Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children 2017-2021, the Steering Committee on Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children, Royal Government of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. (page viii)

In the framework of Strategic Area I - Coordination and Cooperation, in July 2019, a **Steering Committee (SC)** was established by the MoSVY to **coordinate the implementation of the Action Plan**. The committee is chaired by the MoSVY and includes representatives from 12 ministries, UNICEF and NGOs. There is one permanent vice chair and four vice chairs of the SC. A **Secretariat** was established under the Steering Committee to be responsible for day-to-day administrative support to the Steering Committee. Moreover, **three Technical Working Groups (TWGs)**, as showed by figure 1, were established under the Steering Committee to implement and monitor the progress under each strategic area of intervention (see Annex C for further details).

In addition to the above governmental structure, the **key partners** involved in the implementation of the Action Plan include UNICEF, Save the Children, World Vision, Child Fund Cambodia, Plan International, Friends International and its Partnership Programme of the Protection of Children (3PC), Terre des Hommes, Social Services Cambodia, Action Pour les Enfants (APLE), Child Helpline Cambodia, Improving Cambodia's Society through skilful parenting, Family Care First | REACT. In particular, UNICEF holds a key role in supporting the Steering Committee in leading and coordinating the implementation of the Action Plan.

Figure 1: AP's Steering Committee and TWGs

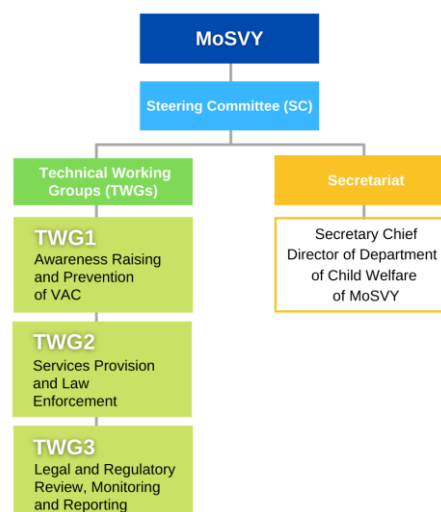
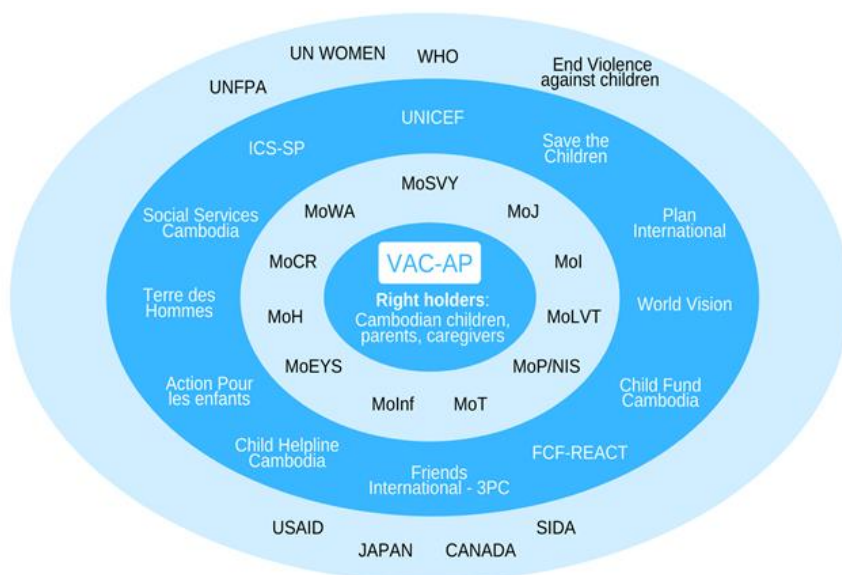


Figure 2: Stakeholders' map



The stakeholder map in figure 2 provides an oversight of the **Action Plan's key stakeholders**, namely the relevant Ministries of the Royal Government of Cambodia, UNICEF and the above-mentioned implementing partners. Moreover, it includes other actors engaged in child protection in Cambodia. Additional details are included in Annex E.

The Action Plan has a **nationwide scope** while the individual interventions have different focal provinces including *Phnom Penh, Kandal, Preah Sihanouk, Siem Reap, Battambang, Kratie, Ratanakiri, Monduliri, Kampong Cham, Stung Treng, Praeh Vihear, Tbong Khmum, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Speu, Prey Veng, Kampot*.

As far as concerns the costing of the Action Plan in terms of resources spent in its design, planning and following implementation, the Ministries are responsible for securing funding for violence against children activities through support from national budget or development partners, the private sector, civil society and other donors.

2.2 Objectives and Outcomes

The overall **Impact** of the VAC Action Plan is as follows: "violence against all children in Cambodia, especially those at increased risk, is reduced through increased prevention interventions, improved response, increased access to quality services, and multi-sectoral coordination and cooperation". There are two impact indicators:

- Impact Indicator 1: Reduction of prevalence of physical, emotional, and sexual violence experienced by children in Cambodia.
- Impact Indicator 2: Percentage of the Cambodian population disapproving of all violence against children in all settings (home, school, community).”

For each strategic area, the Plan identifies the following **objectives** and elaborates desired **outcomes**, which are listed in Annex C:

- Strategic Area 1: Coordination and Cooperation – Reduce violence against children through a multi-sectoral institutional framework for child protection, coordinating primary prevention and response strategies with ministries and institutions targeting key actors and settings for positive change
- Strategic Area 2: Primary Prevention – Reduce violence against children in the home, schools, communities and in the media through a multi-sectoral coordinated primary prevention strategy with ministries and institutions targeting key actors and sectors for positive change
- Strategic Area 3: Multi-Sectoral Child Protection Response – Respond to violence against children by strengthening capacity of social service providers (health, education, justice and child protection) to provide quality services that protect girls and boys who have experienced, witnessed, or are at risk of violence
- Strategic Area 4: Law and Policy Formulation – Reduce violence against children by strengthening legislative and policy frameworks to prevent and protect children against all forms of violence, abuse and neglect
- Strategic Area 5: Monitoring and Evaluation - Reduce violence against children by developing a comprehensive system for data collection and monitoring, evaluation, and reporting on violence experienced by children in Cambodia.

2.3 Results Framework and Theory of Change

A **Results Framework** was developed by each strategic area and objective, and then by outcome and outcome indicators, with a table thereafter covering outputs, associated indicators, activities associated with these indicators, lead institutions and supporting institutions, and the timeframe for the five-year Plan period. The Results Framework was informed by a Theory of Change (ToC) developed earlier in 2017 and thereafter incorporated into the Action Plan itself (please refer to Annex D for the full ToC).

The Theory of Change (ToC) presented in the Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to VAC 2017-2021 is a **country-level Theory of Change**, which goes beyond the scope and is not specific to only this VAC Action Plan. During its development, existing good practices in the field of prevention and response to VAC were taken into consideration, including the 2013 survey on VAC in Cambodia, the UNICEF document “Six Strategies for Action”²², and the INSPIRE document.²³ The ToC also considered relevant national policies including the 2014-2018 National Plan of Action to Prevent Violence Against Women²⁴ as well as the 2016-2018 National Action Plan for Early Child Development²⁵. UNICEF Global Theory of Change for the 2014-2017 Strategic Plan²⁶ and the UNICEF-Cambodia Country Programme (2016-2018)²⁷ were also considered.

An initial step was to develop a conceptual framework to consider the key determinants of VAC, substantially informed by the international literature but also by the 2013 VAC survey, and factors that can effectively mitigate violence. Key strategies were thereafter identified, and discussed in workshops in 2016 in Cambodia. These involved national and provincial officials and civil society stakeholders, and helped inform the work of four Technical Working Groups that proceeded with the development of the Action Plan under the Steering Committee on Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children.

The Theory of Change was intended to serve as a guiding framework for the response to violence against children. Given that the VAC Action Plan is central to programming for preventing and responding to VAC

²²https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Ending_Violence_Against_Children_Six_strategies_for_action_EN_9_Oct_2014.pdf

²³ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/inspire-seven-strategies-for-ending-violence-against-children>

²⁴ <https://cambodia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/NAPVAW2014-2018%28Eng%29.pdf>

²⁵https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/planipolis/files/ressources/cambodia_early_childhood_national_action_plan_2014-2018.pdf

²⁶ https://www.unicef.org/strategicplan/files/2014-CRP_14-Theory_of_Change-7May14-EN.pdf

²⁷ <https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/Child%20Protection%20UNICEF%20Country%20Programme.pdf>

in Cambodia, alignment between the ToC and the Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to VAC has been seen as key to the Action Plan. Conversely, the efficacy of Action Plan implementation should help test assumptions contained in the Theory of Change. As a result, the Theory of Change is **expected to be updated** through consultative sessions carried out during the preparation of the next VAC Action Plan.

3 Purpose, Objectives, Scope and Users of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to “understand and measure the extent to which the Violence Against Children Action Plan has been implemented and how well it has been implemented to tackle violence against children”. Therefore, the exercise evaluated **the plan as a whole**, rather than all activities covered under the Action Plan. The **summative** nature of the evaluation considers progress during Plan implementation, while the **formative** nature of the evaluation will inform development of the next Action Plan.

The objectives of the evaluation, as specified in the ToR (see Annex X), are to:

1. Assess the extent to which the Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to VAC has **met its specific objectives** (including the identification of enabling factors, barriers and bottlenecks) considering both angles of protection and response as well as assess the extent to which the architecture, leadership roles and structure of the VAC-AP has leveraged resources and partnerships, enabled advocacy and policy influence and used evidence to inform policy decisions.
2. **Review and validate** the **strategies and activities** implemented to prevent and respond to violence against children through the Action Plan, **validate** the **Theory of Change** and **construct a Theory of Action** taking into consideration global frameworks and related strategies such as INSPIRE.
3. Assess the **relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact** of the support provided by national and sub-national authorities as well as by multiple ministries to the implementation of the VAC-AP, including the support provided by UNICEF and other implementing partners.
4. Examine the **coherence** of the VAC-AP and its co-ordination, multi-sectoral linkages and complementary/supplementary relationships between all the stakeholders involved and identify the reason that enable or challenge successful co-ordination.
5. **Document** lessons learned, good practices and innovations.
6. Provide reasonable **conclusions** based on the findings and substantiated by evidence, and clear, specific and actionable **recommendations** to strengthen the implementation of the current Action Plan, and to inform the development of a next Action Plan.

The evaluation **focal scope** was at overall Action Plan level, further informed by the analysis of eight project level actions in the Plan: a) *Clinical handbook*; b) *Child-friendly justice mechanisms, including development of diversion guidelines and child protection commune police desks*; c) *Child protection pagoda programme*; d) *Child protection services provided by 3PC*; e) *Provincial Action Plan to Prevent Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy in Ratanakiri*; f) *National behaviour change communication campaign (Cambodia PROTECT)*; g) *Positive discipline in schools programme*; h) *Positive parenting programme*. The evaluation **temporal scope** considered the Plan period from start-up in 2017 until mid-2020. The evaluation **geographical scope** covered the national and sub-national levels, with a special focus on six provinces that indicated by the ToR (Battambang, Kandal, Phnom Penh, Preah Sihanouk, Siem Reap and Ratanakiri), and where data collection was conducted.

The **main intended evaluation users** comprise the agencies overseeing implementation of the 2017-2021 VAC Action Plan, and those who will be involved in the design of the 2022-2026 VAC Action Plan, including UNICEF and the relevant implementing partners.

Other intended evaluation users, who might read the report and use their main findings, comprise a range of stakeholders engaged in child protection in Cambodia, including both rights-holders (girls and boys, students, adolescents and youth and youth activists, parents, caregivers) and duty-bearers, as further detailed in Annex E.

4 Methodology and Implementation Process

4.1 Overview

The evaluation started in August 2020 and was concluded in June 2021. The process followed three stages: i) Inception phase (August 2020 – November 2020); ii) Research and Data collection phase (November 2020 – January 2021); iii) preliminary findings report and draft and final evaluation report writing (January – June 2021).

The evaluation was intended to follow a theory-based approach, along with the indications provided by the TOR. However, as fully described in Section 5, the overall Theory of Change (ToC) for violence against children that was the initial foundation for the Action Plan did not substantially influence the actual implementation of the Action Plan. Implementation was not systematically linked to -- nor monitored against -- the ToC. As a result, the ToC could not serve as a useful guide for the evaluation of the Action Plan. In addition, the retrospective reconstruction of a Theory of Action was not relevant to the actual problem facing the Action Plan: the disconnect between the ToC and the Action Plan. Consequently, the evaluators used the **Results Framework of the Action Plan for the assessment of the implementation**, as this is what Government and its partners use to guide implementation and consider performance.

The evaluation involved **multi-level research** addressing the national/central level and analysing processes and outcomes at the subnational level at selected locations. The evaluation followed a **non-experimental, multi-methods design**. This included materials assembly and review, including from the eight Action Plan-linked projects that were considered in more detail, interviews with a wide range of duty-bearers at national, local, and district/provincial levels, and engaging with rights-holders and activists at local level. The overall approach was guided by the triangulation of findings, multiple team members coming to an agreement on findings and conclusions and recommendations, conducting sufficient data collection to comfortably drawn conclusions, and ensuring that the widest range of voices were heard.

All this has been aimed at making the evaluation as useful as possible by intentionally applying a **utilization-focused approach**. The evaluation was characterised by the **thorough engagement of stakeholders** through: i) senior level stakeholder engagement throughout the evaluation; ii) extended consultations with implementing agencies, development partners, and informed stakeholders; iii) individual and group discussions with rights-holders; and iv) ensuring that stakeholders were involved in drawing up recommendations for the Action Plan. The evaluators conducted 4 half-day online workshops²⁸ to present findings, conclusions and then discuss draft recommendations to promote a process of co-development of recommendations. Throughout the evaluation process, data collection plans at national and provincial levels were regularly shared with the Evaluation Management Team (EMT) and bi-weekly meetings were held with the EMT in order to discuss progress and results.

The evaluation approach ensured that UNICEF's **core commitments** were considered throughout, including evaluation-focused commitments (utility and utilisation, integrity and honesty, clarity and persuasiveness, and following good practice standards), and process commitments aimed at strengthening policy and programming through the implementation of a human rights-based approach to the evaluation, through due attention to gender and equity, and through direct consideration of vulnerability and exclusion.

4.2 Evaluation Criteria and Questions

As detailed in the TOR, the evaluation was guided by the following OECD/DAC evaluation criteria:

- **Relevance** intended as the extent to which the design and the following implementation of the Plan are in line with the real needs and rights of the Cambodian children, as well as the national policies and priorities, and whether the objectives of the Plan were actually realistic. Relevance is also intended to assess alignment with the global and UNICEF specific strategies against VAC, as well as the suitability

²⁸ i) on 15th of March with the International Reference Group; ii) on the 17th of March with the staff of UNICEF Cambodia; iii) on the 18th of March with the Adolescent and Youth Reference Group (AYRG); and on the 23rd of March with the TWG3 of the Action Plan. During the meetings, the App Mentimeter have been used by the evaluators in order to engage all the participants in the workshops and obtain their opinions on the draft recommendations using live polls.

of the institutional arrangements put in place for the implementation of the Plan. The actual participation of the rights-holders, first the children, in the definition and implementation of the Plan was also assessed.

- **Effectiveness** of the support given by the main national partners and UNICEF to the implementation of the Plan, i.e. extent to which the expected outcomes have been achieved, thus fostering concrete positive changes for the intended beneficiaries as a result; and what factors have facilitated or hindered such achievements.
- **Coherence** is mainly intended by the TOR as external coherence, i.e. the consistency and synergies of the Plan with other interventions carried out by the Government or other partners. This has included assessing complementarity, harmonisation and co-ordination with others, as well as the capacity of forming successful partnerships. It also included the analysis of internal coherence, which addresses the linkages and complementarity between the various actions under the Plan.
- **Efficiency** did not focus on implementation efficiency in terms of expenditures versus spending forecasts, accountability around budgeting and reporting, but rather on cost effectiveness, that is, the best use of resources. This was consistent with the focus of the evaluation on the Action Plan overall, rather than details of its constituent elements.
- **Impact** referred both to progress towards reducing the prevalence of violence against children, increasing response to violence, and strengthened institutional capacities to deliver. Consideration was given to early signs of changes in norms and behaviours, with insights from informed stakeholders on trends that may yield important impacts.
- **Sustainability** of the positive results of the Plan, i.e. the possibility of continued benefits in the long-term, with full ownership by the Government.

In addition, the evaluation duly considered the following cross-cutting themes:

- **Gender, human rights, and equity**, i.e. the extent to which the VAC-AP has integrated gender, human rights and equity principles into the design and implementation of its actions; as well as the extent to which the Plan has actually promoted and attained equity, gender equality and the promotion of human rights, including the inclusion of the most vulnerable groups, like children with disabilities.

The Evaluation Matrix (EM) developed during the inception phase was used as a framework to collect, analyse and assess data and information to answer the evaluation questions. The matrix was subsequently used by the evaluation team as a tool for systematizing the data collection process, identifying gaps in evidence, and developing clear evaluative assessments.

The main evaluation questions under each evaluation criterion are summarized in the table below while the comprehensive EM (sub-questions, information sources, etc.) is included in Annex A.

Table 1: Evaluation criteria and main questions

Criteria	Evaluation Questions	# of sub-questions
Relevance	What is the extent to which the VAC-AP is suited to prevent and respond to violence against children?	6
Effectiveness	How effective has the support been provided by Government and UNICEF and other partners in achieving the outcomes of the VAC-AP?	6
Coherence	To what extent are there synergies and interlinkages between the VAC-AP interventions and other interventions?	4
Efficiency	How efficient was the management of the VAC-AP, to ensure timely and efficient use of resources?	4
Impact	What have the results of the VAC-AP been, positive or negative, intended or unintended?	5
Sustainability	How sustainable have the benefits of the VAC-AP been?	3
Cross-Cutting Considerations	Does the Plan contribute to the attainment of rights, and does the Plan reach varied groups in the appropriate ways?	3

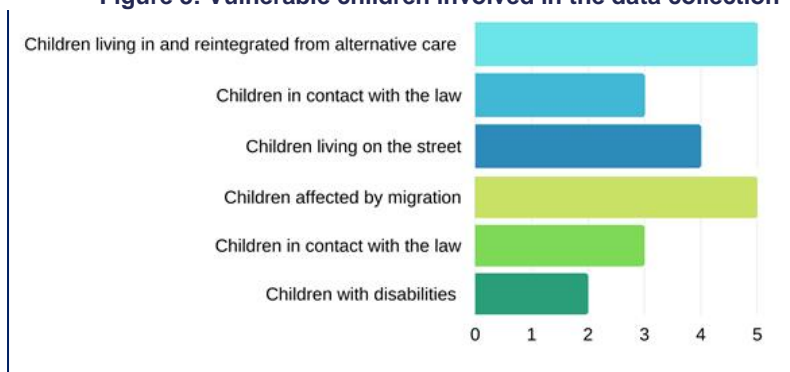
4.3 Data Collection

The evaluation used different data collection methods and tools:

Document review: A wide array of documents were assembled, reviewed and marked up by the evaluation team throughout the all the phases, including: AP's strategic and programmatic documents, reports, knowledge products; MoSVY and the other Ministries' documents; relevant evaluations and analysis; other United Nations agencies' documents on violence against children at international, regional and national level; relevant partners' and donors' reports; relevant literature and websites. A list of documents consulted is provided in Annex G. As mentioned above, eight projects were analysed more in more depth.

Semi structured interviews at individual and focus group levels²⁹: Due to Covid-19 travel restrictions the Team Leader was not able to travel to Cambodia, therefore he conducted remote interviews with stakeholders at national level. The same health emergency caused the fact that many institutional stakeholders in Phnom Penh were not available for face-to-face interviews while preferred online or phone interviews, which have been conducted by the two national consultants starting from 7 December 2020 until mid-January.

