# Stepping Up the Fight Against Sexual Exploitation of Children (SUFASEC) Programme

NARRATIVE REPORT YEAR 1: MARCH 2023 - FEBRUARY 2024

## ⌄ Down to Zero
Fighting sexual exploitation of children

Terre des Hommes Netherlands

Child Rights Coalition Asia

CONEXIÔN

DEFENCE for CHILDREN

ecpat

FREE A GIRL

PLAN INTERNATIONAL

# Down to Zero Alliance

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# Abbreviations and acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| CRC Asia | Child Rights Coalition Asia |
| CSO | Civil society organisation |
| DCI-ECPAT | Defence for Children International- ECPAT |
| DtZ | Down to Zero |
| EU | European Union |
| FGNL | Free a Girl Netherlands |
| GBV | Gender-based violence |
| GSC | Global Steering Committee |
| ICT | Information and communication technology |
| L&A | Lobbying and advocacy |
| Lao PDR | Lao People's Democratic Republic |
| LGBTQI+ | Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex |
| LGU | Local government unit |
| MEAL | Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| OCSE | Online sexual exploitation of children |
| SAARC | South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation |
| SE | Sexual exploitation |
| SEC | Sexual exploitation of children |
| SOGIESC | Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics |
| SRHR | Sexual and reproductive health and rights |
| SUFASEC | Stepping Up the Fight Against Sexual Exploitation of Children |
| TdH NL | Terre des Hommes Netherlands |
| ToC | Theory of Change |
| WG | Working Group |

# Executive summary

The Down to Zero (DtZ) Alliance is proud to present its first consolidated annual report for the Stepping Up the Fight Against Sexual Exploitation of Children (SUFASEC) programme building on the contributions from implementing partners and Alliance members. The initial phase served as an inception phase, allowing countries to refine their work plans, budgets, results framework, and staffing. At the global level efforts began to draft a Memorandum of Understanding, start the baseline study and roll out a decentralised governance model. This model embraces the 'shifting the power' principle by granting country teams greater autonomy and decision-making power, including shared country budgets. Newly appointed Cross-Country Coordinators played a crucial role in enhancing coordination, fostering knowledge sharing, and promoting local ownership and inclusive decision-making.

From mid-2023, the focus shifted to implementing programme activities aligned with the SUFASEC Theory of Change, emphasising three main outcomes: changing harmful social norms and practices, enhancing access to protective assets and environments for youth, and empowering children and civil society to hold duty-bearers accountable. Under Outcome 1, the Alliance collaborated with various stakeholders to challenge social norms that perpetuate sexual exploitation of children (SEC). Efforts focused on raising awareness and deepening understanding of both online and offline exploitation and its ties to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Initiatives included Theatre for Development and social media campaigns, alongside state-level orientations, community dialogue, and sensitisation sessions with local government representatives, community-level child protection actors, religious and community leaders, and the private sector. Additionally, activities involving parents, caregivers, and survivors' families helped establish safe family environments that support positive reintegration processes and counter societal stigma. Under Outcome 2, partners provided psychosocial support and basic needs to survivors, alongside enhancing economic resilience through rehabilitation services, skills development training, and (non-)formal education. Health sector engagements aimed to promote access to SRHR and facilitate referrals. Under Outcome 3, partners prioritised enhancing awareness of legal frameworks related to (online) sexual exploitation, elevating youth advocacy skills, and empowering them to act as community change agents advocating for their rights. They collaborated with diverse duty-bearers, including social welfare officers, law enforcement, judicial bodies, local leaders, and government officials, to foster cooperation and create safer environments. Significant efforts were made to combat trafficking in border regions in Nepal, India, and Bangladesh by raising awareness among border officials and authorities. Next to conducting training sessions, sharing best practices and engaging in discussions about risks and mitigation strategies to minimise sexual exploitation in travel and tourism destinations.

