

**PROTECT:**  
**A Communication Strategy to End Violence  
and Unnecessary Family Separation in Cambodia**  
**2019-2024**

Conceptual Framework



April 2017

## Background

According to the Cambodia Violence Against Children Survey (CVACS), more than half of all Cambodian children have experienced some form of physical violence prior to the age of 18. Roughly one-quarter of Cambodian children are emotionally abused by a parent, caregiver or other adult relative while growing up and about 5 per cent of both females and males aged 13 to 24 reported some form of sexual abuse prior to the age of 18. Among the children who experience violence, a high proportion (70-80 per cent) report multiple instances of violence. Furthermore, the CVACS data indicates that different forms of violence are often overlapping, with approximately 1 in 5 children experiencing more than one form of violence during their childhood.

Despite a growing body of international research demonstrating that the institutionalization of children negatively impacts their social, physical, intellectual and emotional development, an increasing number of children in Cambodia are placed in residential care by their parents or extended family. Since 2005, Cambodia has seen a 75 per cent increase in the number of residential care facilities with a reported 269 facilities in 2016 housing almost 12,000 children. Among the children in residential care, 3 out of 4 are not orphans and have at least one living parent. Residential care is contrary to traditional Cambodian practices of family or community based alternative care and places children at increased risk of neglect, emotional, physical and sexual abuse (UNICEF Cambodia, 2011).

To this end, Rain Barrel Communications was tasked with developing a Communication for Development (C4D) strategy to address the social and behaviour change required to prevent violence against children (VAC) and unnecessary family separation. The strategy will be national in scope, with focused implementation in five focal provinces (Phnom Penh, Kandal, Preah Sihanouk, Battambang, and Siem Reap). Subsequently, it is anticipated that partners can take on the implementation of the strategy in additional districts, using the same package of materials, messages, activities and indicators. The strategy will respond to the social and cultural norms that legitimize violence against children (VAC) and support the belief that residential care facilities are beneficial to a child, by addressing knowledge, attitudes, practices and the underlying determinants that perpetuate violence and institutionalization. It is envisioned that the strategy will promote positive parenting practices by supporting parents and other duty bearers to recognize the different forms of violence that threaten the well-being of their children, reiterating the importance of keeping families together and enabling them to take positive protective actions.

## Role of C4D in addressing VAC and family separation

Globally and within UNICEF there is ample evidence on the powerful role C4D can play in advancing human development and community participation (Inagaki, 2007; Lennie & Tacchi, 2011; McCall, 2011; UNICEF, 2009). Communication for development has been used for several decades as a means of improving the situation of children and families by promoting health, nutrition, sanitation, education and numerous other human rights issues. Communication is central to fostering social change and can inform, influence, motivate, engage and empower individuals and communities (Servaes, 2008).



In order to address VAC, C4D can play a key role for prevention by raising awareness of the negative impacts of violence, enhancing knowledge and skills for alternative actions and by promoting protective parenting practices. It can build upon existing good practices, identify positive role models and build confidence, including among those most marginalized. Communication for Development also plays an important role in transforming attitudes, values and norms that condone physical violence, sexual abuse, exploitation, unnecessary family separation and gender-based harmful traditional practices. When abuse, exploitation or harmful practices do occur, communication can break the silence and impunity surrounding these offences and can promote disclosure, reporting and reintegration (Sood & Cronin, 2014; WHO, 2010; UNICEF, nd; Usdin, Scheepers, Goldstein, & Japhet, 2005). Overall, C4D can address both the prevention and response dimension of child rights violations by generating awareness and dialogue, garnering commitment and encouraging actions by families and children themselves to end such practices.