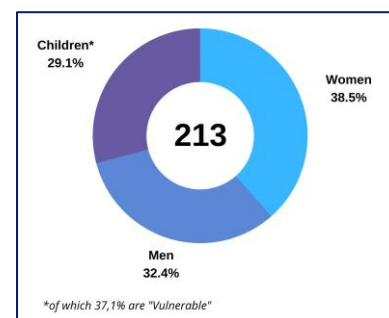
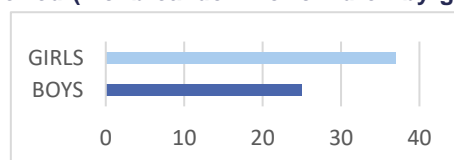
Figure 3: Vulnerable children involved in the data collection



At the sub-national level the data collection was conducted by the national consultants in the six target provinces identified in the ToR (**Phnom Penh, Kandal, Preah Sihanouk, Battambang, Siem Reap, Ratanakiri³⁰**) from 21 of December 2020 to 4 of January 2021, with a pause from 31 December 2020 to 2 of January 2021. The evaluation team consulted **213 individuals** (82 women, 69 men and 62 children, including 37 girls) at the national and sub-national levels through semi-structured

remote and face-to-face interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Stakeholders included rights-holders, duty-bearers, and informed officials and activists. Duty-bearers and informed officials and activists were found at national, provincial and commune levels, while rights-holders were found at community level. In particular, **vulnerabilities were included in the data collection** as showed in figure 3, which represents the vulnerable children interviewed by the team. The figure below provides a snapshot of the stakeholders consulted in this evaluation. A full list of key informants consulted is provided in Annex K, along with disaggregation by gender and by geographical location.

Figure 4: Key Informants interviewed (Inc. breakdown of children by girls and boys)



On the whole, a total of **56% of the persons met and consulted by the evaluation were female** and **15% of the rights-holders interviewed are considered vulnerable** as part of the categories detailed above in figure 3.

When conducting face-to-face interviews and group discussions, the evaluators followed **strict anti-Covid procedures** which comprised the provision of **Covid-kits**, including hand sanitizers and face masks available for the participants, which were used in all the sessions. Moreover, the evaluators ensured the respect of the physical distance in each moment and conducted the interviews outdoor, avoiding closed spaces.

4.4 Data Analysis and Reporting

The evaluation team followed a four-step approach to data analysis, as outlined below:

²⁹ For further details on the data collection methodology please refer to Annex H. All the instruments that were used in the data-collection phase are included in Annex I.

³⁰ List of Sites visited is included in Annex J.

- Step 1: organizing data for analysis coming from both secondary documents and from field interviews and drafting the Matrix on Quality, Sufficiency, Credibility of Data presented in Annex B
- Step 2: sorting findings by evaluation criteria and evaluation questions
- Step 3: reflecting on the findings once initially drafted to ensure coherence in presentation
- Step 4: identifying and filling gaps thereafter

Content analysis constituted the core of the qualitative analysis undertaken by the team: documents, focus group/interview notes and qualitative data emerging from the fieldwork and the zoom-in exercise were analysed. **Comparative analysis** was used to the extent possible, to examine findings across different categories of stakeholders (comparing understandings and perceptions of different categories of stakeholders on the relevance, utility and need of the Action Plan) and to identify best practices and lessons learned. Secondary data collected in the desk review were validated and corroborated through interviews, focus group discussions and survey data; data from interviews and direct observation were analysed in a comparative way, using only the most frequent or common findings as solid evidence, while also recording divergent views when and if appropriate. Team discussions were held regularly to jointly discuss and further triangulate information and validate findings.

A wealth of information was obtained from the interviews that took place at national, international, sub-national and local levels. To ensure adequate attention was devoted to rights-holders, **more detailed information was reported on children**. Detailed tables have been included in annexes by relevant evaluation criteria. This also included findings from parents/caregivers.

A two-step process was followed in report preparation: 1) review of assembled materials, including reference to the inception report and the zoom-in report; and 2) review of field findings. The field instruments (see Annex I) included both questions by evaluation criteria and questions by objectives as well as cross-cutting themes. For analysis of field findings, the information from these sectors was organised into evaluation criteria and sub-question covering all respondents who responded to those questions, tracked by nature of respondent and location of interview. This allowed the inclusion of findings from a wide range of duty-bearers at various levels along with findings from children themselves, parents/caregivers, and local stakeholders when preparing the findings and drawing conclusions. Further, when respondents commented on particular points of relevance to evaluation criteria outside of the specific questions, this was also brought into the write-up. For cross-cutting themes and findings on objectives, these were assembled in a similar fashion.

These findings were briefly summarised in the assembled notes to look for patterns and differences. From there, the assembled findings were split screened with the report for preparation. Following the inclusion of the field evidence that was added to documented findings, a final sweep was made of the documents to fill gaps as possible.

Upon completion of the draft report, the evaluation team considered a **rating scale** to assess the evaluation's conclusions to be able to present a simple statement on progress. The scale did *not* evaluate progress, rather it simply considered how progress was made, or not, against each evaluation criteria. A six-point scale was employed. These are summative ratings, ordinal in nature. They have been assigned based on the team's judgement across a wide range of findings. The ratings were triangulated within the team, i.e. the Team Leader made the initial assessment, which was thereafter reviewed by the other evaluation team members, any differences of opinion were discussed and then the ratings were finalised following this review.

As mentioned above, the development of recommendations followed a participatory approach, i.e. they were initially drafted by the evaluators, jointly discussed with stakeholders in various meetings, thereafter organised around a set of main recommendations and sub-recommendations.

Figure 5: Rating Scale

6	Very positive
5	Somewhat positive
4	Slightly positive
3	Slightly negative
2	Somewhat negative
1	Very negative

4.5 Limitations Encountered in the Evaluation Process and Mitigation Strategies

The following table shows the main limitations encountered by the evaluation team and the ways used to overcome these:

Table 2: Limitations and Means of Mitigation

Limitations	Means of Mitigation
Concerning data collection	
The international team members were not able to travel to Cambodia because of the COVID-19 health emergency	<i>Mitigation measures</i> included the fact that the team has been strengthened by including a second national team member to conduct the data collection. Moreover, the methodology has been adapted to this condition and the Team paid extra attention and devoted additional resources to guarantee that field instrument content and construct validity were adequately transmitted to the field team and that the quality and rigour of data collection was monitored on a consistent basis through communication on a regular basis about the field progress and data gaps to ensure data quality was maintained
The COVID-19 health emergency hindered the availability of the stakeholders both at national and at sub-national level	<i>Mitigation measures</i> put in place by the evaluators included at national level the assurance of flexibility in terms of means to conduct the interviews, giving to the interviewee the full choice about face-to-face or remote interviews Also, at sub-national level, full flexibility was adopted by the team in order to align the availability of the stakeholders in these uncertain times with the data collection needs. Therefore, the schedule has been fully considered with the local authorities
The closure of the schools complicated the access to children in schools	<i>Mitigation measures</i> put in place concerned additional effort of the national team working in collaboration with the Action Plan Focal Points, school principals and teachers and relevant local authorities, such as CCWC, in the target provinces in order to contact children and their families
It was not possible to interview children in detention centres, as planned in the inception phase, because of long processes to obtain the needed authorisations	<i>Mitigation measures</i> put in place concerned the inclusion in the data collection of children that were in detention centres and released after serving their terms
Concerning data analysis	
Existence of data gaps that limited the robustness of some findings, in particular in terms of quantitative data availability	<i>Mitigation measures</i> involved drafting of a detailed Matrix on Quality, Sufficiency, Credibility of Data; comprehensive field instruments with skip prompts to ensure that a range of issues were covered across a subset of interviewees, focused on understanding process results and outcome results. These multiple sources of qualitative data were duly triangulated and interconnected during the analysis.
Data and reporting at Action Plan level was limited, leaving gaps in information availability	
While a 2019 Annual Report was issued for the Action Plan, it was almost entirely comprised of activity and delivery data, without narrative reporting that brought in, for example, reports from Ministries or NGOs working with various programmes. Only a few results were reported	
Data on costs of the Action Plan were not available to the evaluation team	<i>Mitigation measures</i> included the decision, taken during the inception phase, to focus the analysis on cost effectiveness, which is the best use of resources. The analysis has been conducted through desk review and interviews to relevant stakeholders.

4.6 Ethical Protocols and Procedures

The evaluation, like any other data collection, analysis and research activities undertaken or funded by UNICEF (including activities carried out by individual or institutional subcontractors and partners) when involving human subjects or the analysis of sensitive secondary data, was subject to a **formal process of ethics review**. The assessment has been conducted by a recognised and authorised Institutional Review Board (IRB), which issued an approval letter included in Annex L.

This process ensured that **ethical protocols were followed at each step** in the implementation process, including ensuring confidentiality of all interviewees, please refer to Annex L for further details. In particular, the *2020 UNEG ethical standards* guided the evaluation will include the obligations of evaluators

(independence, impartiality, credibility, conflicts of interest, accountability)³¹, and the ethical safeguards for participants appropriate for the issues described (respect for dignity and diversity, right to self-determination, fair representation, compliance with codes for vulnerable groups, confidentiality, and avoidance of harm). The UNEG ethical considerations that the team especially considered covered confidentiality, avoidance of harm, and specific attention to engaging with children, following the *UNICEF Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC)*'s guidance.

Main Evaluation Findings

5 Considerations on the Theory of Change

As mentioned in section 2.3., the country level Theory of Change is **expected to be updated** through consultative sessions carried out during the preparation of the 2022-2026 VAC Action Plan. Based on this Plan level evaluation, **observations of relevance for these revisions** are considered here. It should be noted that there is no single preferred approach to the structure or even content of a theory of change. In the case of the VAC Action Plan, the approach comprised a simplified hierarchy linked to logframe language, with the addition of a barriers' analysis, initiatives (rather than 'activities' because the Action Plan functions at a systems level), and reference to underlying conditions. These underlying conditions were not linked with specific outputs and outcomes, but were rather meant to fall across these.

The ToC Report prepared by Coram notes key elements as follows:

- Context for the initiative
- Intended long-term changes anticipated
- Expected sequence of change to lead to desired long-term outcomes
- Core assumptions
- Narrative summary

In their approach to the ToC, Coram included i) Super Impacts, noted as the right to protection as defined by the CRC, and SDGs are met, and thus referring to broader societal effects of changes arising from both the intervention and other country level determinants, and ii) Impacts referring to 'long-term, cumulative effects of programmes/interventions over time on what they ultimately aim to change'. The impact statement is that 'girls and boys are free from all forms of violence and from the threat of violence'. This covers the contributions of other interventions. They define outcomes as the short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention's outputs. They thereafter refer to outputs delivered by the intervention, barriers and bottlenecks to the intervention, and the sets of initiatives that are intended to yield outputs and outcomes. The outcomes in the Theory of Change are as follows:

1. Social protection is improved to such an extent that the risk of abuse, exploitation and trafficking is reduced or eliminated for all children (and their families)
2. Children have access to quality early childhood, primary and secondary education at child-friendly schools and equal opportunity to access higher education and vocational and technical training
3. All forms of violence against children are deemed unacceptable in all contexts and circumstances. All forms of violence against children are actively and effectively sanctioned at all levels
4. Power relations and control over resources are gender balanced. Girls and boys exercise agency and autonomy over their bodies and lives
5. Governments, officials, teachers, parents, children, and other key stakeholders are aware of and understand children's rights to be protected from violence. Child victims of abuse can access justice safely without discrimination or fear of reprisal
6. Victims of abuse receive adequate legal support, rehabilitation services, and life skills training. The cycle of violence is broken

³¹ For further details, please refer to Annex L.

7. A child protection system is in place that is adequately funded, staffed, has appropriate facilities (e.g. ability to investigate and access when a child is referred as a victim of violence) and appropriate alternative care options in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Given that the Action Plan itself has sixteen outcomes that vary from, but align with, these outcomes, and given that they are high order long-term goals, these can more appropriately be referred to as *ultimate outcomes*. Reference to 'to such an extent' in Outcome 1, 'all forms' in Outcome 3, 'gender-balanced' in Outcome 4 and others reflect these ultimate outcome statements.

Six outputs were linked to the seven outcomes with Output 6 linked to outcomes 6 and 7, but here again in each case these were essentially higher-order outputs as well, with VAC Action Plan specific outputs more directly linked to activities. These ToC outputs were as follows, with point 6 below consistent with points 6 and 7 above:

1. Social protection is improved so that children (and their families) are less vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and trafficking
2. Children have increased access to quality education at safe and child-friendly kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, as well as increased access to higher education and to vocational and technical training
3. Programmes aimed at raising awareness about the negative consequences of harsh and violent discipline and providing positive alternative discipline techniques reach an increasing number of government officials, teachers, parents, children
4. Programmes aimed at raising awareness about gender equality and non- discrimination reach an increasing number of government officials, teachers, parents, children
5. Programmes aimed at raising awareness about laws prohibiting VAC reach an increasing number of government officials, teachers, parents, and children. Training in the law and its implementation is provided to an increasing number of relevant actors in the justice sector. The legal system is better equipped to prevent, recognise and respond to all forms of VAC
6. Government policies, budgets and human resources are in place to deliver prevention and response services, through the child protection system. Individuals who experienced abuse have increased access to legal, rehabilitation and life skills services, and have reduced perpetration/re- victimisation propensity

Those **key informants interviewed** that had been involved with the development of the Theory of Change (ToC) reported high levels of satisfaction with the way in which it was developed, and the resulting content. Nevertheless, despite high levels of satisfaction in this regard, when asked about how the ToC influenced *implementation* of the VAC Action Plan, there were three basic findings:

1. Even those involved with the VAC Action Plan design were unlikely to refer to the ToC as implementation proceeded, nor report against it;
2. The majority of key informants were unaware of the ToC, or unaware of its contents;
3. Programmes falling under the VAC Action Plan reported development of their own ToCs which considered the ToC in the VAC Action Plan itself.

This is not too unexpected, given that theories of change are often not used in programme implementation in any meaningful manner. Rather, results frameworks or logframes tend to be the focus. In addition, the evaluators assessed that the **Theory of Change itself did not include testable hypotheses** that would have allowed testing of the veracity of the ToC itself and would have supported learning. By including these hypotheses, it would thus have been possible to report against VAC Action Plan progress operationally (linked to the Annual Report), as well as against commitments such as Cambodia being a Pathfinding Country and considering progress against the INSPIRE Strategy.

This has not happened and, conversely, the ToC has not had any substantial influence on the **VAC AP implementation**, as reported above. **It follows that the ToC could not be considered as a useful guiding tool for the evaluation.** As previously detailed (see Section 2.3), the evaluators deemed that a retrospective reconstruction of a new ToC, more directly derived from the implementation of the VAC AP, would have not been useful either, going beyond the scope and the resources of the evaluation.

It is however underlined that tracking the efficacy of the ToC would serve as a valuable tool for reflection and learning as implementation proceeded. This includes the annual Action Plan review reporting cycle, which

would then include consideration of these higher order effects. All this is **discussed further in section 13 on Recommendations**.

6 Relevance

6.1 Main Relevance Question

What is the extent to which the VAC-AP is suited to prevent and respond to violence against children?

Relevance considered the extent to which the design and implementation of the Plan are in line with the real needs and rights of the Cambodian children, as well as the national policies and priorities, and whether the objectives of the Plan were actually realistic. Relevance also assesses alignment with the global and UNICEF specific strategies against VAC, as well as the suitability of the institutional arrangements put in place for the implementation of the Plan. Relevance also considers the involvement of rights-holders in the design and implementation of the Action Plan.

6.2 Findings

The main relevance finding regarding the suitability of the VAC Action Plan is linked to the **careful Action Plan development** (Evaluation Question R1). This included the systematic development of the Action Plan, based on considered attention to VAC in the 2010s, the 2013 VAC survey, Cambodia being part of the ASEAN regional initiative on VAC³², Cambodia's development of a range of policies aimed at child protection and strengthening child rights, international and regional protocols, and consideration of what has worked elsewhere. The review of documentation as well as the results of key informant interviewees asked about relevance described aspects of this **methodical, careful approach** to Plan design. As it is later discussed in terms of coherence, features of the Action Plan design lent themselves to supporting relevance. The relevance issues are as follows:

- Clear organisation of the Action Plan under five strategic areas allowed various actors to ensure that they could inform Action Plan design. This was especially important in considering the roles of various ministries, so that they could see this as relevant to their sectoral mandate.
- Extended stakeholder engagement and wide-ranging consultations helped ensure relevant content in the Action Plan.
- Because this was an Action Plan, rather than a single programme, which is relevant to a broad-based national plan in preventing and responding to VAC and systems strengthening were considered in this planning framework.
- Political will and the considered attention to VAC noted earlier were conducive to various relevant ministries/agencies engaging with the Action Plan design process.

The Plan's design continued indeed to build on the momentum that emerged from the VAC survey (Evaluation Question R1), the core commitments on Prevention and Response to VAC by various ministries, the assessment of the economic and health consequences of VAC³³, and international support. This had three main design stage effects:

- An Action Plan that was a **consensus document** that brought together a wide range of actions falling under a single framework.
- An Action Plan that considered how to **'fit best'** with sector priorities, national planning, and child protection more generally, and that gave due attention to international commitments, as reflected in the contents of the Action Plan itself.

³² On 27 November 2015, the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children (RPA/EVAC) was adopted by the ASEAN Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. By adopting the RPA/EVAC, the ASEAN member states cemented their commitment to the 2013 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Violence against Children. The RPA/EVAC contains concrete implementation plans to end all forms of violence against children from 2016 to 2025.

³³ Fang, X. (2015). The Economic Burden of the Health Consequences of Violence Against Children in Cambodia, Ministry of Women's Affairs and UNICEF Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

- An Action Plan that set forth **strategies to coordinate work** in VAC, including mechanisms to avoid redundancy and encourage collaboration.

This continued into implementation, largely due to: 1) continued political will, Government investment of time in VAC programming, and Government agreeing to participate in international normative frameworks aimed at reducing VAC; 2) support from a range of development actors, including donors -- led by UNICEF - - and international non-governmental organisations in heavily engaging in the design and implementation of the VAC Action Plan, and 3) commitment of Government officials at sub-national level in VAC programming being implemented in their areas, working with line ministries, international NGOs, civil society organisations and community.

Strengthening relevance, the Plan also devoted considered attention to vulnerability to violence, the importance of nuancing approaches to both prevention and response, and considerations of targeting to reach hard-to-reach groups. One notable intervention that reflected this careful consideration was the programme in the remote north-eastern Ratanakiri Province targeting teenage pregnancy and child marriage, both high among ethnic minorities that predominate in the Province. Another intervention included programmes to support children in contact with the law with an emphasis on diversion.

In terms of Action Plan **scope**, there are three key findings: 1) the Action Plan was able to competently describe what needed attention and where specific gains could be made across INSPIRE areas, rather than presenting an overwhelming array of priorities; 2) the focal areas under the Action Plan covered the critical areas for preventing and responding to VAC and strengthening the structures required to do this; 3) the technical scope of the Action Plan across types of violence, while broad, was well considered in the context of what other policies, strategies, plans and programming was in place or was being put into place; and 4) implementation of the Action Plan was sufficiently focused in geographical scope in the programming involving international NGOs and their civil society and government partners.

For Action Plan **approach**, there are five key findings (Evaluation Question R2): 1) the multi-sectoral approach of the Action Plan is critical for success and there has been a considerable investment of time and energy in this regard from the very beginning; 2) while critical to success, the multi-sectoral nature of the Action Plan heightens both the complexity of implementation and risks associated with relying on a wide range of actors who need to commit time and resources to the effort; 3) facilitating the development of close working relationships at provincial, district and commune levels helped to build both relationships and trust, central to the sustainability of the VAC response; 4) linking across sectors was especially complicated for responding to violence, involving commune level committees, the health sector, police, social workers, local civil society, international non-governmental organisations and others in complex ways; and 5) careful attention to programming adaptation was critical to meeting the varied needs of girls and boys and various vulnerable groups. Taken together, the scope and approach of the Action Plan proved relevant to systems strengthening, prevention and response.

In terms of activities and strategies being consistent with **objectives** (Evaluation Questions R2 and R3; more detail is provided in Annex O), none of the materials reviewed nor interviews conducted suggested inconsistencies. Even the inclusion of activities that were not always seen as core to VAC programming -- notably child marriage, early pregnancy and child labour -- or often overlooked in VAC programming -- online VAC -- were considered in the documentation around the Action Plan and consistent with the intent of the VAC Action Plan, and with good practice in VAC. The five strategic areas of coordination and cooperation, primary prevention, multi-sectoral child protection response, law and policy formulation, and monitoring and evaluation are consistent with good practice internationally.

