



Damnok Toek
(Goutte d'eau)

Neak Loueng, Cambodia Street Children Survey December 2013



Neak Loueng, February 2014: Stéphane Combre

Data collection: Damnok Toek's Drop-in Centre social workers:
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1. General overview

Cambodia currently has a total population of over 15, 25 million people and has one of the youngest populations in Southeast Asia: with 41 per cent aged 18 and under, and more than a third between the ages of 10 and 24. Three decades of war and conflict, a post-war boom and an average low life expectancy are some of the reasons for this imbalance in demography.

Over the past two decades, despite staggering economic development in Cambodia the situation remains dire, poverty and large inequalities persist. Over 20 years after the end of the civil war and genocide by the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia is ranked 138th out of 186 countries in the Human Development Index, placing it in the lower position to its regional neighbours. 22.8 % of Cambodians live below the poverty line, surviving on less than \$1.25 a day¹, and children are amongst the most vulnerable groups. The average years of schooling is 5.8 years, which means that the majority of the population does not complete the full cycle of primary school

Damnok Toek uses UNICEF's definition when referring to "street children". This includes:

- **Street Living Children:**
'Children/youth who have cut ties with their families and live alone on the streets'
- **Street Working Children:**
'Children/youth who spend all or most of their time working on the streets to provide an income for their families or for themselves, but who return to a caregivers home at night'
- **Children of Street Living Families:**
'Children who live with their family on the streets'

In Cambodia, street children are primarily found in urban areas as cities are considered to have better economic and employment opportunities by migrants from the provinces. Based on information gathered by the Cambodia Street Children Network in 2012, of which Damnok Toek is a member, 4,750 street children were counted in six Cambodian towns in one day, and 247 children were identified in Neak Loeung, 59% of them being girls. The impact of street life on children and youth is significant. Unstable lifestyles, lack of medical care, lack of education, potentially hazardous jobs and inadequate living conditions increase young people's susceptibility to exploitation and abuse, unsafe migration and trafficking, substance abuse, health risks, sexual violence and sexually transmitted diseases.

Neak Loeung is located about 70 km South-East of Phnom Penh in the province of Prey Veng. It is the main Mekong crossing point between Vietnam and Cambodia and therefore a very busy town. Many street sellers are posted around the ferry to sell items to cars or buses that are waiting to cross the Mekong. It is also a stopping point for tourist's buses on their way to or back from Vietnam.

Prey Veng, and neighbouring Svay Rieng remain among the poorest provinces of Cambodia, where poverty and malnutrition are widespread. On their way to Phnom Penh or looking for additional daily income to support their families numerous children hang around on the streets in Neak Loeung, in particular around the ferry landing and harbour. Because of their poor and unstable living conditions these children are at risk of unsafe migration, being trafficked, becoming substance abusers, or being affected by violence.

¹ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/KHM>

The building of a bridge to cross the Mekong is underway and the construction is planned to be finished by 2015, and this element will undoubtedly affect the lives of street children in the area. In Neak Loeung no other institution apart from Damnok Toek is accommodating vulnerable children and offering them alternative solutions such as formal or non-formal education, counselling, vocational training and life skills.

2. Damnok Toek

Damnok Toek (DT) works in three locations throughout Cambodia; Neak Loeung, Poipet and the capital, Phnom Penh. In partnership with the Cambodian government, DT has identified these locations as particularly high risk for children. Damnok Toek started to work in Neak Loeung in 1997 on the request of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY) and assists vulnerable children and their families through a range of targeted health, education and vocational programs. The programme in Neak Loeung comprises the following activities:

Our focus.

- ❖ Drop in centre for street children and outreach
- ❖ Residential centre (mid to longer term shelter)
- ❖ Non-formal education
- ❖ Vocational training
- ❖ Clinic
- ❖ Childsafe Network and Hotline relying on key community members to strengthen child protection in Neak Loeung

3. Introduction of the study

3.1. Objectives

Every two years Damnok Toek conducts a survey among street working and street living children in Neak Loeung. The objectives of the survey are:

- to identify the street children in Neak Loeung (origin, family situation, education, economic situation and reasons for them being on the street);
- to identify Neak Loueng's street children's needs;
- to find out if there is a gap between their needs and the services provided by Damnok Toek and to use the findings to adapt the services provided by Damnok Toek if necessary;
- To monitor general trends within the street children population of Neak Loeung and identify any significant differences in outcomes between the last survey completed in 2011.

3.2. Methodology

The social workers from Damnok Toek's Drop In Centre conducted 166 individual interviews with children between the 2nd and 4th December 2013. The initial questionnaire used in previous years was reviewed by the team in November 2013, and adapted according to their input and experience. Each question was discussed, and issues such as confidentiality, how to approach the children and how to ask sensitive questions were raised. Each team member then conducted three test interviews to experiment the questionnaire and determine if any new changes were needed. One of the areas we were keen to explore this year was the impact the children had considered the new bridge would have on them in the future and what plans they had made, if any, around this.

The surveys were conducted during outreach, mainly near the ferry terminal, where the target children can generally be found, as well as in communities. 169 children were interviewed, amongst them 62 boys and 107 girls. "N" represents the total number of children the results are normalized on. When gender-aggregated data is presented in this report, the numbers are normalized on the total number of boys and girls respectively. This approach has been chosen, because if the numbers were normalized on the total number of children interviewed (169), the results would be biased as there is not an equal representation of boys and girls amongst the respondents.