The Alliance launched three initiatives to boost inter-regional collaboration: Significant groundwork was undertaken to establish local infrastructures for the Youth Voices for Change initiative operating across two regions and six countries. Meanwhile, the Youth Advocacy initiative in South Asia saw child and youth change makers participate in regional consultations to influence SAARC governments to safeguard children from all forms of violence, including SEC. The Boys Initiative was launched, focusing on empowering young people, promoting child- and youth-led advocacy, for addressing the often-neglected issues of boys and LGBTQI+ children impacted by sexual exploitation. Additionally, the program initiated various lobby and advocacy strategies at the international, European Union, regional, and national levels, targeting law enforcement, private sector engagement, and policy enhancement. Latin America efforts focused on researching the risks of SEC related to the Venezuelan refugee crisis. In Asia, efforts concentrated on engaging the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector due to its role in driving SEC. Research preparations began, and findings from the VOICE research were presented to EU policymakers, shedding light on the perspectives of children, youth, parents and caregivers concerning online safety.

The programme prioritised child and youth involvement, integrating their participation into activities such as the baseline study and VOICE research. Safe spaces, capacity building, community engagement, and advocacy ensured comprehensive support to children and youth. Gender-responsive approaches addressed unique vulnerabilities, promoting long-term societal change, while challenges persist, including evolving digital risks, and inadequate access to accurate SRHR information. The SUFASEC programme is distinguished by its cross-regional approach to protecting children from SEC, featuring adaptive strategies, robust partnerships, and active child and youth engagement to drive sustainable and systemic change. Sustainable and systemic change is promoted through partnerships, collaboration with local authorities, strengthening of legislative and regulatory frameworks, capacity building, and advocacy efforts, ensuring a lasting impact on child protection efforts.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. DTZ/SUFASEC PROGRAMME

The Stepping Up the Fight Against Sexual Exploitation of Children (SUFASEC) programme is implemented by the Down to Zero (DtZ) Alliance, with Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH NL) as lead and Child Rights Coalition Asia (CRC Asia), Conexión, Defence for Children – ECPAT Netherlands (DCI-ECPAT), Free A Girl Netherlands (FGNL) and Plan International Netherlands as Alliance members. The overall goal of the SUFASEC programme is that "Children in all of their diversity are better protected from sexual exploitation", contributing to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 3 (ensure healthy lives and promote well-being) and 5.2 (eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls). The programme builds on previous DtZ experience,[1] taking into account the complexity and local context regarding sexual exploitation of children (SEC) in the 12 implementing countries. In Asia, the Alliance works in South East Asia in Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), the Philippines and Thailand, and in South Asia in Bangladesh, India and Nepal. In Latin America, the Alliance works in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic and Guatemala.

The Theory of Change (ToC) enables Alliance members and their implementing partners to contextualise their programming. It is based on three overall outcomes, towards which all implementing partners work, and 11 intermediate outcomes from which partners can choose, depending on their expertise and context. We put children (rights-holders) at the centre, empowering them and involving them in all aspects of the programme. For example, we worked with countries to include children from new and existing youth groups in child and youth advisory groups, ensuring their involvement in monitoring throughout the programme period. Additionally, we empowered countries by giving them more say and decision-making power regarding monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) and joint activities, and ensuring that the programme is responsive to local contexts.

## 1.2. ANNUAL REPORTING PROCESS

For this first SUFASEC consolidated annual narrative report, spanning March 2023 to February 2024, we based our findings on comprehensive country reports. These reports provided in-depth insights and showcased efforts and results in the specific countries. (Cross-)country coordinators consolidated the partner reports for each country using templates prepared by the DtZ Desk. These were then compiled into a single Alliance annual report. Country coordinators and key staff participated in a validation and analysis-sharing workshop, where the first draft of the consolidated annual report was discussed. This collaborative approach ensured a smooth process and effective coordination with the countries. Alliance members also submitted their audited financial reports, which were integrated into the overall audited financial report. This financial report is presented together with this narrative annual report.