With regard to **institutional arrangements** (Evaluation Question R4), relevance considered whether these arrangements were consistent for the operationalization of the Action Plan. From a relevance perspective, two aspects need consideration:

- 1) At national level, how can institutional arrangements support effective operationalization of the Plan?
- 2) At sub-national level, how can institutional arrangements be enabled to implement the Plan, with due attention to local conditions and needs?

Key informant interviewees knowledgeable about this national level infrastructure tended to be supportive of the structures put into place, and recognised that an Action Plan as complex and multifaceted as this one required both a Steering Committee and effective sub-committees in the TWGs.

Engaging with these agencies was felt to be a worthwhile endeavour, however time consuming. This infrastructure also resulted in relationship building between different actors who were members of the groups. Building these relationships, and building trust, were felt to be vital. The existence of the TWG also supported information sharing, not in any detail, but rather in terms of different agencies understanding the full range of activities underway. Equally important, the Steering Committee and the TWGs are high level bodies aimed at helping to consolidate political will.

At sub-national level, the predominant feeling from those involved in VAC Action Plan implementation was that there were **deficiencies in these structures that undermined the relevance of the Action Plan operationalization**. There was a critical need to build capacity in decentralised government institutions and cross-sectoral committees to be able to handle programme implementation, and do so in a manner appropriate to the local situation. Challenges were considerable, from over-stretched local officials to poor skills sets, from problematic structures (in particular with regard to child protection services where staff shortages and skills were problems) to competing demands. Local authorities had wide remits and were not always properly trained and resourced, or equipped, and child protection has not historically been a priority. In areas of primary prevention such as school-based, facility-based or community-based programming, demands on local resources are limited .

The Commune Committees for Women and Children have emerged to play a critical role in particular in terms of VAC response (Evaluation Question R6), and community-based primary prevention. Key informants recognised the importance of these committees and well as overall community-level governance and community leaders, in the success of VAC programming. They also recognised the importance of engaging with district and provincial authorities in a substantive manner, involving them in decision-making and supporting skills development. The relevance of their engagement, and the focus on these bodies for community-based programming, were evident.

Considering **alignment** (Evaluation Question R5), relevance here considers how well aligned the Action Plan's design and implementation has been aligned with key domestic policies, plans and strategies, as well as international alignment with core conventions and strategies. As a starting point, the Action Plan itself contained a full listing of 'international and Cambodian national legal and policy framework on children's rights in Cambodia'. Contained in Annex II, the Action Plan lists out articles in the Constitution, laws and policies that are relevant to children's rights, and thereafter lists laws, protocols, plans and decrees related to violence abuse exploitation and neglect, education, welfare, alternative care, children involved with the justice system.

Cambodia is a signatory to the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1992), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2012), the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2004), the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2002)³⁴. The Action Plan refers to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as well as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People as well.

The 2019 Annual Report on the VAC Action Plan opens with reference to the Global Movement to End Violence Against Children, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Global Strategic Partnership, INSPIRE, ASEAN and Cambodia's own programming on Prevention and Responses to VAC. It does not, however, report against these. There is a 2019 ASEAN and MoSVY report on Cambodia that reports against the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Children (2016-2025)³⁵ aimed at supporting the 2013 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Elimination of Violence Against Children in ASEAN, which reports against twelve priority areas that align with the VAC Action Plan.

Regarding INSPIRE, the WHO Global Report on VAC noted that 56% of countries support INSPIRE strategies, reflecting the relevance of INSPIRE for planning and tracking the VAC response³⁶. The Phnom Penh Declaration of Commitment to INSPIRE referenced a commitment "to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets to end violence against children, utilising

³⁴ These dates reflect the 'coming into effect' status of each, with some signed years before comment into effect.

³⁵ ASEAN Secretariat (2019). Country Progress Summary Cambodia. Ending Violence Against Children in ASEAN Member States. Mid-Term Review of Priority Areas Under the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Children 2016-2025, prepared by T. Chhorvirith, Cambodia's Representative for Children's Rights to ASEAN with H. Bory, MoSVY, Jakarta, Indonesia.

³⁶ WHO (2020). Global Status Report on Preventing Violence Against Children 2020, World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland. Page 30.

the INSPIRE seven evidence-based strategies for ending violence against children as an overarching framework to inform the design and implementation of interventions³⁷.

The Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to VAC is well aligned with the SDGs, as included in the Action Plan itself. The two key clauses fall under SDG 16 'promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels'. SDG 16.2 in particular is noted as relevant: 'end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children', as well as 16.1 ('significantly reduce all forms of violence and related deaths everywhere'), 5.2 ('eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres'), and 5.1 ('eliminate harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation'). Cambodia's review of the SDGs³⁸, issued in 2019, refers to the development and adoption of the 2017-2021 VAC Action Plan, and covers progress under SDG 5 on Gender Equality, but not under SDG 16.1 and 16.2³⁹.

The 2019 VAC Action Plan report focused mostly on activities, with very few referring to any results of these activities. For programme reporting, two problems present themselves; 1) any focus on 'results' are focused on positive findings; and 2) even when a report includes discussion of results, this rarely includes information beyond reporting results associated with direct delivery, such as assessing training effectiveness by interviewing trainees prior to their departure. Little reporting measures results thereafter.

Alignment with the 2014-2018 National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP), and the current 2019-2023 NSDP is reflected in NSDP policy priorities and actions associated with child protection, addressing risk factors that are associated with violence against children (poverty, improved health, gender equality, education access and quality, public safety and access to effective justice systems), and against VAC itself. The NSDP also refers to human trafficking and assisting victims through rehabilitation, vocational training and reintegration back into society. One specific responsibility in the NSDP, referenced as a key responsibility of MoSVY, is child welfare and youth rehabilitation. The NSDP also specifies its commitment to meeting its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and specifically promotes the implementation of the VAC Action Plan and the National Action Plan to Prevention Violence Against Women. There is also alignment with the National Action Plan for Child Development.

The 2016-2025 National Social Protection Policy Framework is an overarching social protection strategy that covers contributory social protection programming, non-contributory social protection programming, labour market planning, and access to social services. The Framework includes attention to linking social protection to child protection in programming, including in terms of shock-responsive social protection, strengthening families, and integrated service delivery.

The Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to VAC is also consistent with the Child Protection and Schools Policy of MoEYS, developed in 2016, and the follow-on Child Protection and Schools Action Plan for 2019-2023 so that children can be educated in a safe and equitable learning environment. The Policy makes specific reference to 'child safe' environments, while the School Action Plan and an associated MoEYS-issued 'Endorsed Letter to the Call to Action, End Violence in School: Safe to Learn' which makes specific reference to ending violence in schools. In 2019 the Department of School Health in MoEYS developed a National Policy on School Health that covered physical and emotional health checks for children affected by violence, without discrimination against children's status and background, including disability.

The VAC Action Plan makes specific reference to children living with disabilities as especially vulnerable to violence, and to the negative consequences of violence. It is consistent with the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Policy on Education for Children with Disabilities, and with the National Disability Strategic Plan which focused on strengthening coordination mechanism to deliver for children living with disabilities.

³⁷ MoSVY, WHO and UNICEF (2018). Phnom Penh Statement of the Regional Conference Towards the Implementation of INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children, held in Phnom Penh from 30 October to 1 November 2018, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

³⁸ https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/documents/23603Cambodia_VNR_PublishingHLPF.pdf

³⁹ The Government committed to including SDGs targets 16.1 and 16.2 in the Cambodia SDGs during the mid-term review in 2022.

The VAC Action Plan is also consistent with the 2016 Juvenile Justice Law and the associated Juvenile Justice Law Strategic and Operational Plan. This includes diversion for children in contact with the law, enabled by the development of diversion guidelines, and restorative justice rather than punishment.

The ASEAN report on progress in VAC programming around the region included a country report for Cambodia⁴⁰. The report provides an overview of progress in action areas deemed relevant to the VAC response for each country, covering prevention, protection response and support services, legal framework and justice, capacity building, research and data collection, management coordination monitoring and evaluation, and partnerships and collaboration. The Cambodia report considers progress in each of these areas by core themes. In considering the report as a whole, four points are clear: 1) that the content and approach of the VAC Action Plan is fully consistent with what ASEAN identifies as central to effective VAC programming; 2) that considerable progress has been made since the 'baseline' assessment was conducted in 2016; 3) that the VAC Action Plan was central to this success; ; and 4) the AP is very comprehensive in terms of what forms of violence are covered. Further, the 2020 Global VAC Report highlighted the importance specifically of multi-sectoral collaboration with clear leadership⁴¹.

The Action Plan is also consistent with international protocols and national objectives when it refers to '**all forms of violence**'. It includes definitions that cover a wide range of physical and emotional violence, as well as all forms of sexual violence. This includes bringing into the AP some forms of violence that are often well considered sectorally, including child labour, trafficking, and child marriage.

However, the **issue of what constitutes violence is challenged by social norms** where physical and emotional violence is often divided between 'unacceptable' and 'acceptable' forms. This was reflected in findings from interviews with children themselves, from parents, and from commune level actors. Two boys, aged 12 and 14 in Ratanakiri Province, for example, referred to 'minor beatings by parents when making any mistake' as acceptable, but beating around the head or a 'severe beating' was not. A young man who had been reunited with his family in Kandal Province argued the difference was being beaten because he 'deserved it' versus being beaten when he did not. The former was acceptable, the latter was not. A young woman in Preah Sihanouk noted that beating with an object such as a stick was okay, as long as it didn't leave any bruises. A senior level officer in Government noted that this was indeed a difficult distinction: 'if we raise about the shouting at children being a form of violence, it is unacceptable because they perceive that this concept is western and not relevant to our context or to our culture'. While the above doesn't mean that the Action Plan's definition, which is consistent with international conventions, is wrong, it does raise questions about how it can be implemented in a manner in Cambodia so that goals can be achieved.

With regard to how well the Action Plan's design and implementation has '**listened to**' rights-holders, findings from the evaluation highlight that **Cambodia has endeavoured to engage rights-holders in VAC programme planning and implementation**. The launch of Cambodia as a Pathfinding Country⁴² included three children's meetings led by three child and youth networks: Child Advocacy Network, Adolescent and Youth Reference Group, and Cambodia Child and Youth Movement for Child Rights. Other groupings included the Child and Youth Network and the Child Advocate Network. Interviews with these groups, as well as with those implementing partners who engage with these groups and those who support them highlight high levels of knowledge of Action Plan intentions, coupled with agreement with the objectives around VAC. It is also evident that these actors have some reach in their communities, including in schools, and that many remain activists committed to child rights.

⁴⁰ ASEAN Secretariat (2019). Country Progress Summary Cambodia. Ending Violence Against Children in ASEAN Member States. Mid-Term Review of Priority Areas Under the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Children 2016-2025, prepared by T. Chhorvirith, Cambodia's Representative for Children's Rights to ASEAN with H. Bory, MoSVY, Jakarta, Indonesia.

⁴¹ WHO (2020). Global Status Report on Preventing Violence Against Children 2020, World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland. Page 21.

⁴² C. Flagothier (2019). Launch of Cambodia as a Pathfinding Country. Phnom Penh, 12 September 2019, UNICEF Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

7 Effectiveness

7.1 Main Effectiveness Question

How effective has the support been provided by Government and UNICEF and other partners in achieving the outcomes of the AP to Prevent and Respond to VAC?

Effectiveness considered the support given by the main national partners and UNICEF to the implementation of the Plan, i.e. extent to which the expected outcomes have been achieved, thus fostering concrete positive changes for the intended beneficiaries as a result; and what factors have facilitated or hindered such achievements.

7.2 Findings

The **2019 Progress Report on the VAC Action Plan reported findings by outcome**, although not necessarily by outcome indicator (Evaluation Question Effect1; also see Annex M). Yet in others it speaks more to activity descriptions or intentions. While it is likely that this reporting will be strengthened for the 2020 report, this was not available for this evaluation. Using the 2019 report, coupled with feedback from key informants and other reports and documentation, the following list provides an overview of what is known about the 16 outcomes (a full table is included in Annex M). A summary of findings is as follows:

- 2 outcomes (school programme; health care): offer complete/mostly complete evidence;
- 8 outcomes (coordination; media; positive parenting; protection; institutional and legislation; corporal punishment; prevention; evidence): offer partial evidence;
- 6 outcomes (legislative and policy frameworks; multi-sectoral M&E; contact with the law; justice system capacity; sexual violence, national laws); offers little evidence.

An assessment of effectiveness across the sixteen outcomes in the Action Plan suggest progress across most measures, but some gaps associated with Outcome 6 and Outcome 7 on legal improvements since relevant advancements such as the Child Protection Law and related SOPs are still in progress.

In considering the results of the above assessment, there are three key lessons learned:

1. **Only part of the evidence required to assess effectiveness is available**, and some of what exists does not offer a critical assessment of progress.
2. Where evidence is available, it suggests that much of what is being done is still early, and that **more time is required for progress against outcomes to be achieved**
3. **Progress is being made in terms of prevention and protection** but this is beyond change in legislative and policy frameworks, suggesting that **some outcomes may be written too narrowly to report progress**.

Cambodia is the only ASEAN member state to have adopted a national communication strategy to end VAC through the PROTECT programme⁴³

Only a few of the children interviewed noted access to any information on violence against children. Two girls aged 13 and 14 mentioned that they had seen posters around town, and had heard things on the radio, but could not remember the messages themselves. They also noted that they had teachers who discussed violence, explaining what physical and sexual violence was

(1) points to the need to strengthening data collection, aggregation and reporting systems isa considerable task but central to effective knowledge management. (2) highlights that many of the actions being undertaken have taken some time to get underway because of complex processes and the requirement for system change. (3) references the issue of the Action Plan's outcomes being heavily focused on institutional and policy development and less on delivery, despite the actions under the outcomes delivering directly and not just through institutional and policy development. Reconsideration of

the wording of a number of these outcomes, and linking them better to primary prevention and responding to violence may be required.

⁴³ ASEAN Secretariat (2019). Country Progress Summary Cambodia. Ending Violence Against Children in ASEAN Member States. Mid-Term Review of Priority Areas Under the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Children 2016-2025, prepared by T. Chhorvirith, Cambodia's Representative for Children's Rights to ASEAN with H. Bory, MoSVY, Jakarta, Indonesia.

Effectiveness was also assessed by strategic area (also covering Evaluation Question Effect1), covering four of the five strategic areas in the Action Plan. Coordination and cooperation were handled under relevance and coherence.

The first Strategic Area covered here is **primary prevention**⁴⁴. Key findings were as follows:

- Progress was noted across Cambodia PROTECT programme and other programmatic actions focused on communications for awareness raising and attitudinal and behavioural change, training of journalists, prevention of online abuse, child labour, and materials and communications and training focused on positive discipline in classroom management.
- Positive parenting was not felt to be focused on the ‘serious’ cases of violence which were of concern to parents⁴⁵.
- Effective primary prevention accommodates varied risk factors, as well as common myths (e.g., boys are not subject to sexual assault). In reviewing the documents developed for Cambodia PROTECT, the documentation reflects a clear understanding of these attitudes and concerns. This is further shared by findings from discussions with those delivering services around prevention, where many of the same risk factors are identified.
- Government’s commitment to effective programming for Preventing and Responding to VAC is reflected in a number of documents, including documents associated with the Action Plan itself. Cambodia became a Pathfinding Country in 2019.
- UNICEF Cambodia’s Country Programme (2019-2023)⁴⁶ refers to Outcome 3 and shows alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (with specific reference to 5 on gender equality, 8 on decent work and economic growth, and 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions), as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Cambodia is a signatory.

The second Strategic Area was Multi-Sectoral Child Protection Response⁴⁷. Key findings were as follows:

- Progress included a Child Protection Bill that included child-friendly law enforcement mechanisms and protection for children who came into contact with law enforcement, training of police officers in child rights and responding to the needs of children who come into contact with the law, and the development of diversion guidelines for alternative justice and a reduction of children in detention.
- Major progress has been made through the development of the case management system Primero.
- Substantial advancement has been made in terms of capacity building of district-level social affairs and social welfare officers, who receive training in case management to support the government’s reintegration priorities⁴⁸.
- Relevant development is also represented by the adoption of a new model of case collaboration which includes setting up partnership building between 3PC social service workers and district social affairs and social welfare workers in 18 districts. UNICEF’s role in supporting programming in this regard was instrumental to roll-out.
- Effectiveness in terms of response in terms of direct reach of children in need included interviews both with children in trouble with the law and children at risk of violence and with key informants involved in service delivery. Findings reflect: 1) the value of the reach of each child in need, and the fact that interventions can make a difference; 2) the difficulties in providing these services and the high unit costs

⁴⁴ The Strategic Area’s objective: to reduce violence against children in the home, schools, communities and in the media through a multi-sectoral coordinated primary prevention strategy with ministries and institutions targeting key actors and sectors for positive change.

⁴⁵ Regarding the Positive Parenting Programme, the implementing organisation ICS-SP has conducted a KAP study aimed to determine current progress towards reaching the programme’s intended results for children whose parents have participated in the programme.

⁴⁶ UNICEF Cambodia (2019). Cambodia’s Country Programme 2019-2023, prepared by UNICEF Cambodia, Phnom Penh.

⁴⁷ The Strategic Area’s objective: to respond to violence against children by strengthening capacity of social service providers (health, education, justice and child protection) to provide quality services that protect girls and boys who have experienced, witnessed or are at risk of violence.

⁴⁸ According to UNICEF Child Protection Quarterly Brief July-September 2020, a total of 147 participants from 25 provinces have been trained to use Primero digital case management: they are provincial focal points of DoSVY, social workers, and officials from the district social welfare and social affairs office.

in doing so; and 3) the vast numbers of children in need who are not being reached by any service providers.

The third strategic area was Law and Policy Formulation⁴⁹. Key findings were as follows:

- The 2019 report on the VAC Action Plan⁵⁰ reports under the three sub-areas of protection from corporal punishment and domestic violence, sexual violence against children and child neglect. This is the only area in the report where no information is available under outcomes of two of the three sub-areas, specifically final Outcome 12 on a legislative framework to protect children from sexual abuse and final Outcome 13 on amendment and passing of national laws to prevent and respond to child neglect. For the other outcomes, reporting on activities and outputs is included, but no results reporting is included. This is despite some results reporting on school violence under the positive discipline programming related to final Outcome 11 on protection from corporal punishment.
- Under this area, four key instruments are being reviewed or developed. These include the update of the Alternative Care Policy (2006), development of the Prakas on Kinship Care, Foster Care and Adoption, the development of the Law on Child Protection and Standard Operating Procedures on child protection⁵¹.
- Progress is noted on the development of a National Strategic Plan for Child Protection and associated operational plans at provincial/municipal level⁵², the development of a five-year plan by the Cambodia National Council for Children, the preparation of draft guidelines on child reintegration and the closure of child care facilities, updating the Policy on Alternative Care for Children to align with international norms, the development of protocols associated with trafficking, and training on juvenile justice protocols. UNICEF has been working with the Royal Government of Cambodia in each of these areas.
- The MOEYS developed “Child Protection Policy” with support from UNICEF and an associated “Child Protection in Schools Policy Action Plan” covering the period 2019-2023⁵³, reflecting sector commitment to child protection in schools.

The members of the Adolescent and Youth Reference Group in Phnom Penh noted that legislation on domestic violence did not include protecting children, because parents still had the right to use violence against them as a form of discipline.

The fourth strategic area was Monitoring and Evaluation⁵⁴. Key findings were as follows:

- There was also specific commitment to building a Child Protection Management Information System (CPMIS) that would consider whether child protection programmes are proceeding as intended, and whether objectives were being met. A total of 55 core indicators organised around 5 domains were established and agreed in mid-2019⁵⁵. These indicators were reviewed and finalised and endorsed⁵⁶. The CPMIS includes measuring various aspects of VAC. UNICEF supported Government in this regard.
- The Primero digital case management system, directly linked with the CPMIS dashboard, has been developed and it is live since July 2020. It tracks all children reached by the system, including those referred for VAC⁵⁷. UNICEF has been extensively involved in helping Government design and strengthen the CPMIS/Primero system.