3.3. Limitations

The data presented here represents a snapshot of street children in Neak Loeung, and over three days. It does not aim to show a comprehensive or exhaustive picture of reality. The number of interviews do not represent the real number of street children in Neak Loeung. The actual number of street children on a given day is expected to be higher. Additional limitations of this study are the following:

- Limited amount of time (3 days) and number of children interviewed;
- The lack of availability/ non willingness of some children approached to participate;
- The sensitive nature of some topics within the questionnaire (for example on sexual and reproductive health, drug use, sex for benefits) : some children may have not always been open about these issues which may have affected the outcomes of the survey;
- There are several questions where answers were blank, so the figures provided do not systematically represent the 169 children.

Location	Number of children interviewed in %
West side of the Mekong	28
East side of the Mekong	23
Community	19
On the ferry	16
No Answer	14

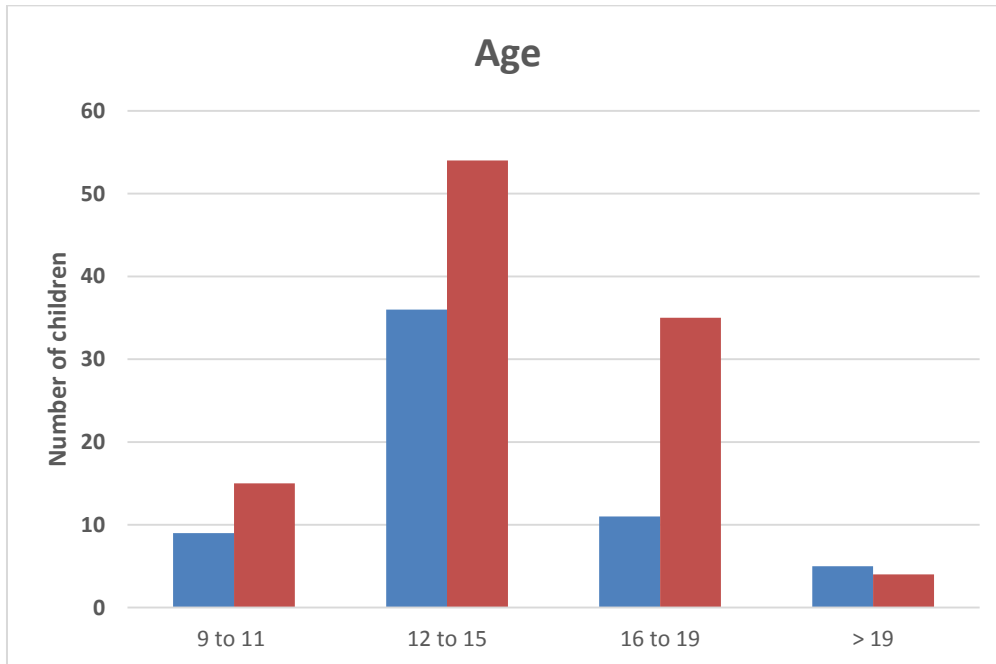
N=169

In total a sample of 169 children were interviewed, 107 girls and 62 boys.

4. Neak Loeung street children profile

The majority of the interviewed children are girls (63%). This confirms the trend of our 2011 survey and the observations of our social workers that there seems to be more girls than boys on the streets in Neak Loeung.

4.1. Age



N=169

The majority of children interviewed (53%) are between 12 and 15 years old, followed by 21% of children that are aged between 16 to 19 year old. 14% of the children are younger than 11 years.

4.2. Place of birth

An overwhelming majority of children (98%) were born in Neak Loeung. Only four children were born in another town/province. This trend was already noted in 2011, where 96% of the children we interviewed were also born in Neak Loeung.

4.3. Living place

Living place	2013 %	2011 %
Kampong Cham Long ("Ferry village")	19,39	8,5
Village 5	16,36	17,6
Preik Tomlourp	12,73	22,2
Village 6	10,30	7,2
Village 1	2,42	5,9

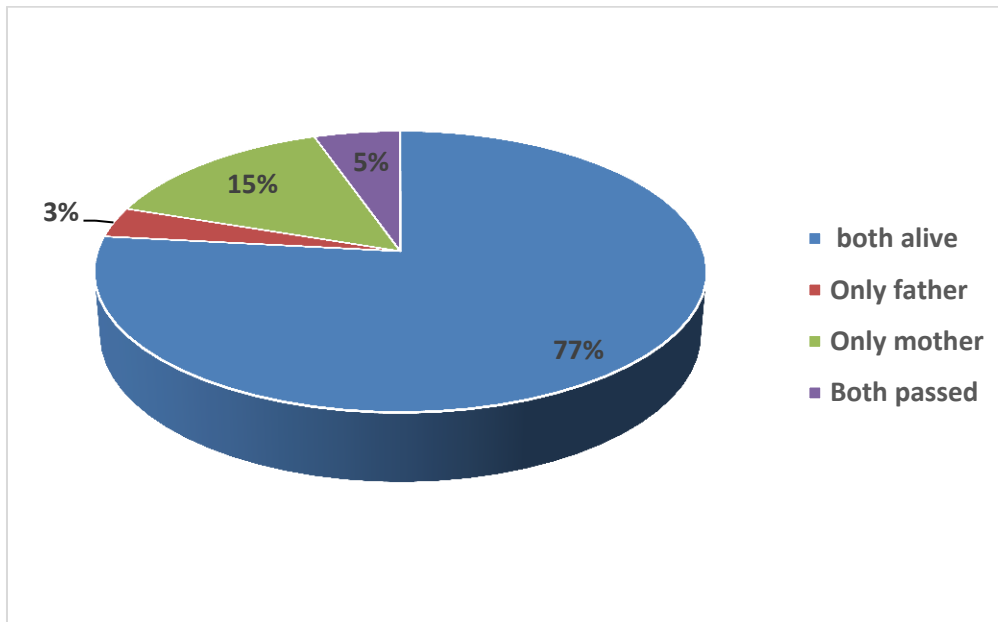
Village 2	10,30	4,6
Village 4	9,7	6,5
Leouk Dek	4,85	0
Village 3	0	2
No Answer	5,45	7,2
Other	4,45	9,8

N=165

The children come from the same villages as in the last survey, with the exception of one new village, Leouk Dek. The majority of children come from the village of Cham Long, often called the “ferry village”.

