Evaluation of the project "Children are not commodities" 2018 – 2021, commissioned by ECPAT Sweden

Final Report

Stefan Dahlgren

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During 2017, ECPAT Sweden decided to extend its activities into financing and managing projects outside Sweden. The reason was that much of what the organisation is working against in Sweden originates abroad, and that a substantial number of Swedes travel to other countries in order to abuse children. Cooperation was established with APLE (Action pour les enfants) in Cambodia and ECPAT Philippines, and a three-year project was funded by to the Swedish Postcode Lottery.

This report summarises the final evaluation of the project, carried out during May–June 2021, which assesses its achievements and proposes recommendations for similar future interventions by ECPAT Sweden.

The purpose of the project was twofold: a learning *process* for ECPAT Sweden to manage projects abroad, and a *project* to contribute to fighting sexual exploitation in the two countries. The goals may be summarised in this way:

- To establish international programming at ECPAT Sweden
- To develop capacity at ECPAT Sweden to run international programming
- To achieve specified goals in the programme countries

The first year concentrated on joint programming by ECPAT Sweden and each of the two other partners separately, and the second and third year to progressively implement the plans.

The findings show that the project generally was successful, both regarding the capacity development process at ECPAT Sweden and the implementation of the project in Cambodia and The Philippines. Particular achievements were strengthening the ability by authorities to handle increased online abuse and cybercrime in both countries, the positive response by regional authorities to increase engagement with this kind of crime in the two provinces of Laguna and Batangas in The Philippines, visible changes in attitudes and practices by police and other authorities to apply more child-centred procedures, in particular regarding child protection.

The evaluation concludes that the way ECPAT Sweden chose to gain experience on how to run projects abroad through a learning-by-doing approach was both relevant and effective. Sustainability is still uncertain, but steps are taken to establish permanent procedures and an institutional memory that is robust.

Also the project parts implemented in the two countries were highly relevant and effective by reaching all expected objectives and, in the case of project activities in the two provinces in Laguna and Batangas, even exceeding the plans. The latter achievement also points towards sustainability of these actions.

The recommendations by the evaluation focus on taking actions to maintain "momentum" for ECPAT Sweden regarding managing projects abroad by having permanent, non-project funded staff for managing projects abroad, and to soon decide on continuation of the current cooperation or establish new projects. In view of the success of the joint planning and implementation procedures, a recommendation is to include this as the normal way for international cooperation by ECPAT Sweden.

A couple of recommendations are also given to all partners to look closely at the current ways to handle planning and reporting, especially the use of logframes, and that time frames and external factors may be given more consideration in future project planning.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

APLE	Action pour les enfants
DAC	Development assistance committee (at OECD)
ECPAT	End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography, and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes
CSAE	Child sexual abuse and exploitation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ToR	Terms of reference

1 INTRODUCTION

During 2017, ECPAT Sweden decided to extend its activities into financing and managing projects outside Sweden. The reason was that much of what the organisation is working against in Sweden originates abroad and that a substantial number of Swedes travel to other countries in order to abuse children.

Because of previous contacts through ECPAT International and because travelling Swedish offenders often choose countries in Southeast Asia to look for victims, Cambodia and the Philippines were selected, and discussions started with APLE (Action pour les enfants) in Cambodia and ECPAT Philippines. An application to Swedish Postcode Lottery (a charity) for a three-year project was approved, and an agreement between the lottery and ECPAT Sweden was signed in December 2017.

Agreements – Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) – for funding and joint management were later signed between ECPAT Sweden and the two partners respectively. The project would originally run from January 2018 to December 2020 and it was later extended to April 2021 in Cambodia and to June 2021 in the Philippines.

This report summarises the final evaluation of the project and assesses its achievements and proposes recommendations for similar future interventions by ECPAT Sweden.

The evaluation was carried out during May and June 2021 by an independent consultant[1], commissioned by ECPAT Sweden.

1.1 The report

The report begins with an introduction, followed in chapter 2 by a description of the evaluation task and the methodology. Chapter 3 has a discussion of the programme's particular features and of the intervention logic or theory of change.

The findings of the evaluation are presented in chapter 4. Chapter 5 and 6 discusses findings on the project design and issues that may have needed more attention. The evaluation's Terms of Reference (ToR) indicate that the emphasis of the evaluation should be the experiences by ECPAT Sweden on managing international projects and suggest that some of the six DAC evaluation criteria[2] should be used. Chapter 7 provides conclusions for each of the selected

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[1] Even if the evaluation was conducted by a single evaluator, the report has usually "we" as the subject instead of "I", which seems too personal, or "the evaluation", which sounds a bit bureaucratic. Sentences with a personal pronouns are also easier to read – and to write.