## 1.3. READING GUIDE

The SUFASEC annual report is a synthesis of the 10 (cross-)country reports (as per the combined Bolivia–Colombia–Guatemala coordination structure, including a joint cross-country steering committee and a cross-country coordinator). This report starts with an executive summary. In Chapter 1, we provide an introduction, and Chapter 2 provides an update on the most relevant contextual changes, such as elections, political instability, shrinking civic space, economic recession and humanitarian crises. Chapter 3 details major risks, including climate change, government staff turnover, political and social unrest, social and cultural norms, new technologies, the entertainment sector and conflict. Chapter 4 provides examples of progress under the three overall outcomes, while Chapter 5 presents three initiatives that strengthen Alliance collaboration across regions and countries, consolidates the annual country reports and includes concrete examples of activities carried out during year 1 of programme implementation. Chapter 6 outlines lobbying and advocacy (L&A) strategies at different levels. Chapter 7 reflects on the ToC, and Chapter 8 describes how the Alliance implements the principle of 'shifting the power'. Chapter 9 covers the Alliance's external communications, and Chapter 10 elaborates on MEAL, with Chapter 11 provides insights into cross-cutting issues, including child participation and youth engagement, intersectionality, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), SEC and safeguarding. Chapter 12 presents good practices, lessons learned and challenges, while Chapter 13 looks at sustainability and future outlooks, and, finally, Chapter 14 briefly explains the audited financial report.

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[1] The DtZ programme implemented in 10 countries in Asia and Latin America between 2016 and 2020, the DtZ Voice for Change programme implemented in five countries between March 2020 and June 2021, and the DtZ Building Back Better programme implemented in 11 countries in Asia and Latin America between May 2021 and May 2022.

# 2. Contextual changes

## 2.1. ELECTIONS AND GOVERNMENT TURNOVER

The political landscape in several programme countries in Asia and Latin America – specifically Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic – has been significantly influenced by national and local elections, alongside turnover in government stakeholders and local authorities with whom SUFASEC partners collaborate. During the elections, civil society organisations (CSOs) experienced a shrinking civic space and reduced government focus on SEC, although most election outcomes are not expected to significantly impact the programme. In the Dominican Republic, heightened activities and political campaigns preceded national elections, while in Guatemala, presidential elections were marked by several attempts to annul results, demonstrations, and arrests of indigenous leaders, creating democratic setbacks and destabilising the political system. In particular, the new Brazilian presidency in 2023 has brought about significant social and political changes, with Brazil reinstating public policies on childhood care, and those addressing sexual violence. Although progress has been gradual, there are promising signs of positive action. Notably, a Brazilian implementing partner actively participates in the Intersectoral Commission for Combating Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents, contributing to policy reviews and strengthening the National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents (CONANDA). These efforts have also supported the National Plan to Combat Sexual Violence. The new political context in Brazil has created opportunities for the Alliance to support and strengthen local bodies and thematic committees, with increased focus on children's rights.

To mitigate these challenges, partners adapted their implementation strategies during the election process by slowing down or halting activities as needed and maintaining communication with key stakeholders. They focused on rebuilding rapport, informing new officials about project activities, and cultivating new collaborations to maintain progress towards achieving project targets. Additionally, they adjusted policy advocacy strategies to align with shifting national policies and budgets.

## 2.2. POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

Political conflicts, instability and communal violence in several SUFASEC countries have impacted programme implementation. In South Asia, frequent shifts in political party alliances in Nepal have further diminished accountability among government officials and weakened institutional effectiveness. Similarly, in Bangladesh, political conflicts, including rallies, strikes and clashes following the national parliamentary elections, partially hampered local project implementation. Additionally, communal violence between Hindu and Muslim communities occurred in parts of Nepal and India, in the latter particularly after the inauguration of the Sri Rama Temple, which were exacerbated by social media.