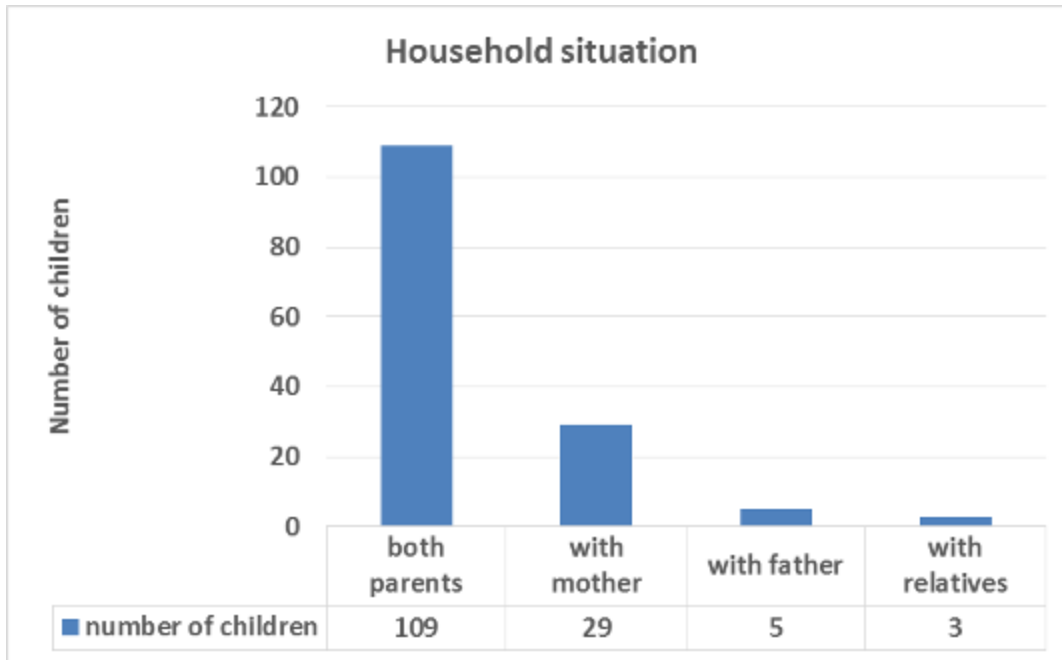
4.4. Family situation

Over 3/4 of the children interviewed indicate that both of their parents are still alive. Of the children with only one parent, the number of children who do not have a father is five times the number of the children who do not have a mother. Both parents have passed away in 3% of children, who now live with relatives. There is no significant change here in comparison to the 2011 survey’s results.



N= 169

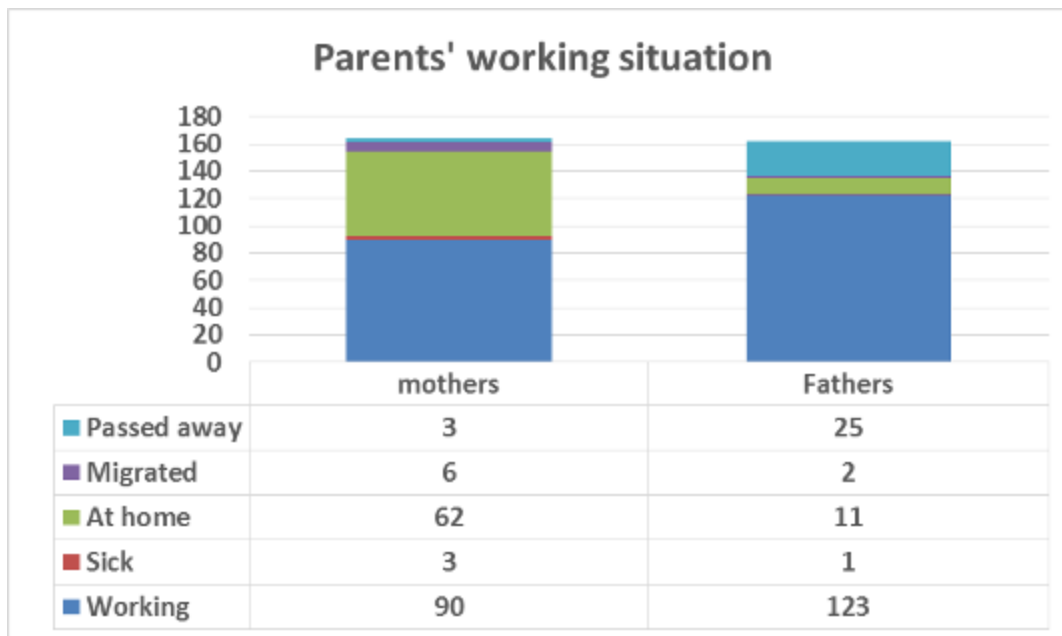
Almost 75% of the children indicate living with both parents (64% in 2011), and about 27% live with only one parent. 8% of the children live with relatives or community members. This is similar to the situation found in the 2011 survey, with a higher proportion of children living with both parents, and slightly less just with their mother.