## Development of the framework

This conceptual framework builds on Rain Barrel Communications' comprehensive desk review that synthesizes the nature and prevalence of VAC in Cambodia and culls out recommendations for a C4D strategy. Additionally, the framework draws on the analysis of key determinants provided in the *Cambodia Systematic Review on VAC* and the *Conceptual Framework on VAC in Cambodia* to propose a communication centered framework to address VAC and family separation. For the purpose of the C4D strategy, this conceptual framework analyzes the determinants described in *the Cambodia Systematic Review on VAC* and the *Conceptual Framework on VAC* and distinguishes those that can be addressed by C4D such as knowledge, attitudes and norms and those that are more structural and thus less amenable to being addressed by communication interventions, such as poverty and demand for child labour. The strategy will focus on the determinants that can be addressed by C4D, aiming to raise awareness of the risk factors and vulnerabilities (e.g., previous abuse, gender, age, ability), alter attitudes that perpetuate violence and impunity and in turn enhance the protective factors (e.g., peer support, positive parenting, law enforcement and education) as shown in Figure 1.

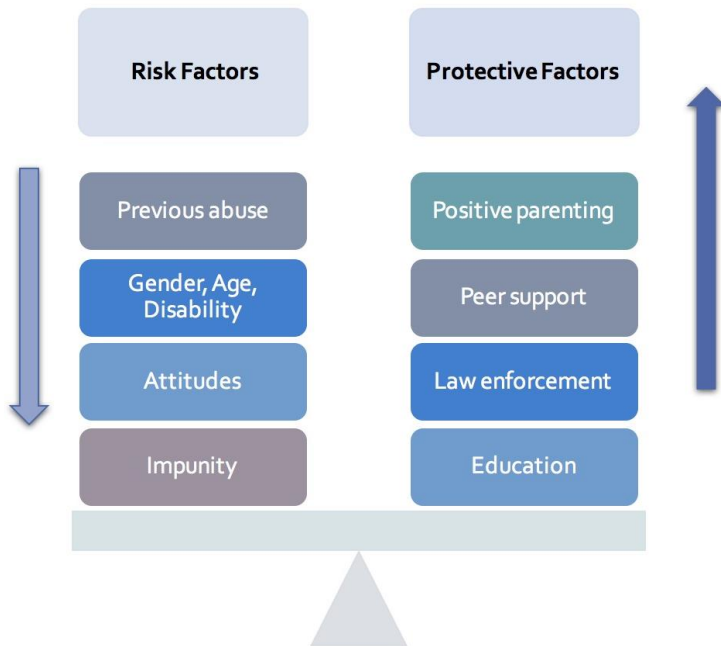


Figure 1: A Determinants based approach

The proposed change process builds on prominent theories of behavior and social change communication that have been used across several areas of health and human rights. The central premise guiding the social and behavior change posits that raising awareness and stimulating debate and discussion among different stakeholders about the unacceptability of all forms of violence and unnecessary family separation, can lead to transforming attitudes and practices that condone or perpetuate violence. Transformation of attitudes and building of critical negotiation skills and self-efficacy will lead to the ability to take action or make safer choices, contributing to changing normative practices and promoting social change. Ultimately the progression from knowledge gain to attitude change to garnering commitment will result in positive social and behaviour changes as illustrated in Figure 2.