In Latin America, Colombia experienced setbacks in the peace process, with armed groups engaging in threats, extortion, kidnapping and forced displacement. These groups also resorted to trafficking and sexual exploitation of children and women. In Colombia, normalised violence and a deeply rooted patriarchal culture have resulted in the subordination of girls, adolescents and women in economic, social, political and sexual aspects of life. In Bolivia, internal disputes within the current governing party led to demonstrations, social polarisation, a judicial–constitutional crisis, and an increase in reported cases of SEC. There has also been a rise in the number of cases of missing children, primarily recruited through social networks, online games and employment agencies.

## 2.3. SHRINKING CIVIL SPACE

Shrinking civil space in countries such as India, Nepal and Bangladesh has created significant challenges for civil society actors, including local and international non-governmental organisations. The tightening of rules and regulations has narrowed the space for organisations to advocate for basic human rights, creating a restrictive legislative environment and numerous bureaucratic hurdles. Consequently, organisations are burdened with excessive administrative procedures, diverting time and energy away from core missions, thus leaving limited time for actual programme implementation. Bangladesh's Digital Security Act curtails CSOs' online presence, prompting partners to cautiously publish content that may not comply with this law. In India, a SUFASEC implementing partner did not receive the required permit to receive funds under the Indian Foreign Contribution Regulation Act. Consequently, the programme has had to terminate its collaboration with this partner. The Alliance members in India are currently discussing how to continue the planned activities and reach their objectives, including by closely monitoring and assessing potential risks and devising mitigation strategies. Alternative ways to implement activities previously carried out by this partner are being explored.

## 2.4. ECONOMIC RECESSION AND INFLATION

Economic recession and inflation have severely impacted food security and daily lives in the Philippines, Bangladesh, Lao PDR, Nepal and Thailand. Rising prices of essential food and other commodities have contributed to increased school dropouts and heightened food insecurity. Additionally, the economic downturn has driven young Nepalese abroad in search of opportunities, increasing their risk of trafficking and exploitation and causing disruptions in families back home. The lack of employment opportunities has pushed many young people into the entertainment sector, exposing them to greater risks of SEC, including online sexual exploitation of children (OCSE).

## 2.5. HUMANITARIAN CRISIS AND MIGRATION

Migrant children are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation, as well as trafficking for sexual exploitation, especially if they are unaccompanied and lack access to safe migration pathways and services. Despite their resilience and agency in seeking safety and economic security and escaping from crises, these children face significant risks. En route, they may turn to guides, smugglers and criminal groups, increasing their vulnerability. On arrival, discrimination and limited access to basic services further expose them to exploitation. Children left behind when their parents migrate are also more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, often experiencing polyvictimisation through both labour and sexual exploitation.

Climate change is a fundamental driver of crises, shocks and both acute and protracted emergencies, acting as a root cause of SEC through multiple pathways. These include the loss of livelihoods due to altered agricultural patterns and rising sea levels, migration to escape natural disasters and disrupted livelihoods, separation from family members, and conflict over scarce resources.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, ongoing migration crises raise serious concerns about potential human rights violations, particularly for migrant children and adolescents. The Dominican Republic and Colombia are being significantly impacted by the humanitarian crises in neighbouring countries such as Haiti and Venezuela. The deepening crisis in Haiti, marked by violence and economic instability, has led to increased migration to the Dominican Republic, resulting in a loss of livelihoods, food insecurity and displacement. These conditions heighten the risks of human rights violations, particularly for migrant children and adolescents. Similarly, ongoing migration of Venezuelans and Colombian returnees poses social challenges, including xenophobia, discrimination, stigmatisation, and risks associated with irregular status, further increasing their vulnerability to trafficking, sexual exploitation and related crimes. Other countries, such as Nepal, face humanitarian crises that fuel migration. The lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with fragile governance, have led to economic challenges and job scarcity. This situation has been exacerbated by two major earthquakes and flooding, which have disrupted lives and contributed to an economic slowdown. Consequently, many young Nepalese, often with limited education and skills, have been compelled to migrate, exposing them to heightened risks of exploitation. These challenges highlight the need for adaptive strategies and comprehensive efforts to address the evolving political, economic and social dynamics affecting programme implementation.