N=146

4.5. Family working situation

In the majority of the cases both the mothers and the fathers are working. However, among the mothers there is a significant proportion (28%) of mothers staying at home. This does not exclude that they are engaged in some form of home based business/farming to gain income.



A variety of jobs are represented amongst the parents. The large majority of women are engaged in informal selling, and the men are primarily in construction work or working as porters. This is quite a big difference in comparison to 2011, where only 10% of fathers were construction workers, and

more than double (approximately 21%) of children said their parents were farmers. The building site of the new bridge crossing the Mekong may be an explanation of this as it has generated many job opportunities for workers in the area especially in construction. In respect to mothers' jobs, there is a significant increase this year comparing to 2011 survey (50%) Fishing is also an activity specifically mentioned.

Type of occupation	Mother %	Father %
Street seller	81.58	14.43
Farmer	9.21	9.57
Scavenger	5.26	2.13
Garment factory	2.63	-
Laundry	2.63	-
Fishing	2.63	8.51
Construction worker	1.32	27.66
Porter	-	18.09
Motodop	-	12.77
Taxi/tuk tuk driver	-	7.45
Taxi broker	-	4.26
Haircutting	-	2.13
Cart puller	-	2.13
Beggar	-	1.03
Other	7.89	14.89

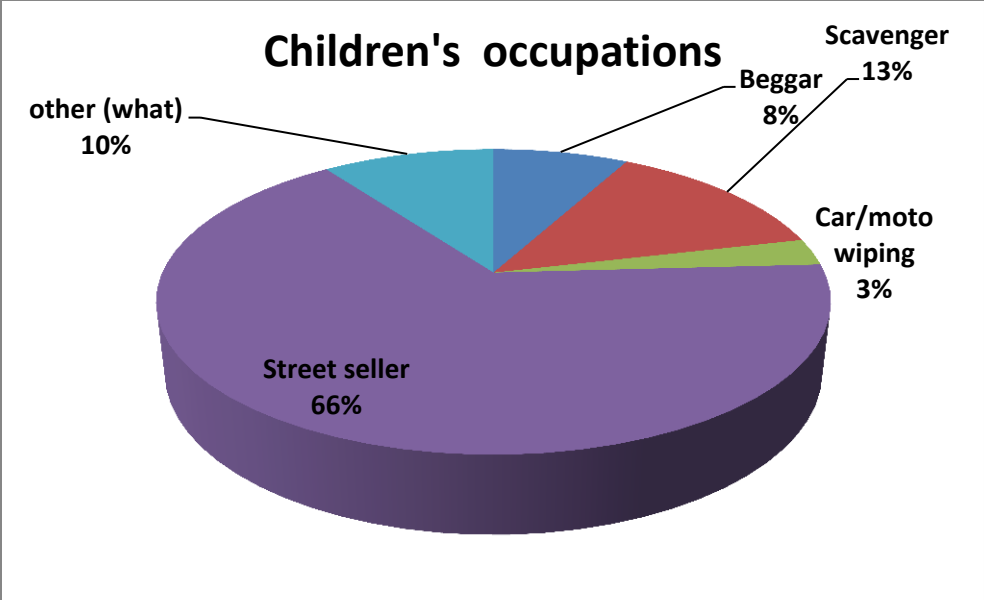
5. Street living and working

5.1. Street living situation

All of the children interviewed stated that they live with their families or relatives. None of the children mention to be street-living. The average number of household members amongst the interviewed children is 5.80 (3.14 adults, 2.68 children).

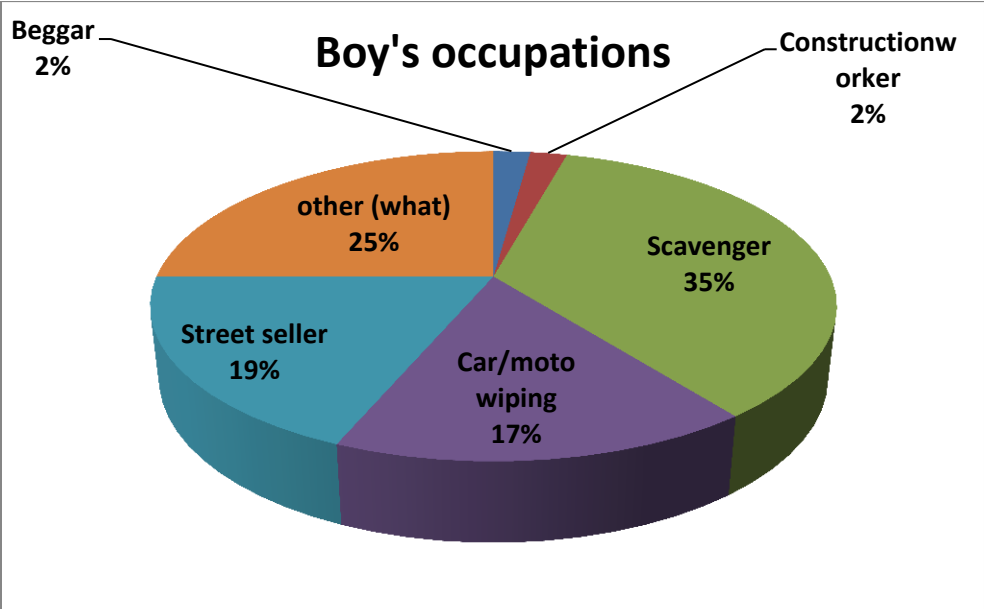
5.2. Street working situation

166 children out of the 169 interviewed children indicate that they work. There is a range of jobs done by children as can be seen below. However, the majority, 67% of the children, work as street sellers around the ferry terminals, followed by scavenging with 13% of the children.