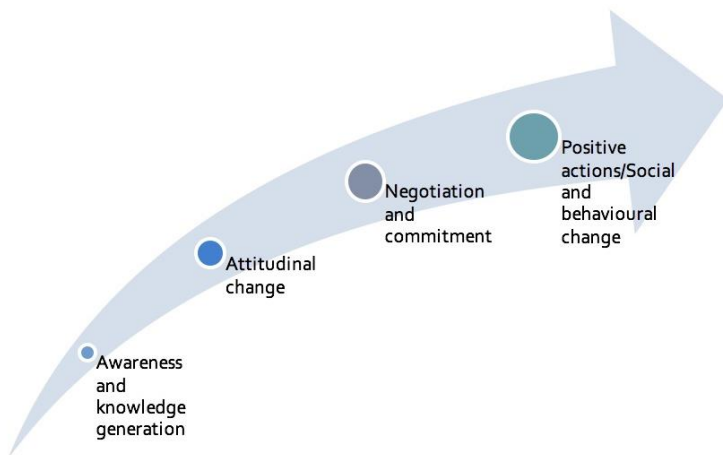


Figure 2: Social and behaviour change process

# Cambodia PROTECT framework

Building on the social and behaviour change communication process detailed previously and operationalizing a range of change theories that function at individual, interpersonal and community levels, a unique framework has been developed to guide the strategy. The Cambodia PROTECT framework, builds on strong evidence of what has worked globally in various areas of VAC including ending child marriage, domestic violence and bullying and is well suited to preventing and responding to both violence and family separation (Ellsberg et al., 2014; Sood & Cronin, 2015; Usdin, Scheepers, Goldstein, & Japhet, 2005) Overall, the framework promotes a culture where no form of violence against children is accepted and all relevant duty-bearers or stakeholders take positive actions to protect children from neglect, harm, abuse and violence (see Figure 3). The strategy will foster the protective factors and the positive aspects of current parenting practices prevalent in Cambodian culture. The strategy will also focus on culturally appropriate, doable and practical steps that individuals, families and communities can take to both prevent and respond to violence and family separation.

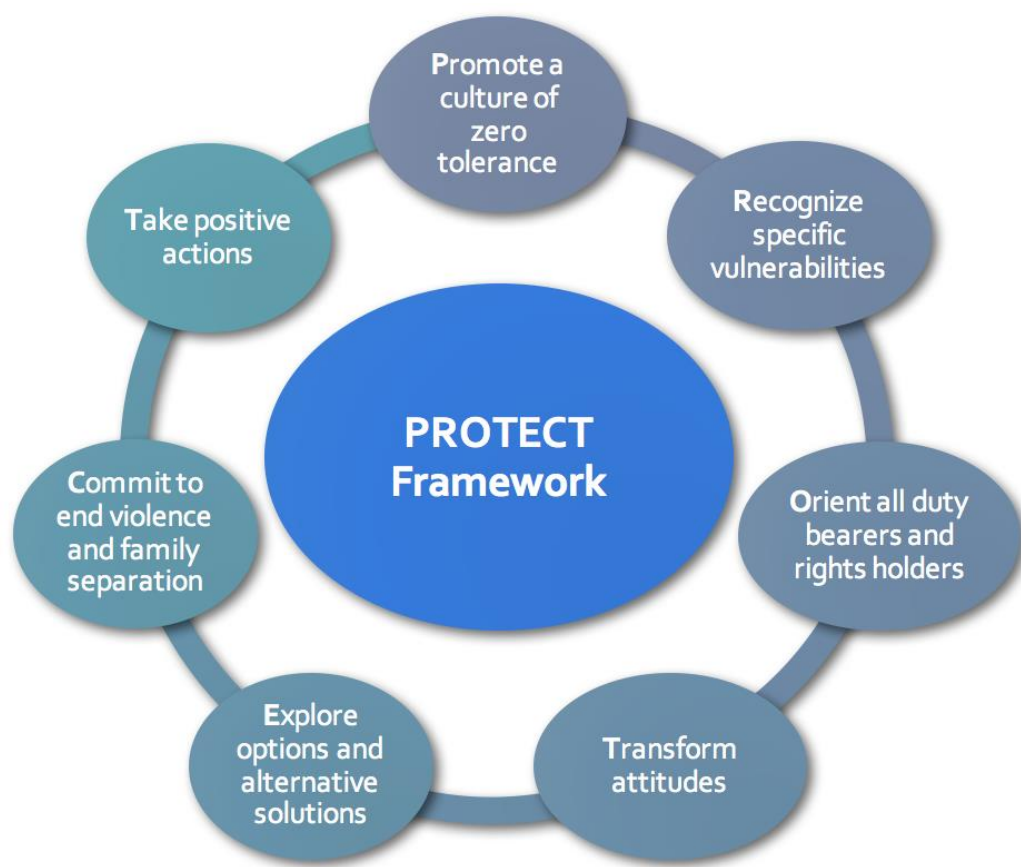


Figure 3: Cambodia PROTECT framework

## Promote a culture of zero tolerance

The strategy will emphasize that all forms of violence against children and unnecessary family separation are unacceptable. Protective practices and non-violent actions will be stressed to encourage prevention. In cases where violence or family separation have already occurred, all duty bearers will be encouraged and empowered to take action to end violence and keep families together. Speaking up against violence, negotiating available options and reporting or accessing referral services will be emphasized as part of recovering from and responding to violence and family separation.