[2] The Evaluation Network within OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) developed many years ago a set of five criteria for evaluation of development cooperation projects and programmes. The international evaluation criteria (formerly known as the OECD/DAC criteria) used to be five: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact. They capture essential aspects of performance, and have proven to be useful and applicable for most development cooperation projects and programmes. A sixth criterion – *coherence* – was officially added in November 2019, and it aims to assess to what extent the reviewed intervention (project or programme) is line with other initiatives in a sector or regarding a problem and if such initiatives are aiming in the same direction.

evaluation criteria. In the concluding chapter 8 we propose recommendations to be considered by ECPAT Sweden for future international projects. No lessons learned are proposed as we consider such lessons as part of the recommendations and conclusions.

In appendices are the ToR, a list of persons met for the evaluation, lists of references and programme documentation used for the evaluation, a brief summary in English of the project document, and examples of interview guides.

2 PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE EVALUATION

2.1 Purpose and objective of the evaluation

The ToR indicate that the main purpose for the evaluation is to assess the development of ECPAT Sweden's capacity to handle international projects[3]:

> "The primary purpose of the evaluation is to assess ECPAT Sweden´s establishment and management of international programmes; structures, working methods and capacity. ECPAT Sweden staff are therefore the primary users of the evaluation, mainly the Secretary General and the Project Manager, but the results concern all of ECPAT Sweden staff, as they have either been involved, or will be involved in future international programming, directly or indirectly. " - - -

> "The evaluation will be used to reflect on the project: what worked well and less well, especially with a view to evaluate where we are now. Since October 2020, ECPAT Sweden has an international strategy. The findings of the evaluation will give valuable information on existing strengths and weaknesses of the international work at ECPAT Sweden until now. The evaluation may be used to inform decisions on how international work may be adjusted and improved."

However, the ToR also indicate that the results of the project in relation to the target groups should be evaluated because that will logically be part of assessing to what extent the capacity development of international programme management has been successful. There is also an accountability requirement for presenting results, which is aimed both at the partners in the two countries and at the funding organisation the Postcode Lottery.

In this evaluation report we have therefore looked at both ECPAT Sweden's capacity development for working with international projects and the process of establishing cooperation with partners in Cambodia and Philippines – this we call "*the process*") – and at the project "Children are not commodities" and its implementation and results – this we call "*the project*".

2.2 Object and scope of the evaluation

The *object* for the evaluation was in fact two projects that were overlapping, thereby creating the three components below. One was the formal project "Children are not commodities", funded from Sweden and implemented by the two partners in Cambodia and the Philippines. The other was the organisation development process within ECPAT Sweden.

As we read the ToR, the assignment had in practice three components, closely linked to each other:

- mapping and assessing how ECPAT Sweden developed its ways to work with partner organisations in other countries;
- mapping and assessing the mutual benefits from working together with the project "Children are not commodities"; and

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[3] ToR, p 4

- assessing the effectiveness of the project as it is implemented by APLE in Cambodia and ECPAT Philippines.

There were no distinct borders between these three aspects, but the evaluation tried to keep them separate to clarify what was actually being evaluated and to be able to arrive at conclusions and recommendations that can be appropriately applied.

The two implementation partners, APLE and ECPAT Philippines, have longer and more varied experience from international cooperation than ECPAT Sweden, and these two partners' practices influenced ECPAT Sweden during the project period. We therefore included the partners' way of working to some extent in the evaluation while, following the ToR, the focus still was on ECPAT Sweden and how its ways of working were changing.

The *scope* in terms of *time* was the period from the formal start of the project in January 2018 until March and June 2021.[4]

2.2.1   Recommendations and lessons learned

Since the primary focus of the evaluation was capacity development for ECPAT Sweden, we have proposed recommendations only regarding the *process*. The project "Children are not commodities" has ended when this evaluation is reported, and for that reason we propose no recommendations regarding the *project*. No lessons learned are suggested since such lessons are included in the conclusions and the recommendations.

2.3   Ethical considerations

The ToR do not have any stipulation regarding ethical considerations, but we adhered to the following, which is borrowed from the ToR for another evaluation assignment: "the evaluator should take into consideration appropriate measures for collecting data in cases where sensitive or confidential issues are addressed and avoid presenting information that may be harmful to stakeholders." [5]

In accordance with established practice for international development evaluators, the notes and transcripts from interviews and other forms of primary data collection should remain with the evaluator in order to safeguard the integrity of sources. Disagreements on the reliability of findings between the evaluation and the commissioning organisation may make it necessary to disclose sources, but this is done only in extreme cases and with due consideration of possible consequences for the informant.

2.4   Limitations and risks

The relatively short time frame for the evaluation limited the number of interviews that were possible to undertake. There is a risk that some aspects were missed or not sufficiently

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[4] ECPAT Sweden's agreement with APLE ended in March 2021 and the agreement with ECPAT Philippines ended in June 2021.

[5] From the ToR for Evaluation of the IDEA project *"Level Up: Political Finance with Integrity"*, May 2020. (IDEA is International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Support).

corroborated. The participatory aspect of the evaluation, with joint discussions of the inception report and a verification workshop before the draft report was completed, has presumably reduced this risk.