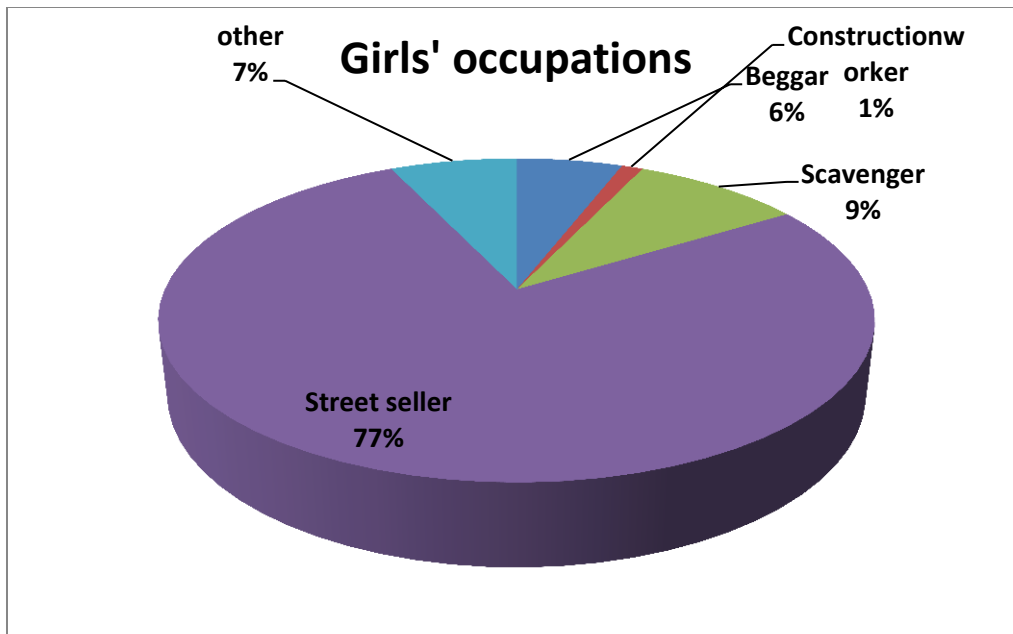


N=166

No major change can be noted in respect to the children's occupations in comparison to 2011, except a slight increase in children working as scavengers (+6%) and less children begging (-5%). Two third of the children are street sellers, in particular drinking water sellers (45% of street seller children) and egg-sellers (26%). Other occupations cited are farming, fishing, factory work, shop assistant in the market, and bicycle repairing.



N=62



N=104

The large majority of girls are street sellers, as in previous years. Boys are predominantly scavenging, but also wiping cars or engaged in street selling. They also mentioned motorcycle repairing as well as working in factories.

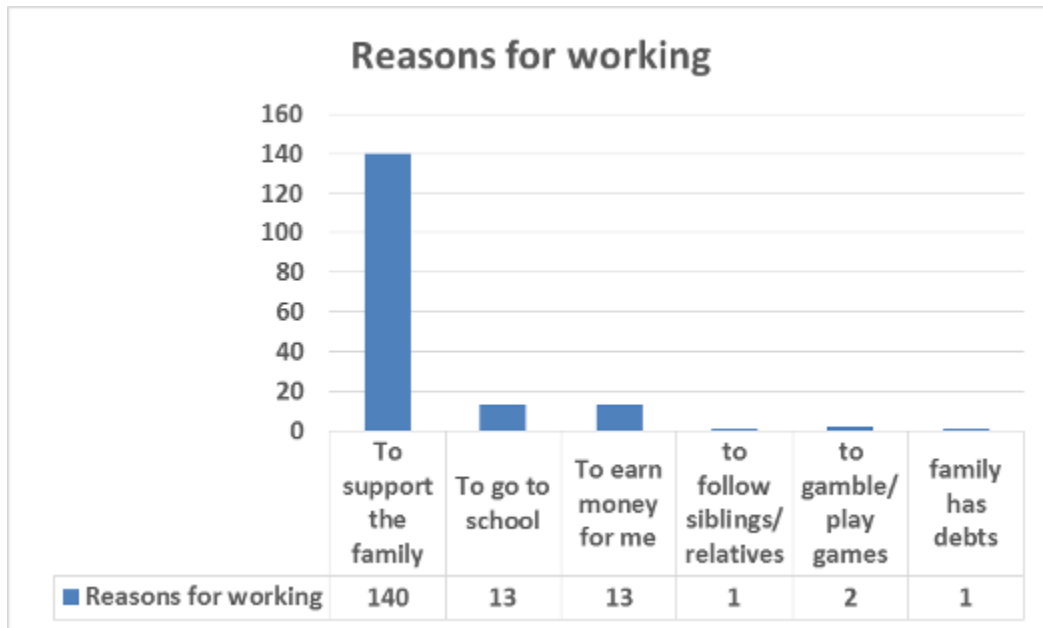
The fact that there is a majority of girls working in Neak Loeung can mainly come from the fact that Neak Loueng is such a busy place for the type of activity girls often traditionally do, street selling, due to its prime location. Boys may indeed be working, but more often in the formal sector as in factories.