## Recognize specific vulnerabilities

While violence can affect all children, certain groups including children with disabilities or those in residential care institutions are at increased risk of violence and it is critical for families to be aware of these vulnerabilities in order to prevent violence from occurring. As the data from Cambodia highlights, violence is often not a one-time occurrence; children face violence multiple times and those who experience one form of violence are likely to experience other overlapping forms of violence. Response mechanisms need to take these vulnerabilities into account and protect children from additional or overlapping forms of violence.

## Orient all duty bearers

Individuals alone cannot prevent and respond to violence; it must be a social responsibility. Children, families, teachers, local officials, service providers, community leaders and public figures need to know that violence against children can occur in multiple ways and understand the immediate and long-term risks of violence. All stakeholders need to know what they can do to protect or respond to children affected by violence. For instance, what should a parent do, what should a peer do, or what can a teacher or local official do? Furthermore, all duty bearers need to be motivated and confident to act on the knowledge. Theories such as Social Learning Theory stress that behavioural capacity (i.e., knowledge and skills to perform a behaviour) and perceived sense of self-efficacy (i.e., the confidence to perform a behaviour) affect the likelihood of changing practices (Bandura, 2004). The awareness raising activities thus need to also strengthen duty bearer's confidence and capacity to perform positive actions.

## Transform attitudes

Globally, research has shown that the normalization and acceptance of violence perpetuates violence and also hinders help seeking behaviours. Shifts in attitude are required at both the individual and societal level to prevent violence from occurring and also to respond to violence when it does occur. Change theories highlight the importance of an individual's attitude towards and intention to perform a certain behaviour as important predictors of behaviour (Ajzen, 2011). Individuals and community members need to be convinced that no form of violence or unnecessary family separation is acceptable, for any child irrespective of gender, ability, ethnicity, sexual orientation or geographic location.

## Explore options

Decision making and negotiating between locally acceptable and available choices is an important step towards taking action to end VAC or family separation. Duty bearers will be encouraged to consider available options



and seek alternative solutions. For instance, violent discipline can be replaced with positive discipline emphasizing love and reassurance. Similarly, responding to violence and taking action may need to consider local mediation, psycho-social support or legal action. Children can be encouraged to resolve conflict through non-violent means that include making better choices. In the case of unnecessary family separation, families and communities could be encouraged to consider alternatives to residential care that build on Khmer family values and kinship care practices. This also builds on the notion that a basic set of critical thinking and decision-making skills are needed for children and parents to ensure they are protected and cared for physically, intellectually and emotionally.

## **Commit to end violence and family separation**

Behaviour change evidence highlights that awareness or knowledge are not enough to result in changed behaviours; perceived benefits, motivation and confidence are prerequisites to taking a stand or committing to adopt or abandon certain practices. Public commitment also gives visibility and highlights intentions to adopt a positive practice and denounce a negative behaviour. When key influentials or a critical mass demonstrate commitment towards an issue, it is considered a trigger for others to follow. Change theories also recognize that individuals learn by observation and are likely to model behaviours that they see in their personal and social environment (Bandura, 2004). To this end, the strategy will highlight positive role models and champions among children, parents, teachers, local officials and leaders.

## **Take positive actions**

Going back to the idea of social responsibility and violence being everybody's concern, the strategy strives for duty bearers at all levels to take positive actions to either prevent or respond to violence. This could be a parent taking protective measures, or a peer providing counselling or a neighbour reporting violence when they observe it. Taking action ties in closely with ideas from social support theory which posits that community members can provide different types of support. For instance, a family member may provide emotional support through expressions of empathy, love or care. Likewise, friends or service providers may provide instrumental support such as aid or services or informational support such as advice and counselling (Rimer, Glanz, & Viswanath, 2008).