For obvious reasons we were limited to conduct only on-line interviews. The means of communication was a limiting factor in itself, but also the sensitiveness of the issue and the fact that was impossible to conduct any personal, face-to-face interviews may have affected the quality of the information obtained. A consequence may have been that the evaluation was less able to capture the nuances in the responses or detect unintended consequences that only a more informal setting for interviews might bring to the surface.

2.5   Quality assurance

The evaluation conforms to OECD/DAC's Quality Standards for Development Evaluation[6] and applied the Sida OECD/DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation[7].

The budget and the time schedule did not allow using a separate consultant for quality assurance purposes. Quality assurance was instead obtained mainly through dialogue with ECPAT Sweden and its partners during the evaluation, in particular at four specific occasions:

- when submitting and discussing the Inception Report;
- through frequent contacts with ECPAT Sweden at the beginning of the field phase to further clarify practical and methodological issues;
- at an on-line verification workshop with the three organisations involved with the evaluation when the interview phase is concluded, which had two purposes: to present preliminary findings and conclusions and to provide an opportunity for the evaluator to validate the findings; and
- through the usual sequence of submitting a draft report and obtaining comments on this.

2.6   Method – general remarks

The evaluation comprised several tasks: to assess achievements and relevance of the activities, outputs and the intervention logic, to determine to what extent the objectives were achieved for both the project and the process, and to formulate recommendations for the process.

There is no immediately apparent way to assess the validity of the intervention logic. Obviously, the degree of achievement of the planned outputs and the outcomes will influence conclusions about the intervention logic but considerations about the context are also valid.

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[6] DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation, OECD 2010.
[7] Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management, Sida in cooperation with OECD/DAC, 2014.

2.7 Comments on the evaluation criteria[8]

Although the purpose of this evaluation was somewhat different from more conventional evaluations, we suggested in the inception report that the usual international evaluation criteria would be useful for guiding the evaluation, and they would be applicable in different ways when both the looking at the project and at the organisation development process.

The ToR indicate that only two of the usual evaluation criteria – effectiveness and sustainability – should be applied regarding the main focus of the evaluation, i.e. ECPAT Sweden's capacity development for international cooperation. In the evaluation we have used four of the six criteria: relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. The remaining two criteria – coherence and efficiency – seemed less useful in this case.

There was no obvious way to apply the criterion *coherence* on the *process* in this evaluation. It would indeed be applicable for the project but given the priority of assessment of the process, no particular data were collected on this issue.

Efficiency is a notoriously difficult aspect to cover. It would require a lot of information that is often not readily available, and as it is difficult to find reasonable points for comparison, in particular regarding the process, this criterion was not included.

Among the usual *cross-cutting issues* gender and human rights were built into the project itself and those issues are the basis on which ECPAT's work is founded. Assessment of cross-cutting issues was not asked for in the ToR, and it could be argued that those issues would automatically be included. We therefore made no specific analysis of those issues in the evaluation.

2.8 Data collection and sources

Sources and types of information collected for the evaluation comprised interviews with 23 key informants[9], mainly staff at the three partners, periodical reports to the funding organisation and monitoring report from APLE and ECPAT Philippines, policy documents, general reports by other organisations and agencies on the situation for children, various research reports as well as background literature the social and political landscape in Cambodia and the Philippines.

The interviews were semi-structured, largely following prepared interview guides[10], where a number of general questions were supplemented by questions related to the specific informant. All interviews were individual interviews except two, where two respondents were interviewed together. All interviews were done on-line, using Zoom or Teams. Documentation and written background information of various types were an important source for the evaluation. The documentation is listed in Annex 4.

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[8] See footnote 2.
[9] For a list of persons interviewed by the evaluation team, see Annex 2.
[10] See Annex 5.

The analysis of the interviews and documentation was qualitative. The framework for the data collection and the subsequent analysis of data was primarily the evaluation criteria relevance, effectiveness, impact (outcome), and sustainability. Below are the different categories of respondents together with the topics that were discussed during the interviews.

Table 1 People/Organisations to be interviewed and examples of topics

Interviewees	*Primary topics*
Staff at ECPAT Sweden	Origin and history of the programme. Changes of plans and reasons for these. Significant learning issues; unexpected experiences. Selection of countries and partners. Response from target groups.
Staff at APLE and ECPAT Philippines	Relevance and usefulness of the programme. Likelihood for changes in line with the programme's objectives. Opinions about the general design of the project. Likely influence by the project. Mutual exchange of experiences. Comparisons with other international partners.
International organisations	Relevance of the programme in relation to other initiatives with similar objectives. Views on rule of law in Cambodia and the Philippines.
Official domestic actors (such as the police and government institutions)	Relevance of the programme in relation to the general problem of sexual exploitation of children. Relevance in relation to other initiatives with similar objectives by government and by civil society org. Views the effectiveness of this and similar projects.

2.9 Phases of the evaluation

The evaluation task comprised three main steps from the end of April to the end of June 2021:

Phase One or the inception phase, included a preliminary document review, which was repeated during the course of the evaluation. The document review was not reported separately useful information was included in the draft and final reports.