5.3. Working hours

54% of the interviewed children say they work half day, whilst the remaining works full days. 4,5% are working a few times a week. 14,2% of the children did not answer the question. A large majority (74,5%) works every day, 10,3% a few times a week, and 4,82% say they work rarely. Working for half a day gives children the opportunity to go to school for the other half of the day, as school in Cambodia is on a part-time basis.

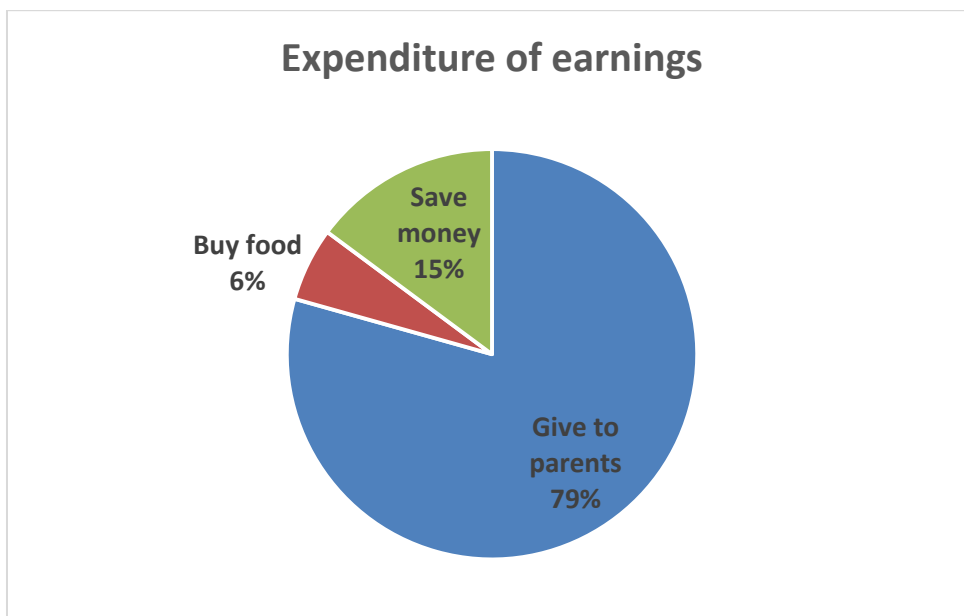
5.4. Reasons for working

84% of the children are working to support the family. This is a large increase compared to 2011 survey, where 58% mentioned giving money to their parents. This is followed with almost 8% working to support going to school and to earn money for their own use.



N=170

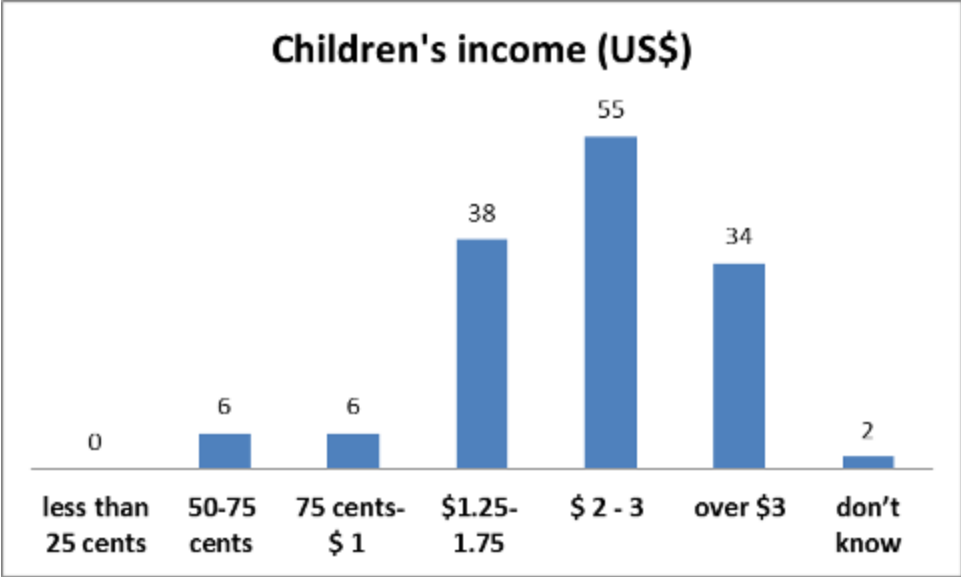
The focus on support to family is reflected in the way children have last spend the money they earned, as can be seen below. There is a 19% increase in the children that state that they gave the money they earned to their parents.



N=166

5.5. Income

All the children interviewed were asked how much money they earned the day before the interview. The question was asked in Cambodian Riels (4000 Riels = US\$1) and the answers are reflected below:



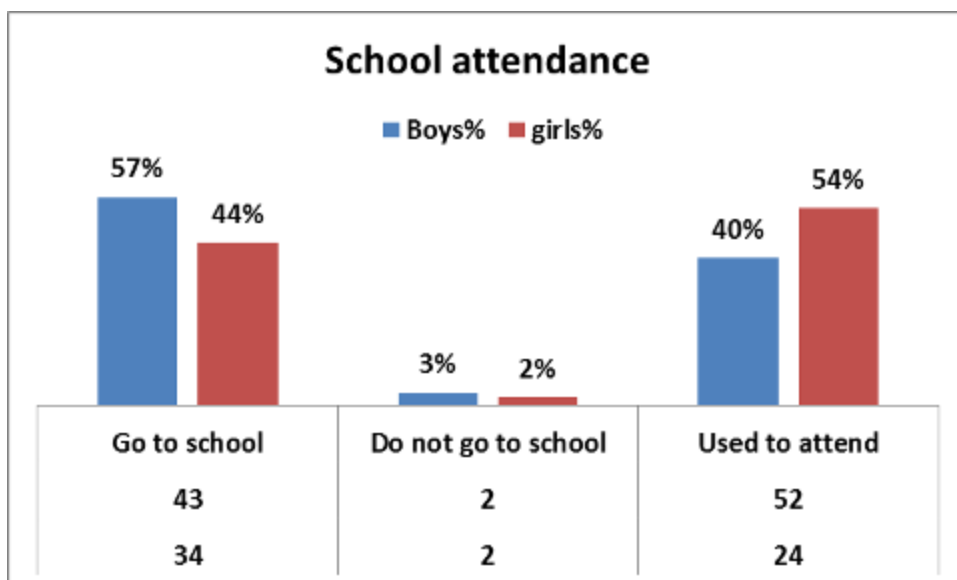
N= 141

In the context of Neak Loeung where incomes are low, and with the majority of children earning between US\$ 1,25 and US\$ 3 a day, this represents a significant contribution to the household's income.

6. Education

6.1. School attendance

49% of the total number of children stated that they were going to school every day. This number is even lower for girls, as only 44% go to school each day, whilst 57% of the boys go to school every day. This is actually a distinctive improvement if we compare to the results of the 2011 survey, where only 31% of boys and 35% of girls were going to school each day. This however remains a high amount of out-of-school children, as there is a majority of interviewed children that are not accessing education. The number of children that replied that they “used to go to school” is also high, and concerns a majority of girls (54%) and 40% of boys. This is a significant increase compared to 2011, in particular for boys, as at the time 28% of boys and 46% of girls said that they used to go to school but had stopped. It thus appears that more children are in school than in 2011, but more children are not accomplishing a full cycle of primary education. Girls in particular are more likely not to be in school.



N=157, girls:97; boys: 60

84% of children enrolled in school attend mainstream public school, whilst the remaining 16% attend Damnok Toek's Non Formal Education programme

6.2. Reasons for not going to school

Half of the 80 children not going to school did not give any reason. The remaining children indicated that they need to work to earn money (48%), that their families are poor (33%) or that they didn't want to study and decided to stop themselves (18%). The remaining 3% mentioned that they had too much housework. The answer relating to being from a "poor family" may be associated to the various costs of going to school: . School uniforms and materials, the unofficial fees children are required to pay to the teachers, despite the fact that public school in Cambodia is theoretically free. It thus appears that in 81% of cases it is economic reasons that are the main obstacle to children attending school.

7. Sexual relations and HIV/AIDS

Only 3 boys (no girls) out of 131 children mentioned being sexually active. 2 of these boys use condoms.

Most of the children could cite one or more modes of transmission of HIV/AIDS. The main answers were the following :

- 100 children mentioned "sexual relations"
- 94 children mentioned "sharing needles"
- 70 children mentioned "transmission mother to child"
- 6 children mentioned "blood"
- 23 children did not know any mode of transmission.

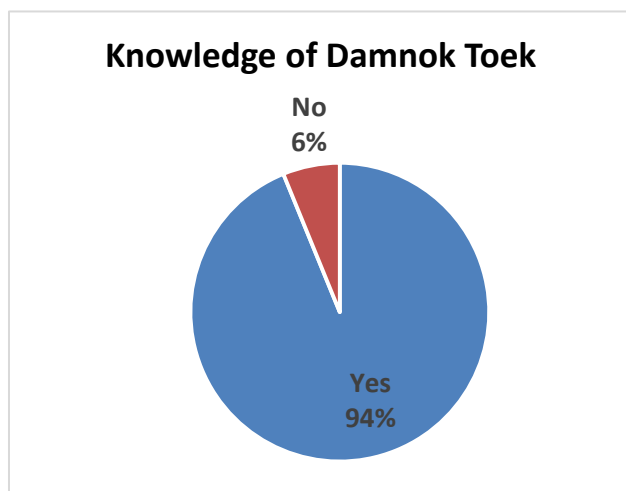
This is the first time we introduced this question in Neak Loeung, so we cannot yet compare the results with the answers from previous surveys.

8. Sex for benefits

Out of 121 children that responded to the question “do you know anyone under 18 that had sexual activity for money or other benefits?”, 8 children replied with a positive answer. Amongst the youth they knew, 5 were male and 3 were female, and they were all aged between 15 and 17 years old. 4 children said they knew the clients were Cambodian, the others did not give an answer. The interviewees all stated that they had never been asked undergo sexual activity in exchange for any benefit, and they had never done so themselves personally.

This is the first time we introduced this question in Neak Loeung, so we cannot yet compare with previous answers. However, 8 children seems to be quite a high number, and concerns a slight majority of boys. In comparison, in Poipet, only one boy out of 112 interviewed children said he knew someone engaged in sexual activities for benefits.

9. Knowledge of services for vulnerable children and families in Neak Loeung



N=162

Only 10 children (6%) did not know Damnok Toek and its services. This is a lower proportion than in the 2011 survey, where 23% of interviewed children did not know Damnok Toek.

Possible explanations are the launching of Damnok Toek's peer education programme on sexual and reproductive health in late 2012, which abled to access more children and youth in communities in Neak Loeung, and the development of the ChildSafe project.