The proposed framework addresses both the prevention and response dimensions of violence against children and unnecessary separation (*see Table 1*). Each element of the framework can be applied to preventing and responding to violence or family separation and draws on the social and behaviour change process proposed for the strategy. The elements follow a sequential flow of knowledge, awareness, skill, capacity, confidence, commitment and, finally, action. This conceptual framework will be applied to the development and planning of the C4D strategy and will inform the communication objectives, proposed messages and will also feed into the measurable outcomes and indicators.

Table 1: Applying the Cambodia PROTECT framework to prevention and response to violence and family separation

| Element of the framework                            | Prevent  | Respond   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Promote a culture of zero tolerance</b>          | Aware of the importance of protecting children from violence and family separation.        | Understand that children who have experienced violence or family separation should seek support services. |
| <b>Recognize specific vulnerabilities</b>           | Know that certain groups of children are at heightened risk of experiencing violence.      | Know how to protect children from further violence.   |
| <b>Orient all duty bearers</b>                      | Consider it is a collective responsibility to prevent violence and keep families together. | Feel confident to take remedial action when violence or family separation occur.                          |
| <b>Transform attitudes</b>                          | Believe that violence and family separation can impact children negatively.                | Believe that children must be cared for and protected by their family and community.                      |
| <b>Explore options and solutions</b>                | Negotiate available options and make informed choices.                                     | Find solutions that are culturally appropriate.   |
| <b>Commit to end violence and family separation</b> | Assert their role as duty bearers to protect children.                                     | Intend to seek support or services.   |
| <b>Take positive action</b>                         | Adopt positive behaviours that are protective and non-violent.                             | Act to help children recover, reintegrate and heal.   |

The strategy will strive to prevent and respond to VAC and unnecessary family separation by supporting families to raise healthy, happy and confident children, thereby addressing physical and mental well-being as well as the social competencies and life skills of children. There is ample evidence to support that nurturing care and protection received from parents, family and community in the early years of a child's life can address multiple threats and has long term benefits that include reducing the impact of negative childhood experiences (e.g., neglect, abuse and exposure to violence) and improve cognitive development, physical health and

wellbeing (Britto et al., 2016). The strategy will therefore, emphasize providing adequate love, nurturing, care and protection right from the early years to address neglect and ensure that strong relationships are established early on in a child’s life, which can in turn result in becoming a protective factor through childhood and adolescence. Figure 4 illustrates how the proposed framework will address both VAC and family separation, cutting across both prevention and response dimensions and ultimately contributing to children’s all round well-being.