⁴⁹ The Strategic Area’s objective: to reduce violence against children by strengthening legislative and policy frameworks to prevent and protect children against all forms of violence, abuse and neglect.

⁵⁰ MoSVY (2020). Report on Implementation of the Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children Year 2019, VAC AP Secretariat, Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

⁵¹ Coram International completed a thorough desk study, wrote a visioning paper for their development and drafted an outline for both the child protection law and SOPs. With the basic outline of the Child Protection Law and SOPs now ready, MoSVY is in the final stage of endorsement of Prakas on Kinship Care and Foster Care and final review of the Alternative Care Policy. Please see Coram International, Child Protection Law and Standard Operating Procedure, November 2020

⁵² Child Protection Sector Strategic Planning – TWG Meeting November 23rd, 2020

⁵³ MoEYS (2018). Child Protection in Schools Policy Action Plan 2019-2023, Primary Education Department, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

⁵⁴ The Strategic Area’s objective: to reduce violence against children by developing a comprehensive system for data collection and monitoring, evaluation, and reporting on violence experienced by children in Cambodia.

⁵⁵ MoSVY (2019). Cambodia Child Protection Monitoring Framework: Core Indicators and Metadata, a working document to guide the establishment of Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS) in Cambodia, Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

⁵⁶ MoSVY, Cambodia Child Protection Monitoring Framework, July 2020.

⁵⁷ MoSVY and UNICEF, Primero Mission to Cambodia in April 2019 and UNICEF Child protection Quarterly Brief 7 on Primero launch and 8 on Primero roll out.

- The process of defining the indicators provided important detail so that priorities could be specified and progress elaborated. For example, indicator 1.3 on 'laws criminalizing child sexual abuse and exploitation are reviewed and amended to fully comply with the international standards' provided specifics on which acts, in this case linked to what was noted as needing review in the VAC Action Plan.
- Overall, findings suggest that (as if often the case for monitoring systems), effectiveness of monitoring initiatives are limited, in particular with regard to results monitoring and independent verification. There are independent assessments, research and evaluations associated with programme design and implementation, but these do not clearly move up in the monitoring and reporting system to be effectively captured.

Beyond the consideration of strategic areas, the evaluation also considered Action Plan implementation in terms of focus. The VAC Action Plan was both implemented at **national level and in a subset of provinces**. **Overall assessment of effectiveness does not suggest dramatic differences across provinces, with the exception of Ratanakiri** (discussed in detail below) where the particular programmatic focus is different than in the other locations. Fieldwork took place across a number of provinces, covering both urban (including the two large cities Phnom Penh and Siem Reap) and rural areas. Provincial differences appeared to less important than urban - rural differences.

Members from the Adolescent and Youth Reference Group highlighted the growing problem of online abuse and that the problem would rise exponentially and therefore needed attention

The evaluation considered **levels of satisfaction of parents, children, communities and local leaders** (Evaluation Question Effect4, Evaluation Question Effect3 and Evaluation Question Effect2) about the actions undertaken under the Action Plan, and how this might vary across groups and locations.

Groups of parents/caregivers were interviewed about their involvement in the Positive Parenting programme. Overall, they were quite positive about having new skills to cope with caring for their children, and to better understand how violence against children affected children themselves. Having said this, the absence of reinforcement over time had meant that many parents reverted back to previous practices. As one group from Battambang concluded, 'even though we have been engaged in positive parenting, we cannot avoid beating our children'. Other parents in the area followed what were felt to be appropriate cultural norms around discipline, and it was difficult for these parents to do otherwise.

What did seem to change, however, was a perceived reduction in severe cases of violence noted by youth activists. This was felt to have come about because of positive parenting in the community, but also because of the formation of active child clubs involving a number of adolescents in the community, as well as community level consultations by NGOs and local partner CSOs that included local leaders. Here the Commune Committees for Women and Children also noted a perceived reduction in severe cases, which they tended to attribute to parents knowing that they should not abuse their children coming from local awareness raising. When asked about what could be done to improve the situation further, responses included availability of counsellors in the community, programming that reached children and educators in schools, and community-based programming that reached leaders and households.

A 2019 report issued by the Cambodia National Council for Children⁵⁸ noted that **Online Child Sexual Exploitation (OCSE)** (Evaluation Question Effect5) is a global concern. The report referred to OCSE as "an emerging form of child sexual abuse and exploitation that is mediated by the internet, utilising websites and social media platforms and smartphone apps. It includes the production, possession and distribution of child sexual abuse material online, the grooming of potential child victims online with the intention of sexual exploitation or abuse, and Live Only Child Sexual Abuse" (page 9). The situation analysis referred to an assessment that found a fivefold increase in OCSE risk in Cambodia from 2017 to 2018.

Cambodia is a signatory to the WePROTECT Statement of Action which follows a national response model focused on stakeholder engagement across sectors, including technology service providers.

The situation analysis goes on to refer to the Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to VAC which "identifies clear gaps in legislation, the capacity of law enforcement, community awareness, and private industry

⁵⁸ Cambodia National Council for Children (2019). Initial Situational Analysis on Online Child Sexual Exploitation (OCSE) in Cambodia, Royal Government of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

response to the issue [of] OCSE". Work in the sector was further informed by a workshop on information and communication technology and the role on preventing and respond to OCSE⁵⁹.

To further inform an understanding of the situation, a small set of consultative workshops were held with schoolteachers and students in three areas in Cambodia with high levels of online access (Sihanoukville, Siem Reap, Phnom Penh) and priority VAC locations, while online consultations were held in Battambang Province. Of the children consulted, one-in-six describe at least one event of OCSE-related risk online. The Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection Department noted that awareness of the risks of OCSE is low, while the Cybercrime Unit responsible for following-up and investigating OCSE-related crimes has little current capacity to deal with OCSE.

The situation analysis concludes that barriers within the national criminal justice system included "a lack of modern technologies and knowledge on information and communication technology (ICT) used by youth and the key trends of technology, a lack of resources to investigate at community level, a lack of connection with technical expertise and existing international resources, and an overreliance on traditional, physical methods of investigation, which are not greatly helpful for crimes committed in a digital context" (page 11).

The WHO global report on VAC underlines that on-line VAC should not be treated as a separate issue because it runs the risk of 'silencing' the response, and doing so in technology-related issues in ministries and information ministries specifically. From a child-centred point of view, online bullying and sexting was often a continuation of abusive relationships in communities, and is therefore a continuum rather than a separate problem⁶⁰.

OCSE is under primary prevention and in school-based programming, as well as in laws and policies (including sectoral policies). The young people interviewed in communities were well aware of OCSE and argued that it was a rapidly growing problem, and that most girls and boys their age were poorly informed about risks. Key informants from donor organisations and NGOs also referenced the rapid growth of the problem in Cambodia, and suggested that this be a key focus of future programming. The emphasis on OCSE in the Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to VAC 2017-2021 was focused on building mechanisms to be able to develop an effective OCSE response, and key informants asked noted that this was an important way to proceed. The level of progress, however, was not well known, and the 2019 Annual Report was prepared early in the process, and therefore only noted two activities in this regard, one with posts and telecommunications and other with an NGO engaged in training.

The analysis conducted has clearly demonstrated the **role played by UNICEF in the implementation of the Action Plan** by providing technical assistance for the achievements of the expected Plan's outcomes mentioned above. In particular, UNICEF Cambodia provided critical support to the Royal Government of Cambodia for the establishment of a structured and coordinated child protection system in the country. This has been realised, *inter alia*, through key interventions such as the launch of the Primero digital case management system, the capacity building of district level social affairs and social welfare officers, and the revised modality of the Partnership Programme for the Protection of Children (3PC), which focuses on district-level case collaboration–enhanced institutional mechanisms for the provision of child protection services in Cambodia. Moreover, it is important to mention the work done by UNICEF in terms of supporting legal and policy reforms in the field of VAC, all conducive to a strengthened child protection programming.

These comprehensive actions were consistent with UNICEF's broader remit in terms of child protection programming. Progress towards outcomes in this regard were noted in Annex M, with UNICEF's contribution considered as follows:

1. Support to the Cambodian National Council for Children (CNCC) in conducting a study on the efficacy or existing mechanisms and identification of gaps in national and sub-national child protection coordination mechanisms. This led to decisions to strengthen provincial/municipal CNCC Secretariats, strengthening monitoring systems, and establishing sub-national multi-sectoral child protection teams.

⁵⁹ UNICEF Cambodia (2019). Report. Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Industry Workshop: Enhancing National Multi-Sectoral Responses to Prevent and Tackle Online Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, UNICEF Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

⁶⁰ WHO (2020). Global Status Report on Preventing Violence Against Children 2020, World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland. Page 24.

2. Support to the National Policy on Child Protection Systems to elaborate Government commitment, and the commitment of development partners.
3. Youth interviewed from the Adolescent and Youth groups were well informed about a range of issues around VAC, and indicated how they were engaged in awareness raising in their schools and communities.
4. Community-level responses to cases of reported violence included working cross-sectorally, involving commune police officers. Key informants working in the response noted changing attitudes and practices around dealing with these cases, presumably reinforced by training content and reach.
5. While only a small number of cases of VAC make it into the court system, support for legal aid in Siem Reap shows that substantive support is possible. Field interview results pointed to a range of challenges in the legal system specifically to diversion, but the issue was increasingly the point of discussion, and there was some optimism among those involved in cases that this may become increasingly used in future, with continued support.
6. UNICEF has been engaged in supporting a range of studies and assessments aimed at strengthening the information base. However, knowledge management and the systematic use of information was more constrained and needed considerable additional attention.
7. A review of UNICEF's child protection workplans for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 reflects clear alignment with the priorities of the VAC Action Plan. Final Outcome 3 on child protection programme is specifically focused on VAC and exploitation, including in humanitarian situations. It makes specific reference to supporting Cambodia's responsibilities as a Pathfinding Country, while Cambodia PROTECT is mentioned as a Key Results Area, capacity building is mentioned covering child marriage and VAC more generally, and school-based programming is referenced.
8. As mentioned above, Cambodia's Country Programme (2019-2023)⁶¹ refers to Outcome 3 and shows alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
9. The Country Programme also refers to Goal Area 3 in UNICEF's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan which refers to protection from violence, including in humanitarian situations, and three regional protocols ('Regional Headline Results') referring to Early Moments Matters for Every Child, Children Grow in Safe and Sustainable Environments and Adolescent's Potential Unleashed. The Country Programme document makes specific reference to alignment with Government's VAC Action Plan.
10. The Country Programme also clearly referenced how their programming fit in with the work of Government and civil society actors, and notes (page 13) that "In the development of the Theory of Change for the child protection programme, particular attention has been provided to considering the contributions of other partners as complementary to UNICEF involvement in achieving a vision of change".

Finally, **four key obstacles to the effectiveness of the Action Plan** were identified. These are summarised in the following, and elaborated in Annex M:

1. One obstacle to the effectiveness of the Action Plan revolves around **Government's financial and human resource commitments** to the Action Plan's implementation. In part this is mitigated by major gains being made in child protection sector reform and service expansion, but it requires further attention specific to the AP itself.
2. A second obstacle to the effectiveness of the Action Plan is the **extent to which VAC does not permeate non-core ministries that have a mandate in supporting VAC programming and child protection.**
3. A third obstacle to the effectiveness of the Action Plan is the **mixed progress in terms of change in the legal environment.** Change takes time, and legal reach even in a strengthened legal environment takes even longer.
4. A fourth obstacle to the effectiveness of the Action Plan is the **gap between what the Plan regards as violence and what rights-holders and local level duty-bearers view as violence.**

⁶¹ UNICEF Cambodia (2019). Cambodia's Country Programme 2019-2023, prepared by UNICEF Cambodia, Phnom Penh.

8 Coherence

8.1 Main Coherence Question

To what extent are there synergies and interlinkages between the VAC Action Plan interventions and other interventions carried out by the government and partners?

Coherence is mainly intended by the Terms of Reference (ToR) as external coherence that is the consistency and synergies of the Plan with other interventions carried out by the Government or other partners. This includes assessing complementarity, harmonisation and coordination with others, as well as the capacity to form successful partnerships. It also includes internal coherence, which addresses the linkages and complementarity between the various actions under the Plan.

8.2 Findings

The evaluation questions for coherence are considered in two respects: 1) was the *design* of the Action Plan conducive to coherence emerging in VAC programming; and 2) how has *implementation* supported, or undermined, coherence as the Action Plan has proceeded.

For **design**, this was enhanced by the fact that some of the actors, including NGOs, civil society, local authorities, MoSVY and MoWA had been working together before the Action Plan was put into place, (in response to Evaluation Question C2 as well as C4 and C3). As one international NGO put it, 'we had been working together with these partners in child protection before the Action Plan was created, we knew what worked'. This even held when these different agencies had been financed by different development partners, noting that there were good faith efforts to ensure complementarity and avoid duplication. In terms of **complementarity**, one of the issues raised by international non-governmental organisations was the ability to identify Cambodian civil society actors who could provide services in their programme areas. While the 'fit' was noted to sometimes be difficult at the beginning, skills development and mentoring were said to have proven effective in building local partnerships with the requisite skills to deliver.

In terms of programme complementarity, the range of actions aimed at strengthening response reflected a **coherence in programming consistent with the care taken during Action Plan design**. Strengthening the health service response, progressing on child protection legislation, capacity and systems development at district and commune levels, engagement of activists and building activist networks for case identification and support for referral and support (for example for reintegration) are all examples of this broader coherence. For primary prevention, however, coherence has proven more challenging, in part because programmes that would have logical overlap (positive discipline in schools and positive parenting) often took place in different locations, and even when they took place in the same locations, were not well coordinated because they fell across multiple ministries. It was also due to primary prevention being quite broad in scope, for example including nationwide communications actions, social media, and institution and community-based programming.

There was also considered investment in the design of a **communications strategy that identified a range of methods to increase awareness of VAC**, built support for VAC initiatives, and strengthened these varied initiatives. This was especially important for community-focused interventions where reach would remain constrained during the timeline of the Action Plan. A range of media channels were identified, and specific actions recommended.

There is also **emergent coherence within the child protection response**. For example, the work being done in child protection programming overall, including the development of national and provincial child protection plans, will enable the VAC Action Plan in three key respects: 1) it links VAC programming with overall child protection programming; 2) it allows local initiative in VAC Action Plan implementation to inform the provincial plans; and 3) it allows the provincial plans to link to VAC Action Plan programming in provinces.

There was widespread agreement that the design of the Action Plan had **built trust across different actors** within Government, within civil society, across these actors and others in a way that would not have been as effective without the Plan.

In response to the VAC survey, MoWA with UNICEF support commissioned a review of parenting programmes that identified actors, described programming, and discussed the efficacy of approaches that helped inform the Action Plan's component on positive parenting⁶². This helped ensure that any programme development was well informed by actors and actions and where this work was taking place.

There was a specific issue around the exclusion of child trafficking actions from the Action Plan, despite it being noted as a problem in the Action Plan but child trafficking was not included under the Action Plan because it has been the subject of considered implementation of a 2008 Law on the Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation (updated from 1986)⁶³, under competence of the Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection Department in the Ministry of Interior, and the National Plan to Suppress Human Trafficking (2017-2021). It does intersect with those involved in Action Plan implementation overall, including MoSVY. MoSVY has established standard operating procedures for treatment of victims of trafficking, including employing child-friendly approaches to children affected by trafficking following training (noted by commune level interviewees in the police), while Government has also developed Minimum Standards to Protect the Rights of Victims of Trafficking. Anti-trafficking and Juvenile Protection Police have been identified and trained in five priority provinces in this regard, and report working closely with social protection services. This is also consistent with the Safe Village/Commune/Sangkat Policy of 2010 and Guidelines on Village and Community Safety⁶⁴.

For **design of the VAC-AP**, in summary, **considerable efforts were made to support coherence, and this proved largely successful:**

1. The Action Plan was able to bring together actors and actions under a single framework that was developed in a manner that supported such buy-in. Financing partners were supportive of this.
2. Coordination mechanisms and a Technical Working Group were established to lead the drafting of the Action Plan, including the detailed work required in developing the Results Framework.

For **implementation, coherence proved more challenging**. Given the breadth of actions under the Action Plan, with a range of work streams emerging led by a range of sectoral ministries, and engaging with a range of provincial and district governments and communes, this could be expected. In sector interviews aside from MoSVY, a common comment was that moving forward with implementation of a particular activity or programme meant more engagement within the relevant sector and less engagement at a cross-sectoral level. Management meant working with the relevant line ministry at national and sub-national levels, and with relevant committees at commune level, with school management committee with the aim of getting a specific set of activities moving, with attention to what it meant for the Action Plan overall. As already analysed under relevance, the Action Plan permitted coordinated work in VAC to happen, including the avoiding redundancy and encouraging synergy. As an example, when the education sector was considering its engagement with the Action Plan, it carefully considered its Education Sector Strategic Plan, the Child Friendly Schools initiative, the School Health Policy, as well as Youth Development Policy, the Information Communications Technology Policy, and others. In so doing, this helped ensure that the educator sector's engagement in the Action Plan was consistent with what it was doing as a sector.

There were opportunities to support internal Action Plan coherence identified in terms of school-based VAC prevention and the pagoda intervention with positive parenting. The main opportunities were identified as the delivery of similar content and following similar protocols, and the chance to reinforce messaging and better understanding what was driving violence in communities where multiple programmes were being implemented. A key challenge was that the programmes were mostly implemented in different locations, undermining internal coherence in implementation.

The establishment of the **Steering Committee** in 2019 to oversee the advancement of the Action Plan, included the creation of three **Technical Working Groups** (TWGs -- 1) Awareness Raising and Prevention; 2) Service Provision and Law Enforcement/Legal; and 3) Regulatory Review, Monitoring and Reporting). They

⁶² See B. Lim and C. Pot (2015). An Indexing of Parenting Programmes in Cambodia, prepared for Royal Government of Cambodia with financial support from UNICEF Cambodia and GIZ.

⁶³ <https://bice.org/app/uploads/2014/06/CambodiaOPSCInitalReport.en.pdf>

⁶⁴ Updated in 2020 to the Safe Village-Commune-District Policy. See <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/ministry-revises-safe-village-commune-policy>

were designed in part based on recognition that, without such mechanism, these cross-sectoral engagements would weaken during implementation, especially given that a similar arrangement had been felt to work well during design. Findings from discussions found that one aim was to keep ministries working in a similar technical area working together. Another aim was to facilitate effective reporting against the Action Plan, describing what had been delivered, and identifying major challenges. A third aim was to support Cambodia's commitments to meeting its obligations around VAC, for example the Global Partnership to End VAC with Cambodia a Pathfinding Country competent to engage in policy dialogue around effective VAC programming.

Interviews with TWGs members noted a stronger focus on specific challenges in specific areas and less focus on coherence in the broader working group area, whether this was with reference to needed legal reform or developments in a particular programme. While these operational aspects were critical to advancing the Action Plan, one NGO respondent argued, 'it's a good idea, but in terms of guiding actions overall, co-ordinating things, there really is little role'.

The fact that the TWGs have been in existence for less than two years highlights that they may not have had sufficient time to play a more active role in cross-sectoral coordination, especially given convening constraints arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. Similar constraints are said to have affected the Steering Committee, where convening has been uncommon and actions to enhance cross-sectoral coordination unclear.

The practical implications of the sectoral focus and shortfalls in how the TWGs brought thematic actors together manifested in operations in the provinces, where programming was also largely sectoral, and where coordination across actors was uncommon.

At commune level different programmes were often implemented in different communes, further limiting collaboration. For example, limited collaboration was evident with regard to school-based programming and positive parenting programming which would go well together, but in practice they were mostly taking place in different locations. Similarly, response protocols that improved the health sector's response to violence against children didn't often link to community-based systems aimed at strengthened referral services. One social sector key informant noted that, while she was active in the TWG on prevention, it wasn't clear where programming was taking place across the different ministries involved in prevention. 'We have not discussed with members on which specific target districts and communes we are going to do. We are busy with our own implementation'.

At commune level, the committees responsible for supporting the advancement of programming around women and children tended to be overburdened with a range of responsibilities, which caused unclear understanding on mandates, while receiving little resources. Given varied programming objectives and targets, and considering the lack of geographical overlap, **duplication was not evident** as a particular problem (Evaluation Question C3).