Phase Two was data collection from the key informants. The interviews concentrated on degree of involvement with the project and the process and views on the relevance and usefulness of what the project provided, and what insights and changes of practices the project may have contributed to.

Step Three was analysis and report writing. It began with a presentation by the evaluator of preliminary results for the three partners, where we also discussed the proposed recommendations. It continued the delivery of the draft and the final reports, and the evaluation ended the final seminar with participants from the three partners.

A detailed time schedule is in Annex 6.

3 THE PROJECT – APPROACH AND THEORY OF CHANGE

3.1 Important project features

As pointed out in section 2.2 above, the project was in fact two: capacity development to handle international projects (*the process*) and the efforts to make changes regarding sexual exploitation of children (*the project*). The project document[11], which is also ECPAT Sweden's application for funding to the Postcode Lottery in Sweden, describes this as different phases of the three-year project, where the first year concentrated on creating conceptual, administrative and financial conditions for a successful project, primarily through capacity development of ECPAT Sweden, and the remaining two years to an increasing degree concentrated on the implementation of the various planned activities.

The project was the first substantial manifestation of ECPAT Sweden's wish to expand its work to other countries. The reasons for doing this, as described in the project document and a strategy paper on the organisation's international programmes[12], were that sexual exploitation of children is increasingly becoming global, both because of internet, which provides easy opportunities for this, and because a number of Swedes are travelling to other countries, among them Cambodia and the Philippines, and are involved with exploiting children sexually. Together, these two facts may be considered as *the problem* the project aimed at contributing to solve.

The project was, as far as we can know, quite unusual by explicitly stating the need to learn handling international projects for the funding partner. This is indeed different from the conventional way of working in international development cooperation, where the donor, a more developed partner and formerly usually a Western country, provides knowledge to the recipient country. In this case the roles were to a large extent reversed. What may be called the theory of change regarding capacity development, was that this is best done through a kind of learning-by-doing process, where the partners in Cambodia and the Philippines provided their long-term experience from previous international cooperation and their specific country knowledge.

The ToR point out that

> "The project was designed to establish international programming at ECPAT Sweden. As such, the project's goal was two-fold: to develop capacity at ECPAT Sweden to run international programming partnerships; and to achieve specified goals in the programme countries." [13]

The idea was not to find organisations in Cambodia and the Philippines that were suitable to implement an already finished design; it was rather to find partners which were competent

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[11] (In Swedish) *Projektplan Specialprojekt – SDGS 10. 13. 14 & 16*. Projekttitel "Barn är ingen handelsvara". Dated 15 December 2017. Annex 3 has a brief summary in English of some main points.

[12] (In Swedish) Internationella program. Projektplan för ECPAT Sveriges internationella program, perioden jan 2018 – dec 2020. ECPAT Sverige Okt 2018.

[13] ToR, p 1

for jointly develop the project and with which a co-ownership could be created. This indicates both a view of the roles of the funding partner and the implementing partners as equal and a willingness to learn from more experienced organisations.

The entire project and its goals may be summarised in this way:

Goals for the process
- To establish international programming at ECPAT Sweden
- To develop capacity at ECPAT Sweden to run international programming

Goals for the project
- To achieve specified goals in the programme countries

3.2 ECPAT Sweden's partners

ECPAT Sweden's two partners have both a long experience from working against sexual exploitation of children and from working with international funding agencies, with other local NGOs and with national and local authorities, which made them useful partners for learning. The situation in the two countries and because they are among the most "popular" countries for Swedish offenders, was also a major argument for the choice of partners.

APLE (Action pour les enfants) is an international organisation that was established in Phnom Penh in 2003. It was registered as a national NGO is 2014. From its very beginning it has worked closely with the authorities, e.g. with the Cambodian National Police, to assist with findings travelling sex offenders and victims of trafficking. The 2016 strategy directed the work systematically into four major areas: criminal justice development, court support, community engagement and research and advocacy.

ECPAT Philippines was one of the four organisations that was among the founders when ECPAT international was created in 1990 by a group of social workers, missionaries and promoters of children's right in Asia. ECPAT Philippines does not have a strategy formulated in a document of the same type as APLE, but the organisation has a well-established way of working at the national level with lobbying and advocacy, aiming at institutional changes. The organisation works to build collaboration among local civil society actors and the broader child rights community to form a social movement for the protection of children from sexual exploitation. The Hotline is an important part of the activities. It contributes to reduce child sexual abuse material on the internet and provides information that may aid in the investigation and prosecution of illegal activities against children.

4   FINDINGS – PROCESS AND PROJECT

The findings discussed in this chapter are based on the regular reporting by the project by ECPAT Sweden and on key informant interviews. The reporting by the two implementing partners related to this specific project is mainly in the form of logframe tables and ECPAT Sweden's reports are in Swedish, fairly short and aimed at the funding Postcode Lottery. The former kind of reporting is detailed but results are not much analysed in other ways that whether targets have been reached.