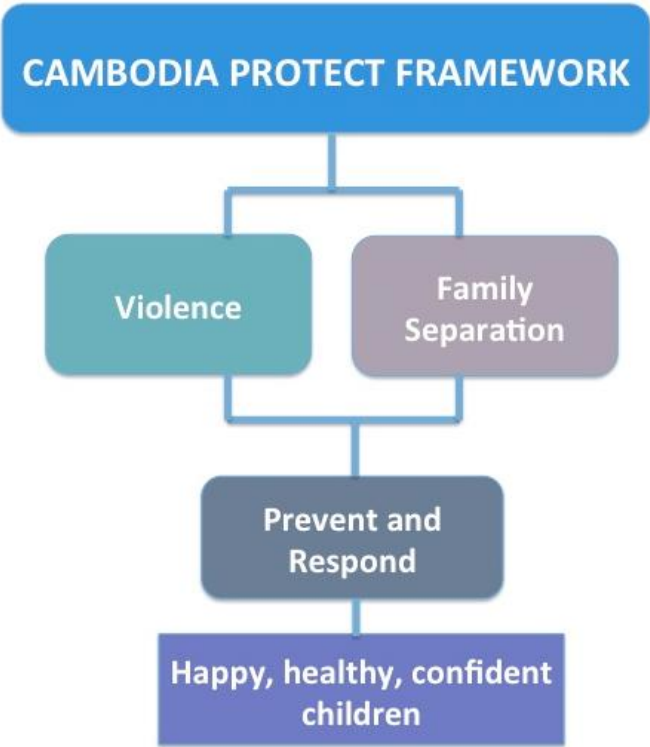


Figure 4: Strategy at a glance

### Proposed approach and key principles

Both the desk review and in-country consultations conducted by the Rain Barrel team indicate that several promising programmes and interventions are underway on various aspects of VAC and family separation. However, there is a clear need for a coordinated, consistent, comprehensive, government endorsed national effort. *The Rain Barrel team proposes a nationally led C4D Strategy for five years with a detailed implementation plan for two years.* The strategy will provide guidelines, specific objectives and overall vision for a five-year programme period and the activities and implementation can be detailed for the first two years, allowing for mid-term amendments and improvements to the design. The strategy will include a costed implementation plan and a monitoring and evaluation framework to ensure that the progress of the initiative can be tracked and the changes resulting from the intervention can be measured. The key approaches and principles guiding the strategy are described below (see Figure 5).