Strengthening coherence also extended to building trust between Government officials and civil society, with relationships being built at local and commune/Sangkat levels that engendered trust (especially in response initiatives; Evaluation Question C2). As one civil society respondent working in VAC response noted, 'our local work has to be undertaken by government, so we do a lot of coaching and mentoring, linking ourselves to Government delivery. This means building trust, providing support, and engaging in networking'. This allowed them to tackle the difference needs of boys and girls in a situation where the risks and nature of violence varied, and where responses needed to accommodate differences.

For **implementation**, in sum, while the structure was established to support a coherent response, **there are critical challenges to the functioning of this at national and sub-national levels**. There is, **however, progress at an operational level at commune level** (Evaluation Question C1 and C2, and responses of relevance to C4):

1. Programming has proceeded within different sectors consistent with effective implementation (to varying degrees), but less so in a way that has encouraged cross-programme and cross-sectoral engagement.
2. The **efficacy of the TWGs is not clear, but there are signs that their operations could be significantly improved**. The Steering Committee's efficacy is also uncertain, but key informants here again suggested that it could play a more active role in improving collaboration.
3. **Within programmes, coordination is noted to be effective** in particular at sub-national operational levels, particularly at commune and district levels where practical implementation issues are considered.

NGOs report some constraints in finding experienced civil society partners, but for the most part they report working well together, in particular where the relationships have been in place for some time. Duplication did not appear to be a specific problem.

Partnerships between international NGOs with local civil society organisations were noted as especially positive, by noting that skills transfer is key, and also international NGOs learning from their partners about what worked and what did not. Similarly, functioning operational partnerships in particular at district level were noted, and that building these relationships meant that delivery could take place, and that the right people would be available when needed. Development partners were also reportedly more attentive to ‘fitting in’ with other interventions within the Action Plan, noted by donors, international NGOs and Government interviewees.

9 Efficiency

9.1 Main Efficiency Question

How efficient was the management of the Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to VAC, to ensure timely and efficient use of resources? The related question was “How well has Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to VAC been managed in terms of the technical and financial resources?”

The focus was *not* on implementation efficiency in terms of expenditures versus spending forecasts, accountability around budgeting and reporting, but rather on cost effectiveness, that is, the best use of resources. This was consistent with the focus of the evaluation on the Action Plan overall, rather than details of its constituent elements.

9.2 Findings

For an evaluation of the Action Plan as a multi-sectoral, multi-programme tool, the question is less about whether each programme was cost effective and more about whether the full range of **programming falling under the Action Plan was more cost effective than if individual programming had taken place without the Action Plan** (Evaluation Question Effic2). In this regard, considering technical and financial resource management from a cost-effectiveness point of view, that is, asking whether funds were spent in a manner that would yield greater progress than other allocations. The majority of key informants suggested that the answer was largely positive. There are two key factors explaining these responses:

- 1) the **Action Plan allowed considered attention to be focused on systems building**, institution strengthening, and improving framework conditions that supported the sequencing the delivery of different Plan inputs aimed at building stronger programming to prevent and respond to VAC; and
- 2) the **Action Plan led to the creation of management structure that enabled both oversight and operations**, even though there are constraints as elaborated below.

‘I think my project is efficient. Reported quality of training provided is good, those trained are pleased with the content, we know what we are focusing on, and we are reaching a number of people. This is despite a shortage of both personnel and funds, but we do our best’. Ministry official involved in the delivery of the Pagoda Child Protection Programme, which began before the Action Plan was in place and thereafter was brought into the Plan’s remit

For Point (1), using responding to VAC as an example, recognition that raising awareness and creating demand for services meant consideration of what services needed to be provided. This led to interventions aimed at strengthening referral service within and across service providers at the local level, training of these service providers, the development of protocols to strengthen treatment of children subject to VAC, and then practical efforts to ensure both referral service and child protection. Innovations led to problem solving to help children secure services, for example working groups that met on a regular basis at commune level to review cases. Similarly, the levels and nature of VAC led to recognition that violence noticeably occurred in both homes and in alternative care institutions. This led to considering programming that would cover these different risk factors. It also led to considerations within programming that considered how risk varied across males and females, for ethnic minorities, for migrant children, for children with disabilities, etc. And it led to particular consideration of dealing with the particular problems of teenage pregnancy and child marriage among ethnic minorities, in this case covering the remote north eastern Ratanakiri Province (Evaluation Question Effic3).

For Point (2), this shows promise in terms of programme level operations but is more constrained in terms of multi-sectoral oversight. As mentioned under coherence, within different ministries the conduct of activities under the Action Plan is largely viewed as positive (Evaluation Question Effic2 as well as Effic4). For example, the Pagoda Programme under the Ministry of Cults and Religion has carried out a number of actions advancing the programme, and has put into place the normative system for protecting children (e.g., Child Safeguarding Policy in Pagoda), as well as allocated resources for implementation e.g., curriculum development, training materialstraining of trainers, direct training, monitoring visits, workshops, etc. This is also true for the Ministry of Health, working with UNICEF in the development, training and utilisation of the Clinical Handbook, as well as the Ministry of Education in enabling the framework for the Positive Discipline in Schools Programme, and juvenile justice with the justice sector.

Within each programme, **cost effective implementation was further strengthened by delivery involving decentralised government officials, international NGOs, and partner civil society organisations working together** (Evaluation Question Effic2). A number of the international NGOs had been operating in Cambodia for some time and had systems in place for counterparts, partnerships and capacity building, and they brought this experience to bear for the Action Plan programming to prevent and respond to VAC. Having said this, the significant constraints in terms of lacking of government personnel providing social protection services, coupled with high turnover in personnel, undermined the cost effectiveness of service delivery.

At the same time, **there were questions about how well integrated the VAC Action Plan is into the planning systems of key ministries/agencies**. This included concerns raised about how well MoSVY intergrated VAC-AP's priorities in its broader programming in social protection and child protection, and what priorities the Ministry of Women's Affairs has intergrated in particular into its violence against women and girl programming, and what actions the Ministry of Interior considered in terms of the VAC Action Plan as their priorities. As one key informant noted, 'I think they have not been effectively implementing activities under the respective scope as well as they could because the Action Plan is not well integrated into their own planning cycles, so the VAC Action Plan actions are not their priorities'. This was even noted with regard to MoSVY and child protection overall, and where the VAC Action Plan fit in with the larger child protection planning. Similar concerns were also raised about the timeline of planning in various ministries and the timeline of the VAC Action Plan, and what could be done to better integrate action planning to Prevent and Respond to VAC into sector plans. In this respect, the cost effectiveness of delivery was undermined.

The coherence and effectiveness of the Steering Committee and the three Technical Working Groups were also discussed. In terms of efficiency, key informants feel that the **structure did not appear to be well suited to the efficient operation of a multi-sectoral response**. In many respects this is understandable, both because this is the first multi-sectoral Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to VAC and because these structures take time to work together. Especially the concern of members of the TWGs was that these multi-sectoral collaborative mechanisms were not showing signs of growing stronger and rather were becoming less effective, and were therefore not necessarily a good investment unless this could be improved. Having said this, it was not the necessity of the TWGs that was questioned it was how well they were functioning.

With regard to **operational efficiency** (Evaluation Question Effic2), as noted during inception, the evaluators did seek insights on operational efficiency from key informants. It was expected that this information would not be widely available, but as a Plan level evaluation the focus was on clarity in whether there were major delays in implementation due to operational inefficiencies. In interviews with field implementers, two points were raised in this regard: 1) when working with local partners and following local protocols, **there were often delays in starting up actions**; and 2) **once systems were in place and relevant capacity building had taken place, these problems were usually overcome**. As a number of NGOs had been working in some locations in child protection for some time, the two problems could be mitigated. However, these NGOs also noted that their local partners were sometimes new partners because of the specific requirements of VAC programming or, if they had already been working with these organisations, time was still needed for capacity development in this regard.

While programme level reporting was said to include expenditure data and clarifications around deviations from forecasts, **Action Plan level reporting did not deal with these operational efficiency measures but rather overall spending** (Evaluation Question Effic1). Strengthening the annual Action Plan-level reporting system would provide useful information of relevance to improving operational efficiency, including attention to results-monitoring and means of mitigation for problems identified. Based on a review of the 2019 Annual

Report as well as documents reviewed for the Zoom-In activities, reporting sometimes included tracking expenditures against targets as a direct measure of efficiency, and focusing on capacity development in effecting change over time as a measure of cost effectiveness.

As noted under relevance and effectiveness, the momentum that emerged from early moves to get VAC on the table was strengthened by the conduct of the 2013 VAC survey, and this helped bring together a range of stakeholders in committing to a national response. In so doing, it was able to attract both attention and financing that would not have been available otherwise, resulting in a most cost-effective approach to VAC.

The question of efficiency and the linkage to **results** is difficult to answer (Evaluation Question Effic4), largely because results themselves are not clearly established. At the highest level, are services being delivered in the most cost-effective fashion to reduce violence against children? If so, how did it do so and what would have been the relative cost effectiveness of alternative approaches? At operational level, for example are positive parenting programmes reducing violence, or interim gains in terms of solving problems within families, in a cost-effective fashion? Are reunification programmes improving the lives of the children who have returned home in a cost-effective fashion? In the absence of clear evidence that would allow judging cost effectiveness, a few observations can nevertheless be made based on documents reviewed and the results of interviews.

'Process' deliverables, such as those delivered within the health sector and justice, were being used, reflecting a positive result. The result of their use was, of course, a different issue, for example the few children who were sent into diversion programmes rather than jail, but progress was noted in terms of fair representation of child in contact with the law, and support to children after they left jail. From a cost effectiveness point of view, there are two questions: 1) the number of children receiving these services compared to the costs of delivering the services; and 2) recognition of the need to provide for children in these circumstances, even with small numbers. The unit costs were indeed noted as high, with considerable resources invested in individual cases. With scarce resources, one issue was whether investing in responding to VAC in these ways are worth the costs. When considered in this light, it is important to note that these children tend to be in very vulnerable situations, whether seeking treatment for injuries or facing prison for crimes.

Programmes aimed at reaching children in especially difficult circumstances did reach children in need, and in case-by-case descriptions given by children themselves it was evident that this was sometimes helping to change their lives. In other cases, however, the outcomes showed less success and were often felt to be overwhelming. Getting children into diversion programmes as an alternative to prison was one example where success was rare but investments still required.

Related comments came from discussions around cost effectiveness in terms of the total number of children most in need versus the number of these children reached. It was recognised that reporting cases of VAC remained constrained due to a range of factors, and that currently only a small portion were currently being reached. In the long-term, if attitudes changed, the perception was that unit costings would improve and that investments in response infrastructure now would be most cost-effective in future.

These findings raise points about **the difficulties in making decisions around cost effectiveness of expenditures overall** (e.g., primary prevention, systems strengthening, monitoring and evaluation, responding to violence) (Evaluation Question Effic1 and Effic4) and deciding to invest even with high unit costs. From a child rights perspective, the focus on children in greatest need would suggest that overall cost effectiveness compared to, for example, prevention was not the right question.

When asked to consider cost effectiveness, one key informant noted that 'we are dealing with something that is difficult to change. That takes time and resources, and cannot be expected to be solved without the commitment of sufficient resources. But these resources are not yet forthcoming from Government to the level needed'

A broader 'results' question is associated with the ability of the Action Plan to deliver as intended in the timeline allocated. From an efficiency point of view, was the Action Plan progressing as expected because it is being efficiently implemented? Here respondents are clearer, with some exceptions: **programmes are delivering activities as scheduled, and that their own programmatic evaluative evidence is positive.** This was especially the case with the institutional-based programming in schools and pagodas, the reintegration programme, and the Ratanakiri initiative. The only exceptions are with regard to legal reform and responding to VAC, where both were felt to take considerable time, and did not easily fit within a five-

year planning cycle; there was nevertheless important progress in terms of children in contact with the law with over 500 supported in 2019 alone. There are also cases where sufficient information was collected up front to allow comparisons later in a Programme, even if not a true baseline-end line comparison. The communications initiative Cambodia PROTECT is one example, the Ratanakiri initiative a second one.

One oft-repeated concern about cost effectiveness was associated with the low level of funding provided by Government for services that could reach children and build on NGO-CSO implemented initiatives. Instead, the outside funding seemed to be treated as replacement funds for Government expenditure. Related to this were specific concern about how Government was resourcing the social protection and child protection infrastructure, for example providing well training on child protection offices throughout the country.

A concluding point relates to a comment made by a national level key informant, consistent with observations made by some of those involved in programme delivery: that expanding services means more efficient delivery of services. Approaches were tried and were proving resilient, programming was being adapted to lower unit costs (e.g., the Positive School Discipline Programme and how training is offered from off-site) to facilitate expansion, and acceptance of interventions, as adapted, coupled with continued political will meant that they would be welcomed. One NGO interviewee further pointed out that primary prevention works best when reach is considerable, because it creates a broader climate where people engage on the topic. **Expansion in this regard would offer a better return-on-investment.**

Annex O contains further considerations on Efficiency.

10 Impact

10.1 Impact Main Question

What have the results of the AP to Prevent and Respond to VAC been, positive or negative, intended or unintended?

Impact referred both to progress towards reducing the prevalence of violence against children, increasing response to violence, and strengthened institutional capacities to deliver. Since impacts take considerable time to manifest, especially when trying to alter deep-seated norms and behaviours, impacts were measured through consideration of early signs of changes in norms and behaviours, discussing how project activities appear to be yielding important impacts, with insights from informed stakeholders on trends that may yield important impacts.

10.2 Findings

Regarding the contribution to a reduction in violence against children, the absence of evidence to be able to comment on impact was referenced above in terms of effectiveness, and is even more important in constraining an assessment of impacts (main Evaluation Question Impact). Where there is early evidence of change in some areas where programming has taken place, to date available findings only give qualitative insights into potential trends rather than helping to establish levels and the veracity of change⁶⁵.

When asked about impacts, approximately half of the key informants indicated that it was too early to tell, and that there was no clear evidence to say whether impacts were emerging. The remainder provided observations on why they thought that the situation was indeed changing, but that they did not have strong empirical evidence in this regard. In considering the question 'is there evidence that the VAC Action Plan may be contributing to a reduction in violence against children', the answer is 'no', there is not sufficient evidence to say so.

⁶⁵ There is a survey planned for 2021 for one of the more promising initiatives, focused on reducing school-based violence. Given that impact requires a high level of evidence, the strength of survey design and implementation is critical to measurement actual impacts. A Demographic and Health Survey was delayed from 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and is expected to take place from 2021. This includes VAC measures, giving data on national trends. It will not, however, provide information on the impacts of the Action Plan on these trends in VAC data, as exposure to the Action Plan programmes will not be measured under the DHS.

This doesn't mean that the Action Plan is *not* having such impacts, rather it refers to the lack of clear evidence that it is doing so (Evaluation Question I1). The results of the 2017 survey by the Cambodian National Institute of Statistics, which covered five provinces for VAC⁶⁶ reflect the current status of VAC across key measures. While these data are not comparable to the 2013 survey findings due to varied sampling frame, strategies and procedures, they *will be* comparable for future surveys in these same locations. While these data are not specific relevant to consider impacts, they are relevant to consider trends within which impacts can be better understood. While the results of the field discussions overall pointed to a mixture of responses, there are **three themes worth noting** (Evaluation Question I2):

As one key informant at the national level concluded, 'school directors are positive that the programme is working, and they are willing to back up the teachers. The teachers themselves say that it has had a positive impact'. Another noted that where field visits had been conducted, children reported feeling safer in the classroom. Knowledge attitudes and practices surveys planned for 2021 are expected to give better insights

1. **A sense among those at sub-national level that things are improving.**
2. Consideration that while proof is still not clear, **there are early signs of results that leave cause for optimism.**
3. **Recognition that it will take time for impacts to manifest** with something as difficult to change as VAC.

While the absence of evidence is the problem, there are **three areas where there does seem to be important change underway, i.e., i) Reintegration; ii) Child labour; iii) Positive discipline in schools** (Evaluation Question I2). These are elaborated in Annex P.

For **communications** (most specifically Cambodia PROTECT), the solid baseline work done means that assessing the efficacy of communications programming is possible, depending on how solid the impact assessment work is, but that there may be evidence in 2021 of possible impacts on knowledge, attitudes and perhaps practices. For other programmes some community-level data collection had taken place at the start of programming which would provide future insights into results. This is also the case with regard to the Clinical Handbook implemented with the Ministry of Health, where follow-on interviews are planned for health personnel on how they have employed the Handbook and what they thought of how it worked.

There are also promising signs of reductions in child marriage and teenage pregnancy (Evaluation Question I1 and I2). The work done in the remote, north-eastern province of Ratanakiri offers interesting insights into a programme nuanced to the particular needs of an area of the country where ethnic minorities predominate. In the Province, some 75% of the population are from ethnic minorities, and the population is widely dispersed with most living in rural areas. Levels of poverty are high, and access to services is below the national average. Teenage pregnancy rates are high, with one-in-four ante natal clinic visits by girls aged under eighteen in the Province, as are levels of child marriage, at 36% compared to a national average of 19% nationwide. With a careful review of the literature⁶⁷ and direct data collection⁶⁸ conducted through 2018, programming has been well informed by evidence. Alignment up with SDGs and national policies was considered, the problem statements clearly made, and the rationale given for how to proceed.

These inputs, along with broad consultations, yielded a Provincial Action Plan to Prevent Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy in Ratanakiri Province⁶⁹. The Plan incorporated background information from the literature review and provided further analysis around determinants of teenage pregnancy and early marriage. It also shows the close connection

'Indigenous children are more vulnerable to violence because they are not good at speaking Khmer'. Two boys, aged 12 and 14, Ratanakiri Province, north eastern Cambodia

⁶⁶ National Institute of Statistics (2018). Baseline for the Regular Survey to Monitor Violence Against Children in Five Target Provinces 2017, prepared by the National Institute of Statistics with support from UNICEF/Cambodia, Royal Government of Cambodia, Phnom Penh.

⁶⁷ UNICEF Cambodia (2016). Literature Review: to Develop the Provincial Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy in Ratanakiri, prepared by K. Chan, Adolescent Development Officer, UNICEF Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

⁶⁸ Provincial Women and Children's Consultative Committee of Ratanakiri (2019). Baseline Study on Child Marriage and Child Mothers Among Girls Aged 12-17 years in Ratanakiri, Provincial Administration of Ratanakiri with support from Australian Aid and UNICEF Cambodia, Ban Lung, Cambodia.

⁶⁹ Provincial Administration of Ratanakiri (2018). Provincial Action Plan to Prevent Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy in Ratanakiri (2017-2021), prepared by the Provincial Administration of Ratanakiri with support from UNICEF, Ban Lung, Cambodia.

between teenage pregnancy and child marriage, and the social norms around this.

Regarding the impacts of actions that **respond to violence** (Evaluation Question I2), respondents involved in programming in this regard note that the **magnitude of the challenges were even more daunting** than thought at the beginning. These included lack of places of safety, especially for boys, the likelihood that most children in immediate need of assistance are not receiving such assistance, and other resources required on time to protect each child, and constraints in legal protections.

Incremental gains were important in such a situation, and the gains made in terms of children at immediate risk facing immediate harm in those cases where they were reached offer some encouragement (Evaluation Question I2). Nevertheless, comparing the small numbers reached to the likely number in need based on the

One 17-year-old girl from an ethnic minority in Ratanakiri Province had dropped out of school, and because she was not in school, her parents said that she should get married. She was married at age 15 and had a child at age 16. Now she works on a farm and leaves the baby with her parents during the workday, and gives them some of the money. She noted later in the interview that she had had a child at 16 because she wanted to make sure that her child could grow up to take care of her by going to work, just like she has done

2013 VAC survey suggest that only a very small minority are being reached, and even then, only some are being reached in a manner conducive to harm reduction. Here again, incremental targets and a renewed focus on systems strengthening within a more robust legal environment (with on-the-ground enforcement) is critical.

regard to response is the reports, that violence had declined because the number of cases that they were dealing with had declined (Evaluation Question I5). Most reported 1-2 cases in the past year, yet even if only 10% of children had been subject to severe physical or emotional violence, these communes would have seen dozens. When asked why cases had gone down, these same groups argued that it was due to increased awareness that such violence was wrong and should not be committed, although a few noted that it might be due to people being less likely to report such violence because they knew it was wrong. None noted that the lack of reporting might be due to insufficiencies in the response services, although this was mentioned by a few of the international NGO respondents working in response.