We do not repeat here all details in the reports, but present and discuss the facts that we consider most important to provide a valid picture of the project's achievements during the period covered by the evaluation.

In line with the division of the project's different aims, the discussion below is separate for the process and the project.

4.1   Findings from the process

Open and joint planning of the project

The plans for the three project years were very open from the beginning. After initial discussions, when the format for the partnership was established, the first year largely was spent on jointly designing the project. In the words of one informant, the second and third year was intentionally left "blank" at the outset. This was understood and accepted by the funding organisation, the Swedish Postcode Lottery.

According to interviews, previous contacts between ECPAT Sweden, ECPAT Philippines and APLE in Cambodia in connection with meetings related to ECPAT International, had established that there seemed to be a shared view on priorities and ways of working. Among those were the emphasis on children's rights, on the child's perspective and the usefulness of the Hotline facility[14]. Those aspects were important for the Swedish ECPAT and among the reasons for choosing the current partners.

The foundation for the planning process and indeed for the entire project was that the two implementing partners would decide themselves how the project would be included in their own respective current strategy and work plan.

The administration and reporting requirements did not create any particular problems, apart from some initial adjustments for ECPAT Sweden regarding accounting in order to better separate the specific project cost from other expenditures. Contributing to the smooth handling of the project was the flexibility of the funding organisation and its acknowledgement that this was a learning process for the partners. Particularly appreciated

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[14] The Hotline is a dedicated phone number or internet connection where anyone can report suspected sexual abuse of children or offenders anonymously. It is handled by a Hotline analyst connected to a local ECPAT organisation or an organisation with similar objectives (such as APLE), who will assess the reports and forward the information to law enforcement entities. The Hotline should not be confused with support lines, where abused children may receive help.

by APLE and ECPAT Philippines was the response on the reporting, which seldom happens with other funding partners, and the opportunities this provided to discuss upcoming issues in implementation.

Continuing close contact during the project's three years

The frequent contacts between the partners did not cease when the planning period was over. A routine was established with regular monthly meetings, attended by the project leadership and different staff members, depending on the issues to be discussed.

The management of the project apparently became a combination of learning sessions, reporting/monitoring exercises and management meetings, where upcoming problems and decisions could be handled jointly.

A couple of the informants mentioned that the process may have been time-consuming, and it was also a very unusual way of working with a funding organisation. However, the time spent was considered worthwhile since it both contributed to mutual learning and made it possible to plan and make changes without a complicated administrative procedure.

The institutional memory for international projects and internal procedures at ECPAT Sweden is being developed

A temporary change of the project manager at ECPAT Sweden and a slight difference in views on reporting illustrated the potential vulnerability of the management of the project, in particular at the beginning of the capacity development process, before experience had been consolidated and routines were firmly established.

ECPAT Sweden seems well aware of this problem and has formed an international working group, which at the time of writing this report, has regular meetings. This group is also working on creating routines and guidance for handling on-going and future international work, based to a considerable extent on experiences from this project but also from other work with strong international connections.

One lesson from the project, mentioned by informants, was that ECPAT Sweden need to watch the overhead costs related to managing projects abroad. The funding may not always be sufficient to cover all such costs.

Mutual learning and a process of strengthening and benefiting from the process

Informants at both implementing partners mentioned that they gained useful knowledge on reporting and tracking results. Among specific issues, ECPAT Sweden had clear ideas regarding online crime while e.g. APLE had vague ideas on that subject. On the other hand APLE had more experience to share about awareness raising among the general public and in communities.

The project was considered to have contributed to strengthening ECPAT Sweden's profile as an actor in this sector and in general to legitimise the organisation's work.

4.2   Findings from the project

Most objectives, maybe all, were reached

The monitoring reports by the implementation partners and the reports by ECPAT Sweden to the Postcode Lottery as well as information through the interviews confirm that most and probably all objectives for the project in the two countries were reached.

The evaluation has not been able to scrutinise the reporting in detail, but the information is consistent and there are no major discrepancies.

Some changes, largely due to the pandemic

In both countries the partners had to make changes in the implementation of the project because of the pandemic and in the Philippines also because of a volcano eruption. The major change was to "transfer" to on-line meeting (seminars, workshops etc). According to interviews such changes did not meet with any great problems but effectiveness may have been lower because time was lost and interaction with participants less active.

Except those mentioned above, the project met no unexpected problems that influenced the implementation in a negative way.

A positive, unexpected experience was the response by the local authorities in the province of Laguna, where resources were allocated from public funds for actions along the lines of the project.

Successful integration with the partners' existing strategies and plans

The joint planning made it easier to integrate the project into what the two implementing partners were doing. One informant emphasised that it resulted in more realistic goals.

APLE chose to integrate the project in their existing 2016-2020 strategy and on-going work and not handle it as a completely separate project. The strategy included goals regarding criminal justice development and court support, and the project increased the resources available and made it possible to allocate more time and efforts on particularly those two areas.