Damnok Toek is indeed implementing the Childsafe Network and hotline since mid-2011, which is designed to improve child protection whilst involving society's involvement in doing this, through the commitment of key community members that are trained on distinguishing and reporting children at risk. It is likely that this project has contributed to increased knowledge of children about Damnok Toek, as they see posters and the hotline number around town. The answers below confirm that for the most part, it is the drop-in centre, the peer education project and the Childsafe network that the children are the most familiar with. Suprisingly few children know the mobile libraries and the community workshops that take place mainly in communities on a monthly basis, and do not only target children. This could possibly be due to the fact that they are working during these times.

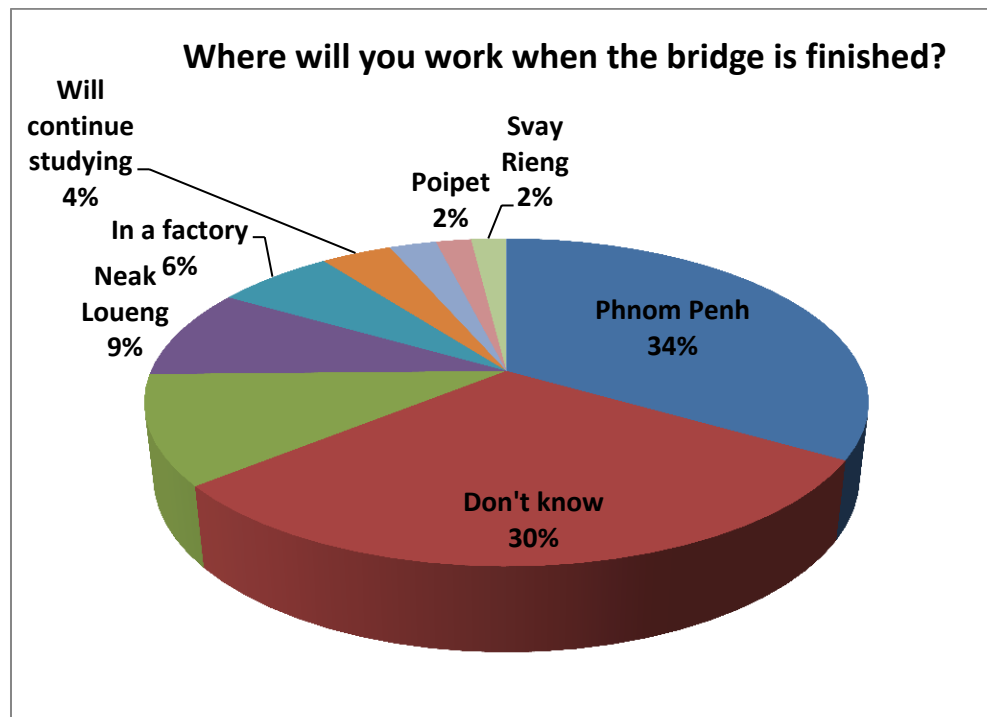
Services known by children (more than one answer possible):

Drop in centre	63%
Peer education programme	55%
ChildSafe	48%
Vocational training	42%
Non formal education	39%
Clinic	27%
Residential centre	25%
Workshop communities	9%
Mobile libraries	2%

10. Future plans

Over 68% of children would like to leave Neak Loeung in the future (N= 160). This percentage is much higher than the survey results of 2011, where only 30% of children indicated wanting to migrate. 9% of the children who would like to leave cite Phnom Penh, whilst the others do not know where they wish to go.

This year we added a question relating to the construction of the bridge separating both sides of the Mekong, and asked the children what they were planning to do once it was completed. Indeed, the lives of the majority of the children are closely related to the business of the ferry terminal, where they have the main opportunities to gain income. It appears that close to one third of the children have not decided where they will work following the construction of the bridge.



N=158

11. Recommendations

Changing context of Neak Loeung

The context of Neak Loeung is changing, with the construction of a bridge between the East and West side of the Mekong that should be finished during 2015. The lives of many street sellers, including the children, will be affected by this construction, and the changes that will result yet remain uncertain. Migration to other provinces can be anticipated, potentially increased poverty of many families relying on sources of income around the ferry terminal, as well as the emergence of new strategic locations for the children working in the streets may also be expected. This situation should be closely monitored by Damnok Toek, and the survey anticipated in 2015 will shed light on the evolving situation.

Education

Community work and peer education

The high number of out of school children in Neak Loeung is a key concern, and girls remain more at-risk to not attending school. In this context it is vital for Damnok Toek to continue advocating on the importance of education during family visits as well as in mobile libraries and community workshops. The peer education programme could also integrate this topic as a key message in order to reach an even wider group.

Community Kindergarten

Aditionnally, DT Neak Loueng has set up a community kindergarten in cooperation with the village leader in order to enable out of school schildren to start early education. This initiative can be replicated and expanded to other villages. By creating a project committee that involves key stakeholders and community members, including parents, this could contribute towards bringing education as a top priority and common concern for community members.

Sex for benefits

Although this year is the first we introduce this question in the Neak Loueng, survey, it is difficult to measure the number of responses. 8 children (6,6%) stated that they know others that are involved in sexual activity to get money or other benefits. This number is likely to in fact be higher, considering that this is a sensitive question, and children that are directly engaged themselves in sex work may not be willing to reveal this information by fear of judgment or stigma. This should be monitored by Damnok Toek's social workers who could, if deemed appropriate, identify strategic locations of children selling sex or ways to get in touch with them, ensure their presence on a special outreach in appropriate locations, train new ChildSafe members in the area, distribute condoms and provide information on sexual and reproductive health, and provide psychosocial support if needed. Damnok Toek drop in centre's social workers could also benefit from a training/sensitisation on this topic.