, One note of concern From more than one Commune Committee for Women and Children interviewed with

If reporting did take place, it was often with regard to sexual violence against girls (the vast majority of girls and boys, parents and commune level officials interviewed said that boys were not subject to sexual violence).

These point to the issue of **what constitutes VAC in the eyes of both rights-holders and duty-bearers** (Evaluation Question I5). The cultural factors around what constitutes acceptable discipline versus violence against children in many societies may differ from international definitions and norms, and this is also the case for Cambodia. If impact considers whether these norms have changed due to communications efforts and primary prevention activities, findings suggest considerable room for improvement. Findings show that types of violence defined by international norms and by Action Plan programming often varies from perceptions of what is acceptable discipline and what is VAC.

These findings are reinforced by findings from discussions with parents reached by the Positive Parenting Programme, where some expressed concerns that the understanding of VAC varied from norms in society that made it difficult to continue to follow what was learned from the programme. While positive approaches to discipline were still favoured by many of these parents, they felt that societal norms would still allow (or require) that they physically punish their children when needed.

This links back to the issue of impacts of programming on the **reporting of violence** (Evaluation Question I4 and I5). As noted above, communes tended to report a reduction in the number of cases of violence, and some attributed this to parents behaving better. This conclusion was mitigated by concerns by other key informants that cases were less likely to be reported. The tendencies on reporting on violence were reported by children interviewed, as well as parents, and reflect the complexities around how violence is perceived to be a 'family thing' rather than something for public referral, even in cases of severe violence where family mechanisms would still be used to try and sort problems out.

'What should be done differently is that children who are victims of violence should be protected by the law. If everyone knows that violence against children is wrong, children would be protected'. 16-year-old boy, rural area outside Siem Reap

'Are you building demand for these child safety services for children facing immediate harm? Word of mouth works. Commune level is where things really work. They know what is going on. We need to link them to district They know what's going on. This is the interface between districts and communities.' International NGO working in VAC response

Where cases of VAC happen, it is mentioned that they are solved through family channels and friendship networks rather than referral to officials. But in most cases informal approaches were mentioned, or respondents underlined that some acts of violence were not seen as violence. Of concern, a few mentioned violence in their own homes that were not resolved, or where reporting made things worse.

Considering progress towards **process objectives** as early indications of impacts, the need to enhance capacity and strengthen systems to effect long-term change and eventually progress towards

impacts is consistent with the Action Plan intent and the priorities of many of those interviewed, recognising that this is the only way to effect change in the longer run (Evaluation Question I3).

Concerning **reach of the Action Plan**, virtually all respondents asked recognised that reach **compared to need was inadequate** (Evaluation Question I2). This held especially for providing support services for children who have been subjected to violence, but also affected constraints on scaling up in existing locations and scaling out to new ones. For some primary prevention interventions, and associated capacity development work, scaling out was felt to be possible in the school system⁷⁰ and for the pagoda programming based on the nature of the targets. Similarly, for communications, there was scope to scale out to new locations as other primary prevention work expanded as well. This was more constrained for community outreach.

None of the respondents argued that the problem of violence against children would be largely resolved by the end of the VAC Action Plan in 2021. There was clear recognition that this was only the beginning, and that the expectations of the Action Plan would take many years to be achieved.

On the whole, having any measurable impact on levels of VAC in Cambodia, given the magnitude of the problem compared to the response, is extremely challenging in such a short timeline.

11 Sustainability

11.1 Main Sustainability Question

How sustainable have the benefits of the AP to Prevent and Respond to VAC been?

Sustainability was considered in terms of the possibility of the Plan offering continued benefits in the long-term (with or without a continued Plan), and the level of ownership of the Plan and its constituent elements by Government.

11.2 Findings

In considering sustainability, the main question on benefits lasting is considered in terms of: 1) the ability of systems in place to sustain programming; and 2) the ability of the results of actions taken to yield benefits into the future. Strengthened Government's child protection systems, durable partnerships, strong and active civil society and other avenues for rights-holders to exercise their rights are critical to the first point. The quality, applicability and magnitude of reach is critical for the latter. Sustainability also considers whether sustainability in programming to Prevent and Respond to VAC is strengthened or weakened by the existence of the Action Plan itself. As mentioned, **the Plan's design and implementation continued to build on the momentum that emerged from the VAC survey**, the core commitments on VAC agreed by various ministries, the assessment of the economic and health consequences of VAC⁷¹, Royal Government pronouncements, and international support (main Sustainability Evaluation Question).

The 2014 Protect Our Children/Cambodia document⁷² on core commitments was specifically aimed at outlining Government's commitment to preventing and responding to VAC leading to the development of the VAC Action Plan. Commitments from each Ministry were indicated, covering the Ministry of Women's Affairs

⁷⁰ See Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (2019) Child Protection in Schools Policy Action Plan 2019-2023, prepared by the Primary Education Department, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Royal Kingdom of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

⁷¹ Fang, X. (2015). The Economic Burden of the Health Consequences of Violence Against Children in Cambodia, Ministry of Women's Affairs and UNICEF Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

⁷² Protect Our Children/Cambodia (2014). Violence Against Children in Cambodia. Core Commitments to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children in Cambodia.

(at that juncture the lead Ministry), the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Cults and Religion, the Ministry of Planning's National Institute of Statistics, the Cambodian National Council for Children, and the National AIDS Authority. The priorities elaborated therein were largely consistent with what emerged in the VAC Action Plan itself, including which actor would lead which activity area (Evaluation Question S2 and S3).

Those key informants asked about the **role of the Action Plan in supporting sustainable action in preventing and responding to VAC** and who were able to respond to the question agreed that the Action Plan had made a difference (Evaluation Question S3 and S1). Respondents were largely positive on the *idea* of the Action Plan as a means to support sustainability, but largely negative on whether the current Action Plan, as implemented, had supported sustainability in practice. A few sample comments include “unless this is financed by Royal Government, how can it be sustainable?”, “we need to find a way for the Commune Investment Plans to include money for VAC programming, including response”, and “we need more coordination, more commitment from players across the ministries”. These reflect factors that were felt to support sustainability: 1) Government committing funds to programming on prevention and response to VAC; 2) higher prioritisation in planning and spending to communes to prevent and respond to VAC; and 3) strengthened commitment across a range of ministries and sectors. Other comments included ‘create focal points like they did for child labour’, ‘go to scale nationwide’, ‘reform the criminal justice system to better protect children’, ‘make sure that the full Action Plan is implemented’, and ‘pass the necessary legislation and prepare the necessary policies’. Comments about Government commitment were most common, including committing funds, but also making VAC programming work across sectors, and expanding actions nationwide. More detail is provided in Annex Q.

The issue was not ‘doing away with’ the Action Plan rather, there was a desire to ‘go to scale’, a demand for significant expansion in Government financing and overcoming major roadblocks such as needed legal reform and expanded human resourcing, strengthening implementation at commune level, and improving within ministry integration into ministry programming as well as improving cross-sectoral responses. On within sector integration, for example, one respondent noted that ‘we have implemented the Plan based on financing from UNICEF but we never established any committee in our ministry to integrate this work into our other programming that focuses on children’ (Evaluation Question S1)

A number of key informants at national level, as well as local officials and key informants from international NGOs, noted that **UNICEF in particular played a critical role in helping to maintain momentum**, based on its ‘soft power’ of reputation, its experience, its direct engagement in a range of Action Plan programming, and in terms of enabling fundraising. UNICEF supported the convening functions of Royal Government and then helped build working relationships between actors including international NGOs. This role is highly valued, and is consistent with broader support in terms of child protection systems strengthening as well as strengthening the legal and policy environments (Evaluation Question S3).

A range of respondents provided the consistent comments about the need to **better fit the Action Plan programming into how ministries already implement their activities**. But it was more than that, which is also about considering existing programming, existing systems, existing services and considering where implementation could take place within those. One example given was the health sector clinical handbook that fit clearly within how the sector delivered. Another was programming around rehabilitation where procedures were clear. As one international NGO respondent put it, ‘the key is to strengthen and enforce existing mechanisms and systems where there is already ownership’.

In 2016 UNICEF wrote⁷³: “Cambodia’s child protection system remains underfunded and understaffed. The government budget for child protection, including violence prevention and response, alternative care and child justice, is limited and the system relies heavily on donor financing”. Many of the key informants agreed that this remained a problem

Overall there were three points related to Royal Government’s role where particular concerns were raised (Evaluation Question S2): 1) **pressure on commune-level bodies** to perform critical on-the-ground roles when they didn’t have the skills or time to do so; 2) **shortages of skilled and experienced human**

⁷³ UNICEF Cambodia (2016). UNICEF Cambodia Child Protection Strategy Note 2016-2018, prepared by UNICEF Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Page 1.

resources at local government level to be able to engage commune-level bodies and effectively manage referrals through standard operating procedures; and 3) a heavy reliance on development partners for financing and implementation and consequently **inadequate financing from Government**. As these are critical to sustainability, a number of respondents suggested further investment in capacity development, considering restructuring bodies at the commune level to handle additional workloads, stronger linkages between local authorities and these commune bodies, and Government agreeing to finance initiatives in proximate locations as they transition towards greater Government financing overall. These expectations are consistent with investments in child protection systems strengthen and capacity development efforts for social workforce⁷⁴.

A number of the civil society and development partner interviewees highlighted the **value of investing in improved service delivery at decentralised levels**. **Government financing was critical** in those bodies in terms of securing the necessary resources from Government, with particular challenges at the commune level (Evaluation Question S2).

Commune level budgeting processes, securing financing based on the Commune Investment Plans, and diversifying ‘pressure’ on opinion leaders at the commune level were all noted (Evaluation Question S1). The Commune Investment Plans were noted by commune interviewees as heavily focused on infrastructure, with little financing for social programming including VAC. None of the commune groups interviewed noted that the Investment Plans were targeting the needs of children in need. This does mean that it isn’t happening in other communes, but none of the district or provincial interviewees referred to the Investment Plans as a source of funds for VAC programming, but could be.

The Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to VAC refers to “more extensive costing procedures by line ministries as they integrate activities to prevent and respond to violence against children into their annual operational budgets” of their ministries (page 30). A number of key informants from ministries noted that this had not happened, but needed to be done in order for the Action Plan to be ‘internalised’ within their ministries (Evaluation Question S2).

To strengthen subnational level decision-making, MoSVY is supporting decentralised authorities with the development of sub-national child protection strategic plans that are specifically relevant to the situation, needs and expectations in different areas around the country (Evaluation Question S2). This includes specific consideration of the VAC Action Plan and what it means for each location, and frames it in the broader context of child protection more generally. Supported by UNICEF Cambodia, these will eventually be synthesized into a consolidated national strategic plan that accommodates diversity. Depending on the efficacy of this process, it is expected that this will enhance the sustainability of VAC programming within the child protection response, and support resources of VAC programming as well as other child protection programming. Additionally, as mentioned, Government is investing considerable resources, with UNICEF support, in strengthening overall child protection infrastructure.

In discussions with commune and district level entities, a concern was repeatedly expressed that their members did not have the skills required to meet their obligations (Evaluation Question S2). The problem was not one of commitment, rather it was the ability to do what needed to be done. Without this, they argued, they could not perform over time. Much of the conversation that followed covered responding to children who are in difficulties, such as children needing protection from an abuser. But it also included responding to broader needs of families where violence was felt to be more prevalent because of risks like poverty. One district committee, for example, noted that there were cases where parents had migrated for work and children were staying with grandparents or grandmothers who could not take care of them. ‘There should be support for children whose parents migrated, the support should include providing materials and foods to be able for them to go to school’.

Operationally, the **functioning of the Action Plan ‘infrastructure’** to guide implementation of the Action Plan **was raised as a concern** by key informants knowledgeable about the process, noting a range of constraints associated with managing Action Plan implementation, and the loss of interest in engaging with

⁷⁴ In this sense, reference is also made to the launch and roll-out of the Primero digital case management system, to the capacity building of district level social affairs and social welfare officers and to the the new model of case collaboration included setting up partnership building between 3PC social service workers and district social affairs and social welfare workers in 18 districts.

the multi-sectoral arrangements put into place, including the Technical Working Groups (Evaluation Question S2). The Steering Committee was noted to have served as a deliberative body that has helped advance the Action Plan, but that it was not playing a sufficiently active and visible role compared to what was needed to strengthen programming. As these or similar structures would remain central to the smooth implementation of a multi-sectoral set of programmes and actions, more attention is needed on strengthening these entities, rationalise structures and functions (e.g., are the TWGs properly focused on the right topics?, are the right topics grouped together?, should there be more such groups and more specific focus within each, or fewer groups with more responsibilities?), and provide updated mandates to implement and enforce actions.

Another aspect of sustainability is associated with the **expansion of initiatives** judged to have worked geographically, and deepened in locations of current implementation (Evaluation Question S3 and S1). The UNICEF Country Programme⁷⁵ for Cambodia notes the importance of ‘taking initiatives to scale’, and references Positive Discipline in Schools and Positive Parenting programmes in particular. They also point to the Clinical Handbook on the identification and treatment of children subjected to violence and Cambodia PROTECT and issues of unnecessary family separation that were already being implemented countrywide. Positive Discipline in Schools pre-dates the Action Plan, by the end of 2017 the programme already reached 405 primary schools and over 120,000 girls and boys⁷⁶. A knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) survey was conducted in 2015 in twelve pilot schools and twelve non-reached schools, with a follow-on survey conducted in 2016. The 2019 Annual Report on the VAC Action Plan shows activities across a range of educators and institutions for positive discipline in schools. The findings show that it is possible to invoke rapid change with a well-considered intervention, with changes in educator conduct and educator behaviour. This change occurred despite objective conditions not having changed (e.g., crowded classrooms, disruptive behaviours).

One point not commonly mentioned when discussing sustainability was how information itself could strengthen awareness of what was being delivered through the Action Plan, only mentioned by a few senior level key informants (Evaluation Question S1). Here a case was made for how data and knowledge products had already played such a critical role in *preparing* the Action Plan but seemed to be less valued with *implementation* of the Action Plan. There is reported to be a wealth of interesting findings coming from the work being done around prevention and response, and less codified learning on the effectiveness of systems strengthening, that needed to be brought together through a **clear knowledge sharing and learning strategy**. This would require that the design of this strategy be done involving a wide range of actors to support understanding how the sector worked and to support buy-in, but also that an agency in Government needed to be assigned the responsibility of effective knowledge management.

12 Cross-Cutting Issues

12.1 Introduction

There was no single cross-cutting question in the Terms of Reference. Instead, three were specified:

1. In what ways and to what extent has the Action Plan to prevent and respond to VAC integrated an equity-based approach into the design and implementation of its services?
2. To what extent are age, disability and gender disaggregated data regarding beneficiaries collected and monitored?
3. Does the VAC Action Plan actively contribute to the promotion of child and women’s rights, especially the most vulnerable, including children with disabilities?

⁷⁵ UNICEF (2018). Country Programme Document: Cambodia, United Nations Children’s Fund Executive Board, New York, New York, United States.

⁷⁶ UNICEF Cambodia (2018). “KAP Survey on Disciplinary Methods in Cambodian Primary Schools”, (mimeo), prepared by M. Yoshikawa, UNICEF Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Cross-cutting issues were considered by each evaluation criteria above, consistent with good practice as per Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) standards⁷⁷. Further information is also provided here to build on the mainstreaming results presented above.

12.2 Findings

There is clear evidence that **Action Plan design gave due consideration to cross-cutting issues** associated with vulnerability and the different consequences of violence, with due consideration of gender, ethnicity, disability, and other relevant factors. This is reflected in the contents of the Action Plan, as well as noted by key informants. **The Action Plan includes general principles that refer to child rights and address gender discrimination** that perpetuates violence against children, and children at increased risk and in potentially vulnerable situations. It also includes key contents associated international conventions, national policies, strategies, laws and regulations of relevance to children, including especially vulnerable children. The Action Plan further notes how implementation processes will tackle a range of cross-cutting issues or refers to other policies and programmes focused on relevant areas that will do so (e.g., trafficking which is rather covered by the National Action Plan on the Suppression of Human Trafficking, Smuggling, Labour and Sexual Exploitation and associated decrees).

The Action Plan specifies objectives aimed at supporting equity. Equity is considered most specifically in the Action Plan considering differential risk to violence, and the need to respond to these differences. While recognising that “all children are fundamentally more vulnerable than adults due to their younger age, limited life experience, smaller physical size, maturity and means” (page 6), some were considered to be more vulnerable than others. Sub-section 3.2.9 specifically lists those children more at risk, and further notes overlapping risks, referring to ‘children at increased risk of violence’ as follows: Children Living with Disabilities and HIV&AIDS; Children in Residential Care; LGBT Children; Children Living or Working on the Street; Out-of-School Children; Child Migrants and Children of Migrating Families; Children Living in Rural or Remote Areas; Children from Indigenous or Ethnic or Religious Minority Communities; Children in Contact with the Law; Children of Incarcerated Women. This is reiterated under Sub-section 4.2 on General Principles and Approach which references risk factors and children being at increased risk and being in potentially vulnerable situations. Reference to risk is also mentioned in terms of gender and the different risk factors and consequences of violence facing girls and boys. Indicators are specified in terms of measuring progress for girls and boys and females and males, as well as some indicators focused on especially vulnerable children.

Regarding Action Plan **implementation, there are three key findings:**

1. Stakeholder interviews and a review of programme documents suggest that concerted attention has been devoted to VAC programming based on an **understanding of the different risks and needs of girls and boys, children living in rural versus urban areas, children who had migrated, children living outside a family environment, and working children.** Gender considerations permeated virtually all programmes, while consideration of other types of vulnerabilities tended to fall under targeted programming.
2. **Both primary prevention and response to VAC programming were responsive to gender issues in materials design, messaging, reach, and tailored programming** to meet the varied needs of girls and boys and females and males. Programming involving various target groups in these respects did the same, while also responding to more specific vulnerabilities.
3. **Action Plan programming aimed at specific vulnerable populations** (e.g., children in contact with the law, working children, children living outside of families, children with disabilities, children from ethnic minorities, etc.) focused attention on their particular target groups, and retained that focus throughout.⁷⁸

The equity objectives associated with reaching those living in poverty were supported in two respects: 1) targeting poorer regions in the country (e.g., remote locations in the northeast); or 2) locations where there were a number of pockets of poverty (e.g., urban informal settlements). An excellent example of an initiative that targeted a remote area in a poorer, more isolated part of the country was the Ratanakiri Provincial Action Plan to Prevention Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy, issued in 2018. The Provincial Action Plan

⁷⁷ OECD (2014). Mainstreaming Cross-Cutting Issues Advancing Gender Equality and Environmental Sustainability, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Despite its title, this refers to cross-cutting themes more broadly.

⁷⁸ For example, consider the importance of Provincial Action Plan to Prevent Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy in Ratanakiri.

included a solid assessment of the challenges facing the province that resulted in high levels of child marriage and teenage pregnancy, elaborated the implications of these for young people (with particular problems facing girls), and provided a cogent discussion of the way forward. This was further informed by a baseline study that followed a year later.

There were also programmatic efforts for primary prevention to effectively reach poorer households, households with adults with low levels of education, single parent households, and other households where economic conditions might be especially difficult and who faced limited ability to solve the problem. For response, the issue was less poverty *per se* but rather risk profile, and in this regard some key informants involved in the response noted that that meant that they were often faced with situations where poverty undermined the ability of children and families to caring for children and engaging in positive discipline. Reintegration programming was noted as a particular challenge in this regard, as these households were largely under economic pressure (which led to a number of cases of child institutionalisation in the first place).

Children were asked about who was most vulnerable to violence, referring to the risk of violence as well as the consequences of violence (see Annex R for further details). In some cases, the children referred to different risk factors affecting girls and boys. A number of the children referred to children in different situations that made them more vulnerable to violence. Poverty was mentioned by a number of children, where they noted that the weight of problems facing these families could lead to violence against children. Children with disabilities were also commonly mentioned, as were children who had migrated from elsewhere. Street children were also noted by those in urban areas, while two sets of respondents mentioned LGBT children. Children who had migrated from one place to another noted two key outcomes affecting their lives: 1) inability to attend school, or having to drop out of school; and 2) difficulties in fitting in to their new location which, for some, meant being bullied.