For ECPAT Philippines the project created an opportunity to work more at the provincial level. Most of the organisation's work has traditionally been directed at the national level while acknowledging that localisation, i.e. working closer to communities and local authorities, would be highly desirable. The project was implemented in two provinces south of Manila, Batangas and Laguna, and met a very positive response.

The success in implementing the project in those two provinces has, according to one informant, given confidence about this way of working, and it will serve as a model to be replicated elsewhere.

The project illustrated and emphasised the important roles of NGOs

A number of informants, including representatives from authorities both Cambodia and in The Philippines, pointed out the importance and the need of NGOs in the fight against sexual exploitation of children. The technical and practical knowledge regarding increasing online crimes was frequently mentioned, where the police has limited resources and not well-developed procedures. The NGOs are prepared to take care of victims, which the authorities seldom are, and NGOs often have the ability to detect offenders and help bringing them to justice.

A new sector for APLE – private sector cooperation

An unexpected response in Cambodia was the engagement with the private sector, which was ECPAT Sweden's idea. APLE had not worked with the private sector before, but the organisation could use Sweden's experience and found it was surprisingly easy and smooth. APLE was even able to work through the local branch of companies in Cambodia to get their ideas into the international part of the companies.

5 FINDINGS ON THE DESIGN

5.1 The project and the process

In very general terms the project's objective was to reduce sexual exploitation of children, in particular the opportunities for exploitation that are based on poverty and on limited understanding of children's rights, and to improve the lives of children who have already been subject to exploitation or are at risk to become exploited.

The project document and monitoring documentation had an elaborate system for overall objective, subgoals, indicators etc. However, from a formal point of view the logical framework included in the project proposal was incomplete, and while it well specifies what actions would lead to desired results, it did not specify external factors beyond the programme's scope but concentrates on the *objectives*, on results or rather *outputs* expected to achieve these objectives, and on *activities* for bringing about the results.

Programme *risks*, which are of course examples of external factors and which may be seen as an indirect way to indicate assumptions, are extensively discussed in the ECPAT Sweden international strategy document together with measures to mitigate these risks, but they were not included in the programme proposal.

The project document had several levels of objectives[15]: one overarching purpose; five long-term aims – one for the year 2018 focussing on capacity development at ECPAT Sweden – and four on aimed improvements in the two partner countries; eight outcomes for long-term aim 1; and a number of not listed outcomes for aims 2-5.

There are many different ways to formulate a theory of change, to apply a logical framework analysis, to establish indicators, and to formulate other features that are essential for understanding and assessing a development project, and there is obviously not only one correct way of using these concepts and tools.

The structure of the intervention logic for the project is fairly clear and provide guidance for what to do in the project. It has no doubt worked satisfactorily during the implementation of the project. Also, they seem to fit into the two partners' strategies and logframes.

However, a closer look raises a number of questions regarding the logical structure. Some of the outcomes look to us more like outputs from activities or even activities, but they are less clear as outcomes or intermediate outcomes directly connected to the four long-term aims 2019-2020.

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[15] The following description is based on a summary in English (original in Swedish; see footnote 11 above), which is in Annex 3.

5.2   Some findings regarding the partners' logframes

Logframe tables are frequently used by the partners and seem to be an important tool for both APLE and ECPAT Philippines. They are of course inspired by the logical framework analysis or approach (LFA) method[16], which is used all over the world in development cooperation and also frequently in all kinds of projects aiming for change in one way or another.

There is no denying that it is a very useful and practical tool in this kind of work, but it is also easy to use it in ways it is not intended to be used or omitting features that are important for utilising its full potential. There is a number of critical voices saying that LFA encourages too narrow or simplistic cause–effect or linear thinking as opposed to a more realistic view of more complicated patterns.[17]

We are not here going into a general debate about the pros and cons of the LFA method, but we want to highlight and comment briefly on some ways the "logframe" was used in connection with the evaluated project.

The advantage of a separate or explicit theory of change (ToC)

Although it is fairly clear that there is a kind of ToC behind or included in the logframe tables, there are few examples of a separate presentation or discussion of the ToC, which starts from the formulation of the problem that the intervention is supposed to attack. The advantage of having that would be that it is easier to discuss adjustments and – most important – it would be clear what is to be analysed in an LFA exercise, where ToC alternatives could be discussed and assessed by project staff together with various stakeholders.

The logframes seem to be a combination of a ToC, outcomes a logical framework analysis, work plans and results reports

The logframes are used by APLE and ECPAT Philippines in the project as a kind of multipurpose tools, and as such they are obviously found very useful. However, they may have the same disadvantages as more conventional multipurpose tools (like the famous Swiss army officers' knife), i.e. not quite the right thing, but easily available and often handy for taking care of immediate tasks.

A problem is that the tables may be difficult to understand for outsiders because too much of different kinds of information are put into them, and the reader may not understand how the information hangs together. There may be no separate documentation with reasons behind a certain target or indicator, and there are not normally comments on the results, for instance how they differ from the intended goals and what consequences that may have.