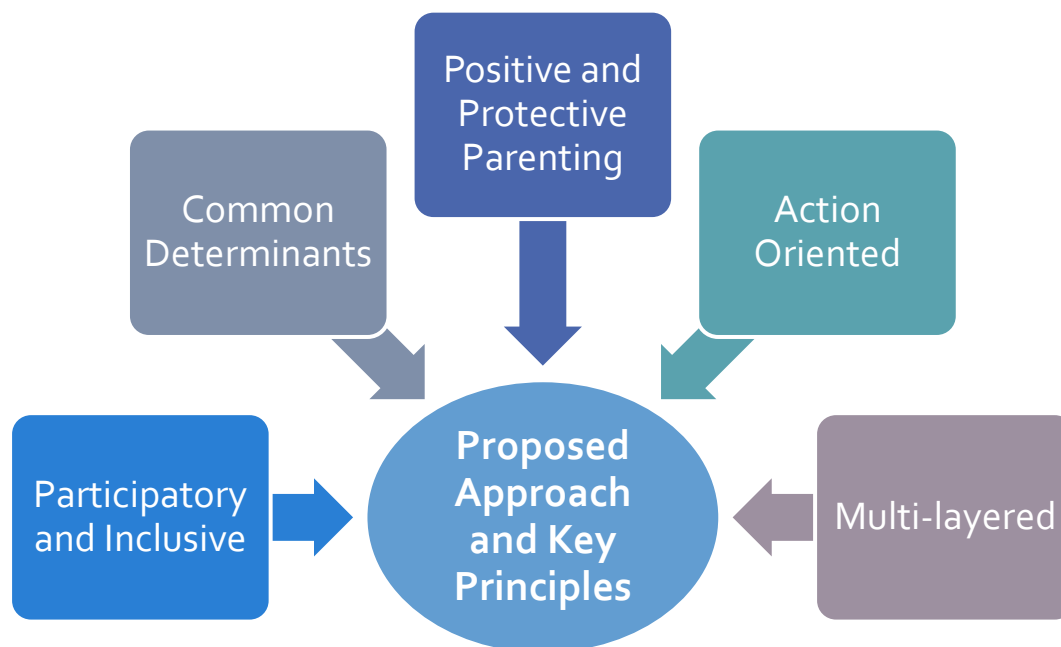


Figure 5: Proposed approach and key principles

## Participatory and inclusive

The strategy will address all forms of violence affecting boys and girls in Cambodia, focussing especially on those who are at risk or more vulnerable to violence, and will empower individuals, families and community members to protect children from violence and unnecessary family separation. Two-way communication and participation of children and duty-bearers will be prioritized, aiming to facilitate dialogue and develop skills and confidence to find solutions in order to bring about meaningful change. Violence related interventions that have demonstrated impact have been participatory, engaging multiple stakeholders or duty bearers and have promoted enhanced communication and shared decision making among family members (Ellsberg et al., 2014). To this end, the participation of children and fathers will be critical. There is strong evidence to support the need to engage with men and boys to address the deeply gendered and normative aspects of many forms of violence (Barker, 2006; Barker, Ricardo, Nascimento, Olukoy & Santos, 2010; Jewkes, Flood & Lang, 2014). The strategy will articulate specific actions that men can take to protect children from violence and unnecessary family separation. More specifically, the communication strategy will explore opportunities to engage fathers as promoters of non-violent disciplining practices within the home. This could be done by creating space for fathers to actively participate in parenting programmes and by fostering positive father-child relationships. Likewise, children will be engaged as change agents and solution seekers, with a focus to enhance inclusion, critical thinking, peaceful conflict resolution and confidence building.

## Common determinants

Given the range of issues and forms of violence included in the strategy, it is recommended that the strategy focus on the common determinants of violence and family separation. Furthermore, considering that various forms of violence are closely linked and those experiencing one form of violence are likely to experience both multiple types of violence and multiple incidents of violence, the linkages between the different forms of violence and family separation need to be addressed. The messages and the overall response of the communication strategy should thus stress a core set of informational takeaways and skills that cover or are applicable across multiple forms of violence. For instance, critical thinking and decision-making or reporting or seeking support services are common for multiple forms of violence. Prevention efforts across multiple forms of violence have demonstrated the importance of critical discussion and decision-making and support the development of new skills, including those for communication and conflict resolution (Ellsberg et al., 2014).

## Positive and protective parenting

In addition, the forms of violence include a continuum ranging from the subtler and less recognized forms (e.g., neglect, emotional abuse) to the more apparent yet accepted forms (e.g., corporal punishment, bullying and child labour), to the more severe forms (e.g., trafficking, child labour and sexual abuse). It is vital that the strategy address the less recognized and commonly accepted forms of violence. In particular, the issue of neglect provides a strategic entry point to address VAC issues and also to link VAC and unnecessary family separation. Positive parenting strategies that promote nurturing, care and protection, will not only prevent neglect but also address other forms of violence such as corporal punishment and emotional abuse. Parental care and nurturing in the early years also provides a strong foundation for close parent and child relationships, which can be a protective mechanism for various forms of violence.

## Action oriented

In terms of overall framing, it is important to promote the positive aspects of Khmer culture rather than to bring attention to the negative aspects of current parenting practices or Cambodian society. The messages, communication material and overall approach should be positive, inspirational, and action oriented. In essence, it is not enough to communicate the ills or harms of violence; rather, all stakeholders need to know what they can do to make a difference and end VAC and unnecessary family separation. This approach will be appealing for both families and national counterparts. It is also suggested that the power of narratives are leveraged, using stories highlighting positive role models utilizing common characters and story lines across media and for different participant groups. Inspirational stories showcasing positive role models at all levels, from prominent figures and celebrities to children, mothers, fathers, teachers, religious leaders and local officials who have made a difference and practiced positive behaviours overcoming odds and challenging the norm, will be accentuated.

## Multi-layered

The strategy will utilize a range of communication channels including mass media, interpersonal communication and existing social networks such as commune councils and religious leaders in order to deliver and reinforce consistent messages through multiple channels. The mediated messages will be complemented



with interpersonal communication and social mobilization activities. In order to address the normative aspect of many of the underlying factors that promote violence and family separation a social and behaviour change approach is recommended. Such an approach will enable changes at individual, family, community and societal levels that are required for ending violence and unnecessary family separation and that are envisioned in the national action plans on VAC and improving childcare (MOWA, 2016; MOSVY, 2016). Experiences in formulating interventions to address violence through communication have underscored the need to include efforts that are multi-layered and can impact change at multiple mutually reinforcing levels across the socio-ecology (Usdin, Scheepers, Goldstein, & Japhet, 2005; Michau, Horn, Bank, Dutt, & Zimmerman, 2014).

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