When asked about which children were subject to which types of violence, this assessment that boys were not commonly affected by sexual violence but girls were was repeated by a number of children, as well as parents/caregivers and commune authorities. Boys, it was commonly argued, were rather more subject to physical violence, and girls more subject to emotional and sexual violence⁷⁹

One 12-year-old girl in Preah Sihanouk, who had a disability with only one arm from birth noted that she was lucky because she was supported by a group Mlup Tapang which meant she could attend school. After school, she helped her mom selling knitted products, which left little time for studies

The area where most key informants said not enough was being done was with regard to children living with disabilities. There was recognition that this was specifically important and that risks were indeed there, but difficulties in adapting programming to reach and respond to the needs of children with disabilities meant that the response was

inadequate. Some noted that it was constrained access issues, with children with disabilities less likely to attend school, seek out services, be seen in public, or be targeted for support by commune-level entities, while others noted that local partners were not specifically trained or experienced in reaching out to children with disabilities, with particular challenges in terms of children living with mental disabilities. While HIV was included in the plan linked to disabilities, the reporting on children living with HIV was included with regard to drug use and exploitation, reached through the 3PC Programme.

There was programming around children in contact with the law, which was highly valued by the children interviewed in this regard, but recognition that many children in contact with the law were not reached with these services, and further that attempts at diversion rather than imprisonment were still not successful. Similarly, during the evaluation interviews were conducted with migrant children where they pointed out that the challenges they faced were considerable, from bullying to non-attendance at school to having to work to not seeking services. Reintegrated children, having left institutions and reunited with their families, gave a range of responses to questions around the success of their reintegration that highlighted mixed experiences at the institutions (some reported good treatment, access to education, etc. while others reported emotional abuse), and mixed experiences at home. What was common to most reintegrated children was noting the struggles facing their families in caring for them and making a living, and concerns that their presence could make life more difficult for the families themselves. Some were receiving assistance, including support to attend school, and where this was taking place the children were clearly accepting of this support.

⁷⁹ Among those aged 13-17, 6.4% of girls and 5.2% of boys were subjected to sexual violence. See Royal Government of Cambodia (2014). Findings from Cambodia's Violence Against Children Survey 2013, Government Commitment to End Violence Against Children, Steering Committee on Violence Against Children, Royal Government of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

The issue of ‘promoting child and women’s rights’ is also specifically noted in the Action Plan. Yet this is perhaps one of the more constrained aspects of Plan implementation in two important respects: 1) legal reform; and 2) substantive engagement of rights-holders as decision-makers rather than decision-takers during implementation. For the former, development of the Juvenile Justice Law Strategic and Operational Plan (2018-2020), led by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY), working in particular with the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice, was an example of legal advancements, but even here the work is both time-consuming and sometimes slow-moving⁸⁰. There were also challenges in protecting the rights of some vulnerable minorities. Respondents asked about legal reform noted that these things took time, and further that specific mention of some vulnerable groups (e.g., LGBT Cambodians) in which legislation is not yet set.

For the latter -- substantive engagement of rights-holders as decision-makers -- the existence of consultative structures for young people⁸¹ was mentioned, but were inevitably stated as quite limited and that much more was required. **Engagement with rights-holders that effectively listened to young people and parents/caregivers were noted**, with examples given for both community-based and school-based interventions, but even here those involved in implementation noted that cultural norms as well as the approach to communities historically both undermined effective engagement, in particular of young persons. Civil society respondents also identified norms within Government that encouraging ‘active listening’ to the voices of rights-holders is limited, and that few solutions had been found in how to effect change in this regard.

Key informants involved in public health and VAW programming noted that it had been challenging to expand clinical protocols around sexual violence against women and girls to include boys. This is despite the preparation of a Clinical Handbook, Healthcare for Children Subjected to Violence or Sexual Abuse (2017), and a Clinical Handbook for Responding to Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence (2014). In part this was due to a common perception, even in the medical profession, that boys are not subject to sexual assault⁸². **Violence against boys tended to be viewed as specifically dealing with physical harm**, rather than an integrated response to violence. Minimum Standards for Basic Counselling for Women and Girl Survivors of Gender Based Violence (2016) and Referral Guidelines for Women and Girl Survivors of Gender-Based Violence (2016) required additional adaptation.

Reporting on progress provides data across girls and boys and by vulnerable groups where appropriate. For example, where a local organisation provided support to children in contact with the law, the numbers were given, and were provided by males and females. When children were reunited with their families, a similar approach was followed. Where engagement was deficient (e.g., fathers involved in positive parenting), this was also reported. Key informants involved in implementation and reporting noted that further breakdowns were required, and that they were endeavouring to support improved data capture in this regard, with greater attention needed on issues such as age (noting the importance of life cycle differences), location, migration status and more. The responses reflect the challenges associated with understanding risk factors and responding to them in practical programming, and in effectively targeting children in their programming. Dealing with the different needs of boys and girls was common, but programmes had more difficulties dealing with other factors that may determine risk such as those who specifically targeted children at risk, such as children in trouble with the law, children living on the street, children living outside of family care, and similar were well able to target effectively. There, rather, the problem was constraints in reaching as many in need as possible. The high unit costs of service provision to groups with particular needs and constraints in service delivery were noted to frustrate delivery.

One final issue is **whether programming recognises children as having agency**, as having the right to be involved in design and implementation and in decisions that affect their lives. A number of key informant interviewees implementing programmes under the VAC Action Plan were unable to answer the question of whether their work was consistent with a human rights-based approach to programming. Some were

⁸⁰ See MoSVY and Ministry of Justice (2018). Juvenile Justice Law and Strategic and Operational Plan 2018-2020.

⁸¹ Mainly the Adolescent and Youth Reference Group (AYRG). See AYRG’s Presentation on: Outcome of the group in 2019-2020 Discusses on challenges and solutions in capacity building activities.

⁸² As noted earlier, 6.4% of girls and 5.2% of boys interviewed in the 2013 VAC survey had been subjected to violence between the ages of 13 and 17. See Royal Government of Cambodia (2014). Findings from Cambodia’s Violence Against Children Survey 2013, Government Commitment to End Violence Against Children, Steering Committee on Violence Against Children, Royal Government of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

implementing programmes that actively involved children and made sure to engage with both boys and girls to strengthen their agency, where clubs were created or similar, but most were rather delivering services directly with only some engagement of target audiences. This did not mean that the children interviewed resented their involvement with these agencies -- quite the contrary. But **few noted that they were actively involved in what was being delivered**. Findings suggest considerable room for improvement in this regard.

13 Conclusions, Lessons Learned and Recommendations

13.1 Conclusions

Conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations are presented below. Furthermore, a six-point scale is used to provide a summary statement on each AP's objective and evaluation criteria, judged in terms of whether progress is positive or negative, and how strongly this is the case, as explained above in Section 4.4.

6	Very positive
5	Somewhat positive
4	Slightly positive
3	Slightly negative
2	Somewhat negative
1	Very negative

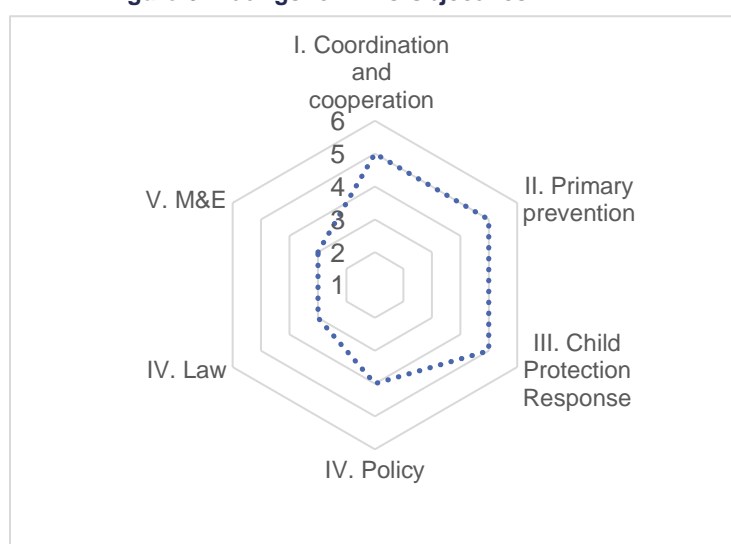
Did the VAC Action Plan Meet its Objectives?

The VAC Action Plan has five objectives associated with improved systems strengthening (coordination and cooperation, monitoring and evaluation), improved framework conditions (law and policy formulation), and building effective VAC programming (primary prevention, responding to VAC). The objectives were carefully formulated to reflect an emphasis on **building sustainable national structures and mechanisms to prevent and respond to VAC, and directly delivering prevention and response services to consider the efficacy of approaches employed**.

Conclusion 1. The overall conclusion of the evaluation against these objectives is that this is the right focus to respond to a problem with deep roots that will take considerable time and energy to counter. It gets the balance right between trying to lower rates of violence against children while at the same time recognising that real change will take time. In orientation, **all five objectives are both sound and are core to any effective VAC programming**.

The challenges to achieving these objectives remain daunting, and are therefore more relevant when considered as long-term objectives for building a viable, sustainable, and coherent VAC programming. **More single plan-focused objectives, to be crafted as the equivalent of interim objectives, would provide good benchmarks for considering progress over time.**

Figure 6: Ratings for AP's Objectives



As showed by the figure 6, which gives an overview of the ratings offered for each AP's objectives for systems strengthening objectives around coordination and cooperation and monitoring and evaluation, the findings suggest mixed performance, with **Objective 1 on Coordination and Cooperation rated as 'somewhat positive' (5 on the 6-point scale), and Objective 5 on Monitoring and Evaluation rated as 'slightly negative' (3 on the 6-point scale)**. Both areas were clearly recognised as important in the Action Plan, and there was considerable investment in particular in Coordination and Cooperation directly associated with making the Plan work as a Plan, and with broader investment in strengthening monitoring

systems overall in child protection, but less attention to monitoring of the Plan itself.

Conclusion 2. Given that this was the first Action Plan, there are challenges associated with effective monitoring, with particular gaps in results monitoring and detailed reporting that undermines evaluation. The fact that fairly extensive routine monitoring took place from year 2, and which was expected to have further improved but was hampered by Covid-19, is positive, but there was no critical reporting and an absence of denominators that undermined the ability to use these results to assess progress. Significantly greater investment is needed linking VAC programming with the emergent child protection information systems and reporting, in adding results monitoring to the Action Plan, and in building an Action Plan-level Theory of Change with testable hypotheses.

Conclusion 3. Similarly, institutions put into place to strengthen cross-sectoral coordination and Action Plan functioning remained weak. VAC programming requires extensive cross-sectoral engagement, and this comes up against the tendency for programmes to be implemented within sectoral line ministries rather than across cross-institutional structures. Considerable time and energy have been invested in these national institutions, including both the Steering Committee and the Technical Working Groups, with UNICEF working closely with MoSVY in continued efforts to build viable and active infrastructure that would help enable any VAC action planning. **The evidence shows that this takes time, and will take continued investment including the continued involvement of UNICEF, but that from a long-term perspective this national infrastructure is key to the sustainability of long-term VAC programming.** In this regard, it is a worthwhile investment, whatever progress has been made in the short-term. Further, **the convening functions around this infrastructure has had positive impacts on networking**, with government, NGOs and civil society working closely together with international development partners. Building these relationships is critical to the long-term sustainability of VAC programming.

Conclusion 4. The improvement of framework conditions around legal and policy reform met with considerable headwinds. **Greater progress was showed in policy (rated 'slightly positive', at 4) than in legal reform and innovation (rated as 'slightly negative', at 3).** The political environment nevertheless remained positive with opportunities for further strengthening, suggesting that legal and policy change was both possible and likely. This holds true in Cambodia, and within the context of regional and international commitments and institutions (e.g., ASEAN). The constraints were around the time required to navigate processes and provide the infrastructure necessary to enable policy implementation and legal advancements (e.g., child-friendly legal services, establishing places of safety and securing the necessary human resources, effective referral mechanisms, etc.).

Policy, strategy and implementation protocols have been advancing associated with improved child protection overall, and with specific regard to trafficking, child marriage, child labour and reintegration of children from institutions into their families.

The two objectives around building effective VAC programming (primary prevention and multi-sectoral child protection response) were both concluded to be 'somewhat positive' (rated 5 out of 6). This positive rating reflected progress made in committing to comprehensive prevention programming from media outreach to community-based programming, and by building networks, relationships, and systems that could identify and respond to situations of violence against children.

Conclusion 5. Considerable work has been done in establishing avenues for primary prevention, including media, institutions, and community-based actions. Findings suggest broad acceptance of the range of activities underway. Feedback on institutional actions is largely positive, such as feedback on the quality of media campaigning design and initial implementation, although insufficient time has passed to judge results. Community-based programming is progressing but results are not clear, and there are challenges to direct field engagement in this regard, including restrictions around Covid-19. Given the magnitude of the problem of VAC and the efficacy of actions to date (as far as can be distilled from available data), expanded investment in primary prevention will be needed, including both mass media and community outreach.

Conclusion 6. Programming aimed at building stronger response infrastructure to try and protect all children, and targeting those most in need of immediate protection, is reasonably effective. This is so despite the many problems associated with constrained demand for these services and the level of effort required to build systems that can provide the range of services for children in need. The focus on systems strengthening from commune level up, the emphasis on better linking service providers to the range of

services that children in harm may need, and targeting gaps in service delivery in various sectors (e.g., health protocols, child-friendly protective police services, etc.) are all valuable contributions to an eventually strengthened response.

Conclusions on the Theory of Change

Conclusion 7. The development of the Theory of Change (ToC) on VAC in Cambodia as a whole was noted by those involved in the process as important to agreeing on the determinants of violence against children, considering what child protection actions can best contribute to preventing VAC, understanding the multi-sectoral nature of violence cause and prevention, and identifying areas for response. The Theory of Change was attended by an informative document that discussed the ToC elements in a clear and understandable manner. Overall, **there was broad-based satisfaction with the process of ToC development.**

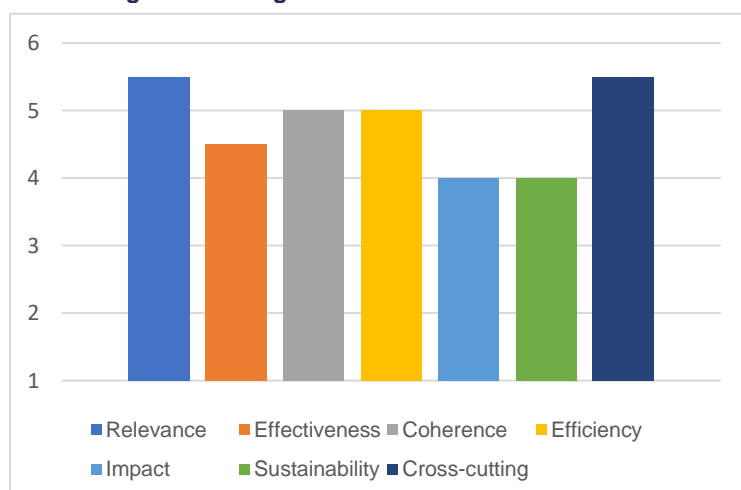
Nevertheless, the ToC was not directly linked to the implementation of the Action Plan, and served no purpose in considering the contribution of the Action Plan activities to factors noted in the ToC. In part this is due to the fact that the ToC was simply too high level of a framework to guide practical actions. And even if it had been better connected, the ToC lacked testable hypotheses that would have allowed the connection to be made between actions carried out under the Action Plan and the ToC itself. In short, it was too far removed from implementation to help guide the process.

What is needed is a complete revision of the Theory of Change that better links the higher-level factors with programming around VAC, including those actions falling under the VAC Action Plan, but also other plans (e.g., trafficking, legal reform, etc.). Also needed are clear 'arrows' throughout the Theory of Change that represent hypothesized relationships between actions and outcomes, and outcomes and impacts. From this, the VAC Action Plan could consider which of the testable hypotheses are relevant for the Plan's implementation, and measure accordingly. One approach could be 'nested' theories of change that are reflective of sections of the VAC Action Plan, as discussed below under recommendations. This would also allow a continued 'high level' ToC that covers issues beyond the Action Plan, but underneath that an Action Plan-level ToC that can be tested as implementation proceeds.

Conclusions on Relevance, Effectiveness, Coherence, Efficiency, Sustainability, Impact and Cross-cutting issues

Ratings associated with design were more positive than ratings against implementation for relevance and cross-cutting issues. Effectiveness varied in terms of achieving objectives, i.e. 'somewhat positive', and 'slightly positive' for some outcomes. Sustainability was 'somewhat positive' in terms of the implications of design, but showed serious limitations during implementation and was rated 'slightly negative'. While it was also rated 'slightly positive' for impact, the absence of clear and convincing evidence means that this conclusion should be considered with caution.

Figure 7: Ratings for evaluation criteria



Conclusion 8. For relevance, solid design meant that careful attention was paid to national and international planning documents and normative frameworks, as well as careful consideration against gender and vulnerability as they manifest in Cambodia. Relevance during design was similarly enabled due to the attention given to engagement with various sectors and agreement on the roles each would play in the Action Plan. As a result, **the Action Plan was rated as 'very positive' in terms of design. This remained positive for implementation but with a lower rating of 'somewhat positive'.** This was due to constraints that became evident as

implementation proceeded in terms of the tendency of each actor to focus on sectoral programming in responding to their particular involvement in programme implementation, and weaknesses in the broader

child protection system despite progress made. While international definitions of VAC are followed throughout the world, there are nevertheless important differences between international definitions and Cambodian culture norms of what constitutes violence versus what is considered ‘acceptable discipline’, as is the case for many countries. This was not likely to be resolved during design, as Cambodia needed to show consistency with these international definitions, there is scope for greater nuancing during implementation that would allow those involved in primary prevention to better target norms and practices that are most relevant to reduce risk of severe physical violence, all sexual violence, and the worst aspects of emotional violence.

Conclusion 9. Effectiveness was rated as ‘somewhat positive’ for achievement of objectives and ‘slightly positive’ for some outcomes. The strength of these conclusions, however, was mitigated by a lack of evidence because of problems around the quality and availability of information (see Annex B). The uneven progress against outcomes reflected **strong progress across institution-focused interventions, moderate in terms of outcomes associated with community programming and child protection systems strengthening, and weakest in terms of outcomes associated with monitoring and reporting** on Action Plan delivery, reaching some of those in especially difficult circumstances. Rights-holder engagement can contribute significantly to Action Plan effectiveness in this regard, including community-based monitoring mechanisms that NGOs often employ.

Progress is evident against building systems and institutions in locations reached by interventions, building the case for effective upscaling in these locations and reach to new locations. Based on available information, both primary prevention and VAC response programming have proven effective, in particular institution-focused interventions. While evidence is mixed, prevention of violence in schools, pagodas and in some communities is likely, and important attitudinal change has occurred among those reached.

Some progress is evident in terms of policy development and coordination across policies, but this has been constrained by a lack of integration of VAC programming into sector plans and strategies. Legal reform is a slow process, and will take time.

Progress did not appear to vary significantly across location, and was rather tailored to the particular operational environment, thereby enhancing effectiveness. **While satisfaction with programming for those reached was positive, reach itself was more constrained.** This suggests that Action Plan delivery has been sufficiently nuanced to be more effective than would otherwise be the case, an important attribute that would need to be maintained for any future action planning. Reinforcement by greater rights-holder engagement would add considerable value.

Conclusion 10. Coherence was rated ‘somewhat positive’, reflecting the considered efforts to how to ‘make sense’ of the various actions in the overall Action Plan framework, how they would best fit under the identified strategic areas, how well they would contribute to attaining objectives, and what should be included and what should not be included in terms of VAC programming as they were covered elsewhere. This strategic approach, coupled with responding to opportunities that presented themselves (e.g., child marriage in Ratanakiri Province), helped ensure that the Action Plan fits within the context of Cambodia. **Complementarity was well considered,** including by various partners in identifying how they could contribute to various programme actions in various parts of the country.