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[16] See for instance https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/search/site/LFA
[17] Examples of critique are:
https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/simonhearn_en_Logframe_A_Critique_199-1.pdf and
Bakewell and Garbutt: The use and abuse of the Logical Framework Approach. Sida (Sweden) 2005.

Indicators and goals

A common risk in logframe tables everywhere is that indicators may become objectives. This may happen when the definition of an objective is made more concrete through an indicator or the goals is so far away that the indicator seems to be the only thing that is achievable and thus it effectively becomes the goal.

A special problem arises when goals are defined as verbs as is the case in some of the project's logframes. If the goal is an on-going activity it may be difficult to determine if and when the goal is reached. There is an obvious risk that the indicator turns into becoming a goal. It is usually better to define a future desirable state of a situation, where the state before an intervention and the state of somethings after the intervention can be observed or determined directly or through indicators.

Still, verbs may be used to describe the state before and after, for instance that the police are using child-friendly interrogation methods, which they did not before. Then a kind of barrier has been broken down and that would clearly indicate that a goal has been reached, even if there may be a need to add some kind of quality measure as well. This may be the case regarding some areas that the project includes, but without a clear theory of change it may be difficult to understand that the verb is actually a description of the expected new state of things.

Assumptions were not discussed

In the logframe tables we have seen, there are no assumptions stated clearly. Assumptions are descriptions of features the project context that are external to the project and not possible to directly influence through the intervention. In a classical logical framework analysis they are essential and represent both things that must be taken as given and things that may even be considered as risks or contributing to risk.

APLE's very well elaborated 2016-2020 Strategic Plan has a section labelled "Externalities" which may be read as a list of assumptions and risks and works well for that purpose. However, these were not included in the project logframes.

6   ISSUES THAT MAY NEED MORE ATTENTION

The following issues were discussed only very briefly or not at all in the project documentation:

- Scaling up; how to reach out to all regions and communities
- "Critical mass" – how many must be informed/trained to trigger major effects
- Time perspective for reaching outcomes; apart from what is inside the time frame of the project
- Factors determining outcome (including assumptions)
- Institutional changes (or perhaps conditions) to be created for sustainability

An important feature in the project was that it intended to reach far more people and institutions than were included in the activities during its three years implementation period. The same goes for the three partners' past and current activities. The theory of change implies that the goals should be reached in two main ways: by institutional changes and by raising awareness in the general public about the particular risks for children.

In the former case, strategic changes in legislation, defining formal responsibilities for authorities and private enterprises regarding sexual exploitation of children, and improved ways of working, are aimed at reducing the risks for children and ideally make it impossible for potential perpetrators to act. In that way the entire society will benefit from such changes.

In the latter case, different strategies for spreading "the message" may be applied or assumed to work. Organisations like ECPAT or APLE will never on their own have enough resources to reach the entire population of a country. Nevertheless, they may in various ways be able to reach an increasing number of people, and it would therefore be important to discuss how to best scale up the activities. Such discussions are, however, largely absent in the documentation. Also absent are discussions about time needed to bring about substantial or crucial changes beyond the time frame of the project.

Linked to this may be the possibility of applying the concept of critical mass, i.e. if there may be a crucial number of people informed that creates a kind of independent and self-powered movement of awareness and change of attitudes.

The benefits from such discussions would be to put the current activities into perspective regarding time and resources, and it may also be a trigger to find new ways to work. It could in addition be useful when entering into dialogue with government and local institutions about roles and responsibilities in the long run.

In the preceding chapter we raised the importance to explicitly include assumptions in the logical framework analysis. This may be reformulated into a more general suggestion to analyse factors outside the project that may have decisive effect on the outcomes and impact. As mentioned above, this was to some extent done in APLE's strategy document, but it might be expanded further.

7 CONCLUSIONS

In section 2.7 above we discussed the usefulness of the international criteria and how they may be applied. In this chapter we present conclusions regarding the four criteria that were assessed in the evaluation.

7.1 Relevance

Relevance in this case would mean two things:

- that the current project "Children are not commodities" and its implementation in Cambodia and the Philippines was an appropriate way to promote the overall goals for ECPAT Sweden and its partners, and

- that choosing APLE in Cambodia and ECPAT Philippines as partners was a good way to gain experience in handling international projects.

The ToR has only one general question about relevance, which corresponds to the two implicit questions above.

Our conclusion for the first question above is that the project was relevant considering the situation in the two countries, the direction of the work and results related to the two implementing partners and the potential response by authorities and the general public regarding actions to reduce consequences of sexual exploitation of children in the two countries.

On the second question our conclusion is that the choice of method to learn about managing projects abroad was relevant as it clearly addressed gaps in planning and operational knowledge at ECPAT Sweden. Also, being involved with projects abroad was relevant for understanding the social and political environment and conditions for working against this kind of problem, including the context for Swedish perpetrators, which created better understanding of actions needed in Sweden.