Coherence was further enabled by the development and continued support by MoSVY and UNICEF in particular to cross-sectoral structures and by a focus on engaging cross-sectoral entities and decentralised actors, including at commune and district levels. **These bodies were, nevertheless, quite constrained in functioning and effectiveness, which undermined coherence over time. Lack of resources and the tendency to focus on programmes within a sectoral context were common problems.** Without further attention to these constraints during the remainder of Action Plan implementation, and without specific consideration of these constraints when designing the next Action Plan, coherence will be undermined.

Conclusion 11. Action Plan efficiency in terms of cost-effectiveness was rated ‘somewhat positive’. The main conclusion is that **VAC programming under the Action Plan was more cost effective than if the programming had been delivered without the umbrella of the Action Plan.** Cost effectiveness was improved by the participatory design of the Action Plan, the extensive processes put into place for design and early implementation to get a range of actors on board, by the ability of varied service providers to

advocate for their programming within the framework of the Action Plan (and therefore their ability to raise resources), and the resources and time invested in partnerships, mentoring and capacity development. **Cost effectiveness was further enhanced by the emphasis on systems strengthening and institutional development, and by actions aimed at sector service delivery strengthening.** These warrant further attention for the remainder of this Action Plan, and any future action planning.

There were **efficiency challenges associated with the integration of VAC programming within ministries** in terms of sectoral planning, implementation and reporting processes, which tended to focus on VAC as stand-alone actions.

Conclusion 12. Severe information gaps undermined the ability to assess impacts, while impacts generally take considerable time to manifest, and this Action Plan is effectively only in year three of implementation (and constrained by the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic). In these respects, **it was too early to measure impacts.** Within this framework, **available evidence suggests ‘slightly positive’ impacts, considered short-term results that may yield long-term impacts.** The key finding is that impacts will be heightened by the focus on investing in systems strengthening and institutional development, while at the same time keeping VAC on the political agenda. Mobilisation of actors across various ministries was noted as positive with early signs of progress and results reflected in institutions. **Broader efforts in institutional development and system strengthening in child protection more generally reinforce conclusions that current results will translate into longer-term impacts if efforts continue.**

Despite all of this, **few stakeholders felt that changes in levels of violence against children had occurred**, save within some institutional settings, and in terms of trends in child marriage. There was considerable confusion about trends in VAC at local level, much of it due to conflating reporting violence with actual cases of violence, and in terms of only severe violence (severe physical violence, any sexual violence, and severe emotional abuse) being considered to be violence. This highlights the challenges in reducing levels of violence over time without more attention to community-driven VAC programming with local change agents that can help change opinions and practices over time.

Conclusion 13. For sustainability, early evidence suggests grounds for optimism that, if current efforts continue and if improvements are made, effective VAC programming can be sustained. **For commitment and awareness, given political commitment and the high-profile nature of the Action Plan, sustainability was rated ‘somewhat positive’.** **Nevertheless, resource allocation and staffing remained heavily constrained, and was rated as ‘slightly negative’.**

There is strong political will, recognition by Government and partners in development that VAC is a serious problem warranting attention, continued Government and partner commitment to reducing VAC, and a willingness of Government to commit to national, regional and international objectives. Further, there is strong evidence of sustained commitment by international development partners to support VAC programming into the future, and there are a number of NGOs with Cambodian experience and a willingness to continue VAC programming into the future. **Momentum is strong, and if international commitments are maintained, VAC programming should strengthen over time. UNICEF has an especially critical role to play in this regard, both in terms of supporting the focus on systems strengthening and institutional development, and in terms of support to policy and legal innovation.**

Government remains clearly committed to provide human resources to the task, including in communities as part of broader child protection strengthening, and in working with a wide range of implementing partners and development agencies. The presence of the Action Plan reinforces these actions, and further suggests that sustainability would be undermined if there was no Action Plan to guide coherent implementation. Unfortunately, **weaknesses in implementation has undermined the Action Plan’s ability to do so, requiring further support to strengthening Action Plan implementation and the commitment of additional financial and other resources by Government.**

Threats to sustainability therefore emanate from lack of Government financing that would mean additional commitment to VAC programming, whether for expanded current programming, for roll-out for replacement, for efforts to overcome legislative gaps, and for significant additional attention to measuring results and impacts and revising programming accordingly.

Conclusion 14. Regarding cross-cutting issues, this was a particular strength of the Action Plan, both for design ('very positive'), and for implementation ('somewhat positive'). It is clear from a review of the Action Plan itself, and various documents supporting its development, that **cross-cutting issues were consistently considered and integrated into each stage of action planning, and carried through to implementation.** Various documents, studies and the VAC survey that fed into the Action Plan were given careful consideration, and offered numerous insights into matters such as targeting and approach. All of this allowed clear consideration of a range of cross-cutting factors during implementation, with UNICEF and international NGOs offering critical support to agents of change within the Royal Government of Cambodia as well as in civil society.

For implementation, some aspects of this comprehensive attention weakened, with the result that most focused on girls versus boys rather than other patterns of vulnerability. These other vulnerabilities were largely considered when a programme was particularly focused on that vulnerability (e.g., child labour), and as a result mainstreaming cross-cutting issues into programme targeting and reporting was insufficient.

13.2 Lessons Learned

Lessons learned fell into **three groupings**:

1. The evaluation has highlighted the **important role that strong design** and continued support during implementation has played in the successes of the Action Plan. This in turn underlines the **importance of continued partnership between international actors and national governmental and civil society actors and rights-holders.**
2. **Learning from regional and international experience and guiding protocols is critical, while adapting approaches based on local conditions** and norms helps connect these to effective programming within Cambodia.
3. While it is important to be ambitious about the need to counter high levels of violence against children, it is equally important to recognise the profound challenges in reducing levels of violence, and the **central role that robust systems and strong institutions play in effecting long-term change.**

In the first instance, the design of the Action Plan highlighted the value of investing in the evidence that helped build political will and country commitment, and marshalling this evidence in determining Action Plan content and priorities. This was followed by extensive engagement with a wide range of stakeholders over time, as well as actions including the development of the Theory of Change that built consensus on what could be done under the framework of the Action Plan, including actions that fell under other policies and plans but would contribute to the objectives of the VAC Action Plan. And it included careful attention to gaining agreement on priorities, identifying programmes and partners, and holding this all together within a single framework represented by the Action Plan. **Those involved in the design process highlighted the thoroughness of the design work, and repeated efforts to ensure a wide range of voices were heard and respected.** These channels of communication and consultation remained open and active during implementation, with MoSVY and UNICEF both playing core roles in this regard. As with design, those involved in implementation underlined the commitment of core actors in maintaining momentum and ensuring continued engagement, and actions to support continued political commitment. MoSVY and UNICEF's further actions to strengthen child protection more broadly reinforced this.

In the second instance, the design and implementation of the Action Plan was built on solid international normative documents on successful programming around VAC. This also held for regional normative documents, with ASEAN especially important in this regard. Some of the key informants argued that, as a result of its actions, Cambodia is viewed as a leader in the region. **The character of the response to VAC in Cambodia was built around local systems and protocols,** while at the same time recognising important entry points to effect change. **Innovative programming around employing respected local leaders** has proven especially effective (e.g., religious institutions, schools, local councils).

With regard to the third point, the Action Plan included a particular focus on systems strengthening and institution building as necessary foundations for effective VAC programming. This was reflected in the Action Plan document itself, and reinforced in the Results Matrix and in how objectives were phrased. As a result, these factors were never lost sight of, and investment continued in building the right foundation. At the

same time, it was also recognised that these could be further strengthened through linking to the direct delivery of services for prevention and response. Whether these involved local entities engaging with international NGO and civil society or UNICEF working with the health sector to strengthen the response to VAC, these links helped show that preventing and responding to VAC was possible, further strengthening government administrative and political commitment.

13.3 Recommendations

A thorough process of co-development of the recommendations was promoted, through four sessions of joint reflection held with various stakeholders, including the Evaluation International Reference Group composed by NGOs/CSOs, UN and donors, the staff of UNICEF Cambodia, the Adolescent and Youth Group (AYRG) and the Royal Government of Cambodia as represented by the Technical Working Group 3 of the VAC Action Plan. The final recommendations are listed here below. **The main three recommendations are presented along a scale of priority:**

Priority Recommendation 1: Proceed with VAC Action Plan extension and with preparations for and further action planning

Mainly based on Conclusions: All of them

Specific recommendations:

- A two-year extension is recommended to help catch up on lost time due to Covid-19 and give sufficient time to carefully prepare the next Action Plan.
- The next full Action Plan should be a 'rolling plan', with a full review after three years into the six-year planning cycle, allowing for adaptation of specific programming and priorities as the situation changes and priorities emerge.
- The Action Plan should continue to encompass other child protection initiatives that fall outside the delivery mandate, but are relevant to VAC. This includes areas such as child labour, child marriage and child trafficking, which fall largely under other thematic plans and programming but are part of Cambodia's VAC programming.
- Consider more alignment and integrative programming with the National Action Plan to address Violence Against Women.
- Emphasis to cross-cutting issues should continue into Action Plan extension and the next Action Plan, but with greater attention to mainstreaming vulnerabilities within all programming.
- Maintain alignment of the next Action Plan with the agreed global framework for INSPIRE, as per current plans in Cambodia.
- Cambodia should expand actions responding to online child sexual abuse and exploitation, including the topic within the Action Plan but separate programming to cover the complex and multi-sectoral nature of the problem.
- Develop a unified budget that includes government inputs, including in-kind inputs.
- Secure Government's specific fund commitment against the costed budget.

Main actors: MoSVY as lead ministry for CP and chair of SC; UNICEF as supporting body and the other AP's implementing partners; Technical teams established to develop the detailed inputs into the next AP.

Additional actors involved: All members of the Steering Committee overseeing implementation of the VAC Action Plan, and the Technical Working Groups supporting implementation; Government agencies/programmes involved in VAC programming that falls outside the AP but should be considered (e.g., trafficking); Major donors involved in CP in Cambodia; facilitators for various components.

Timeline: Extend the current plan into 2023, begin preparations for 2023-2029 action planning

Priority Recommendation 2: Retain the five strategic areas, but restructure objectives

Mainly based on Conclusions: All of them

Specific Recommendations:

- Remove the impact level references to reducing VAC that are currently in the objectives.
- Divide into process and outcome components, clearly stating each.

- Strategic Area 4 Objective: separate out legal reform and advancement from policy/strategy/ guidelines and similar.
- Strategic Area 5: add learning and reporting to monitoring and evaluation to emphasize documenting evidence and reporting. Under outcomes, indicate documentation of learning from what does not work as well as what does work as part of revising the second outcome. Make specific reference to results monitoring as a process outcome.
- All strategic areas: include clear references to gender and vulnerability.

Main actors: MoSVY as lead ministry for child protection and chair of the Steering Committee; technical teams established to develop the detailed inputs into the next Action Plan

Timeline: As part of design of the new Action Plan

Priority Recommendation 3: Strengthen M&E through building Results Monitoring into all programme and Action Plan monitoring systems, strengthening the emphasis on learning and documenting learning, and reporting on progress and regress

Mainly based on Conclusions: 1, 2, 12, 14

Specific recommendations:

- Develop mechanisms to report progress by prevention and response and systems strengthening overall on a more regular basis. Progress should be discussed in both relevant TWG meetings and through the Steering Committee and, as relevant, at provincial level as frequently as possible, but at least on an annual basis. Adolescent and youth consultative mechanisms should also be engaged.
- Significantly strengthen reporting on the results of actions taken, building in more field data collection (qualitative, observational, quantitative, case, significant change, etc.) than is currently the case. This should cascade up from programmes and provinces to national Action Plan reporting.
- Critical reporting on failure and setbacks should be specifically required for all reporting and included in Action Plan reporting, along with recommendations on alternative approaches or means to improve the situation. Reports that exclude this critical analysis should be rejected until they incorporate these factors.
- Develop a Knowledge Management Strategy and link this Strategy to Primary Prevention in particular to ensure that it informs programming as implementation proceeds.
- Establish specific participatory monitoring systems that allow reached populations and duty-bearers to report on progress and lack of progress. This includes online mechanisms.
- Measure and report against gender and vulnerability.

Main actors: MoSVY as implementation lead, UNICEF as technical lead and the other AP's implementing partners

Additional Actors involved: Consultants appointed to lead a process of engagement

Timeline: With the extension of the current AP into 2023, the focus would be on supporting MoSVY on the completion of the 2020 report that has already begun, and 2021-2022 reporting, including results monitoring

The following remaining recommendations are categorised between “strategic”, “operational” and “programmatic” according to their scope and level of implementation.

Strategic level:

Recommendation 4: Update the Theory of Change and adapt approach to make it an effective implementation tool

Mainly based on Conclusions: 7

Specific recommendations:

- Develop an Action Plan-specific Theory of Change falling under a broader, updated Theory of Change.
- Engage in an outcome mapping process to ensure that the Action Plan ToC duly considers the Action Plan's contribution to reducing VAC, intermediate measures, and linkages between outputs and outcomes. Ensure linkages with actions falling outside the remit of the VAC Action Plan but relevant to VAC.

- Within this ToC, deepen each strategic area with 'nested' theories of change at programme focus area (prevention, response, legal framework, policy framework, etc.) so that it is clear how each contributes towards the aims of the Action Plan overall.
- Develop testable hypotheses and sub-hypotheses (giving due attention to cultural and other context factors) for each of these strategic areas from output to outcome and from outcome to impact levels and measure these towards reporting on results and impacts (linked to Recommendation 3 below).
- Develop specific sub-hypotheses regarding gender and vulnerability.

Main actors: MoSVY as implementation lead; UNICEF as technical lead and the other AP's implementing partners

Additional actors involved: Consultants appointed to lead a process of engagement

Timeline: Begin preparation at least one year before the 2023 Action Plan is due to be implemented

Recommendation 5: Engage in further efforts in overall systems strengthening, legal and policy reform, and cross-sectoral integration

Mainly based on Conclusions: 1, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 13

Specific Recommendations:

- Continue to devote attention to systems strengthening, regional and international engagement in VAC initiatives, and legal and policy reform and development to support sustainability and the likelihood of impacts.
- Better integrate VAC actions into sectoral plans, strategies, policies, regulations, etc.
- Align VAC Action Plan timing, as possible, with national development planning cycles.
- Include specific measures on sustainability as part of the reporting system.

Main actors: MoSVY as lead ministry for child protection and chair of the Steering Committee; UNICEF and the other AP's implementing partners

Additional Actors involved: All members of the Steering Committee overseeing implementation of the VAC Action Plan, and the Technical Working Groups supporting implementation

Timeline: As part of design of the new Action Plan

Recommendation 6: Strengthen Multi-Sectoral Structures

Mainly based on Conclusions: 1, 3, 9, 10, 13

Specific Recommendations:

- Review the commitments of various sectoral actors and secure renewed commitment from each ministry.
- Update Terms of Reference for each entity, with clear statements of what is required (based on lessons learned from the current Action Plan).
- Assess whether there is a need to restructure the Technical Working Groups based on lessons learned from the current Action Plan.
- Establish means to incentivise engagement and performance reviews.
- Strengthen means for cross-sectoral engagement for the current and next Action Plan that reinforces this infrastructure, including ad hoc committees for particular tasks, joint programme implementation, joint monitoring and reporting mechanisms, and similar.
- At sub-national level, strengthen child protection to better position VAC programming, and to increase engagement in VAC. In the interim, secure commitment at provincial and district level from these authorities where programmes are on the ground.
- At commune level, strengthen social protection to improve performance of these bodies in the long-run. In the interim, consider means to incentivise their operations where VAC programming requires their extensive engagement.

Main actors: Steering Committee overseeing implementation of the VAC Action Plan; UNICEF and the other AP's implementing partners

Additional actors: Technical support from development partners with expertise in this area

Timeline: As part of design of the new Action Plan

Operational level:

Recommendation 7: Set up an impact evaluation component for the next Action Plan

Mainly based on Conclusions: 2, 12, 14

Specific recommendations:

- Secure specific financing for an independent impact evaluation contractor to set up baseline, midline and endline measures of treatment effects.
- Cover both process-related impacts and outcome-related impacts in this impact evaluation framework
- Establish and update denominators for key measures, establish benchmarks for achievements, including interim measures, and benchmarks focused on both process and outcomes.
- Ensure sample sizes are sufficient to track and report against gender and vulnerability.

Main actors: MoSVY as implementation lead, UNICEF as technical lead and the other AP's implementing partners;

Additional Actors involved: TWG 3; Consultants appointed to implement the impact evaluation

Timeline: As part of design of the new Action Plan

Recommendation 8: Establish means to further track expenditures and determine unit costs

Mainly based on Conclusions: 11

Specific Recommendations:

- Establish means to track and aggregate expenditure data at Action Plan level (including VAC programming that falls outside of the Action Plan as possible).
- Determine unit costs for prevention, response and systems strengthening by area.
- Track reach against need as per denominators noted above, and consider how to improve delivery to lower unit costs over time and improve reach.

Main actors: Steering Committee overseeing implementation of the VAC Action Plan, UNICEF and the other AP's implementing partners

Additional Actors involved: Technical support as appropriate

Timeline: As part of new Action Plan development, into year 1 of implementation to set up systems

Programmatic level:

Recommendation 9: Strengthen the engagement of rights-holders

Mainly based on Conclusions: 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 14

Specific Recommendations:

- Continue to actively engage with beneficiary groups through consultative structures, taking care to ensure inclusion in processes across gender and vulnerability.
- At programme level, expanded consultations during design and during implementation.
- At programme level, set up structures to hear from children and young people who are not part of consultative structures through small scale participatory exercises.
- At programme level, consider additional means to support the strengthening of agency among those reached by prevention and response outreach.

Main actors: MoSVY as lead ministry for child protection and chair of the Steering Committee; UNICEF as supporting body and the other AP's implementing partners

Additional Actors involved: All members of the Steering Committee overseeing implementation of the VAC Action Plan, and the Technical Working Groups supporting implementation;

Timeline: Implement at least one year before the next Action Plan is set for implementation

Recommendation 10: Devote additional attention to primary prevention roll-out and linked coverage

Mainly based on Conclusions: 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 14

Specific Recommendations:

- Implement integrated/co-ordinated systems strengthening at provincial, district and commune levels.
- Proceed with the expansion of institution-based prevention programming into new locations, including testing alternative means of delivery to lower unit costs.
- Continue primary prevention actions focused on various media channels, including social media, and engage with community media in target locations.
- Further consider cultural norms and how they should influence the focus of programming, along with gender norms and patterns of exclusion and vulnerability.
- Develop specific programme actions targeting children with disabilities as well as LGBT youth, and improve mainstreaming of vulnerability into all programming.
- Report against gender and vulnerability.

Main actors: MoSVY as lead ministry for child protection and chair of the Steering Committee

Additional actors: Members of the Steering Committee overseeing implementation of primary prevention interventions in the VAC Action Plan, and the relevant Technical Working Groups; UNICEF and other partners involved in the implementation of the Action Plan who are involved in primary prevention

Timeline: As part of design of the new Action Plan

Recommendation 11: Devote additional attention to the integrated response to VAC

Mainly based on Conclusions: 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 14

Specific Recommendations:

- Given that there is no substitute for building stronger services for children in immediate need, systems strengthening in this regard will need to remain a priority, despite unit costs.
- Ensure meaningful service delivery by strengthening the facilities and human resources needed to provide services, a protective legal framework, and a child-centred approach that helps build agency among affected children.
- Enable alternative means of protection that are common in communities that are most likely to reach the vast majority of children in need. Understanding their extent and functioning is required.
- Build awareness about the risk to sexual violence among boys, both among the public and among service providers.
- Strengthen tracking of situation following reintegration, as the conditions that led to separation often remain. Consider the implications for violence and prevention of violence.
- Enable diversion opportunities for young offenders.
- Improve reach for children with disabilities.
- Report against gender and vulnerability.

Main actors: MoSVY as lead ministry for child protection and chair of the Steering Committee; UNICEF and the other AP's implementing partners

Additional actors: All members of the Steering Committee overseeing implementation of the VAC Action Plan; the Technical Working Groups supporting implementation that focus on responding to VAC. Local government due to the critical issues around local responses to children most in need of protection, with specific involvement at commune level

Timeline: As part of design of the new Action Plan