7.2 Effectiveness

Regarding *effectiveness*, i.e. if the project produced the intended outputs and outcomes, the ToR suggest one main question and a couple of follow-up questions about reasons for reported results:

- "To which extent have the project contributed to outcome objectives as defined in the results matrix of the project? Why? Why not?"

The conclusion from the reports and interviews indicate clearly that the project was effective in reaching the expected project objectives. It could even be said that regarding the positive response from Laguna province in the Philippines the results were above expectations. Also this experience points at the effectiveness of a model of working that may be repeated in other locations and used as an illustration for local authorities on how to work against sexual exploitation of children.

The effectiveness questions above refer only to the project and not to the process. A couple of general process questions may be:

- To what extent have the experiences from the cooperation with the two partners shaped ECPAT Sweden's current views on international projects?

- Is "learning-by-doing" a mutually beneficial way of improving handling of international projects?

Also regarding these two questions the evaluation findings point at positive conclusions. It is obvious that the substantial knowledge gained over a long time by the two implementing partners was highly useful for ECPAT Sweden's learning process. Contributing to this seem to have been both organisations' experience from working with several different organisations and funding partners, which made them open for variation and probably gave an insight on the need for flexibility.

The decision to design the project as an on-going, continuous process instead of having a limited number of learning events, for instance at the beginning and at the end of the cooperation period, seems to have created a very effective learning process. The frequent meetings between the three partners were apparently in fact both learning events and management meetings. Interviews indicate that learning was mutual benefitting also APLE and ECPAT Philippines.

7.3   Impact and sustainability

Impact is by definition about long-term effects. The project was running for three years, which means that long-term effects may still be difficult to determine. In the reporting by the partners, the term "outcome" was instead used to cover both more medium-term results and to narrow down what can reasonably be the effect of the intervention.

The ToR explicitly indicate that *sustainability* should be included and suggest a general question, asking if it is likely that the benefits of the project are sustainable. This criterion was assessed primarily regarding the process, but the project's sustainability is also discussed.

Long-term effects – impact – and sustainability are of course closely connected concepts and there are reasons to discuss them together.

Regarding the process, there is no doubt that the experiences from managing the project "Children are not commodities" have been well identified and acknowledged by ECPAT Sweden. The organisation has a number of other international engagements, although they are of a different kind and not implemented as separate projects in other countries. Efforts have been taken to retain the knowledge within the organisation through for example an international working group comprising all staff linked to international collaboration, which meets regularly and aims among other things to create routines for working with international partners. Also, the international strategy that the organisation decided on in 2020 provides a formal frame for further international work. In these ways it is possible to conclude that the project has left an impact.

However, the sustainability of this knowledge may be somewhat vulnerable as it rests mainly with one person, and there is at the time of writing of this evaluation report, no firm decision on how to continue with project abroad.

For the project, it may still be early days to make a firm conclusion on impact and sustainability but there are clear pointers in the right direction. APLE was able to focus and successfully work more with criminal justice development and has apparently had an impact on the ways the police are working with children regarding for instance interrogation techniques. Promising steps have also been taken towards the establishment of one-step service centres[18], where abused children can receive more appropriate response and support compared to current practices when they often are subject to procedures that may increase their suffering.

Our conclusion is that the project has substantially contributed to sustainable changes in attitudes and ways of working aimed at national and local authorities in both countries, and probably also to awareness raising among the general public on occurrence and better response to sexual abuse of children.

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[18] The APLE research report "From Operation-oriented to Child-centered" (APLE Cambodia, 2020) include experiences from Sweden and other Nordic countries and has concrete proposals on how to create such centres.

8   RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Don't lose momentum regarding projects abroad. Plan for a continuation of the cooperation with the existing partners and/or look soon for other projects and partners.

B. Try to find ways to continue the *process*, i.e. the joint and mutual capacity development work that obviously was beneficial for all the three partners.

C. Maintaining capacity within ECPAT Sweden to run international project seems vulnerable with a single program officer, who is funded only through the project contribution. Look for ways to fund this as a permanent post, not financed only through project funding.

D. ECPAT Sweden already has an internal international working group, which is a way for exchanging experiences and discuss actions. However, this group seems to be informal, and it may be an advantage to make it permanent with a specific mandate.

E. The way cooperation between partners in the "Children are not commodities" project was developed and implemented is encouraging and particularly suitable for this kind of work. Update the international policy for ECPAT Sweden and indicate in this document that stepwise, joint development of projects should be the normal way for cooperation.

F. Reconsider the design and use of the logframe tables and other formats for project management documentation to make their use for different purposes more clear and to provide more space for discussions about alternatives and consequences of results.

G. Try to find ways to discuss and include long term considerations about possibilities and forms for scaling up various actions and realistic time for sustainable results beyond the actual project time frame.

LIST OF ANNEXES

Annex 1   Terms of reference (ToR)

Annex 2   List of people interviewed

Annex 3   Summary of the project document (aims and outcomes)

Annex 4   References and project documentation

Annex 5   Interview guides, examples

Annex 6   Time schedule for the evaluation