# 3. Risks and mitigation

The following overview restates previously identified risks outlined in the SUFASEC proposal, while new risks, such as rival gangs in Brazil, have emerged due to evolving contexts. Mitigation measures from the proposal, along with additional strategies, have been effectively implemented to address these risks.

## 3.1. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UNREST

Political and social unrest related to national elections created fear and tension among the population in Bangladesh and other countries, disrupting project activities. To mitigate these risks, the project team developed alternative plans, collaborated with local leaders and politicians to secure support for project initiatives, focused more on in-house and indoor activities, and compensated staff for extra hours worked on weekends and public holidays. In Nepal, frequent changes in leaders and bureaucrats due to political unrest, demonstrations, strikes and violence posed significant challenges to programme operations. The country team responded by proactively devising contingency plans, assisting the government in building institutional memory, completing tasks ahead of anticipated changes, and collaborating closely with law enforcement agencies, civil society and rights-holders to overcome obstacles. These proactive measures ensured the continuation of project activities despite political and social instability.

## 3.2. GOVERNMENT STAFF TURNOVER

Alliance partners implemented several strategies to address the high turnover of government staff across various SUFASEC countries in Asia and Latin America, such as Guatemala, Bolivia, Colombia, Nepal, India, Thailand and the Philippines. They included maintaining communication with key personnel in each government, engaging in ongoing liaison with relevant agencies, proactively engaging with and finding allies in new ministries and institutions, and holding consultative, introductory and alignment meetings with new officers. Additionally, they kept signed agreements with various bodies of the child protection system, provided training at the directorate level, and generated constant synergies with different sectors to ensure continuity. These strategies help ensure programme stability despite frequent changes in government personnel.

## 3.3. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL NORMS

Social and cultural norms continued to pose a major risk in both Asian and Latin American countries, where patriarchal attitudes create resistance to efforts to address issues related to SEC, OCSE and SRHR. Addressing norms related to SRHR took place, for example, by educating parents and child protection actors on SRHR topics, including definitions of gender and sexuality, myths and misconceptions about contraceptives, and available SRHR services. Stigma, societal norms and a culture of victim-blaming contribute to families rejecting services. Certain children — for example, children with disabilities, children with diverse genders and sexual orientations, children belonging to indigenous groups or particular castes, migrants etc. — also experience social exclusion and barriers. To address these

challenges, the Alliance in both regions collaborated with community leaders to develop awareness-raising materials and conducted extensive outreach to educate various community sectors about the programme's benefits. The programme engaged men and boys in positive parenting interventions and awareness sessions, and established collaborations with religious leaders and other local authority figures to build alliances and counteract social norms and patriarchal attitudes. Implementing partners adopted various contextualised strategies, such as raising awareness among children and young people, providing them with knowledge and skills, and involving them in activities as a means to empower them and give them agency, and sensitising parents and community members about the harms of SEC. For instance, in different countries in Asia and Latin America, theatre-based community education was used as an awareness-raising method. To mitigate any potential backlash and threats against youth advocates and social workers involved in advocacy work, implementing partners provided regular support, counselling, and referrals to other support services, in addition to risk assessments and safeguarding. These efforts were combined with advocacy for policies and legislation, coordination with law enforcement agencies and child helplines to ensure survivor protection and mitigate child protection risks.

## 3.4. CLIMATE

Countries such as Nepal, Thailand, Bangladesh, India and the Philippines have faced significant climate-related risks impacting programme implementation, such as torrential rainfall, floods, cyclones and heatwaves. To address these challenges, partners have taken proactive measures, including selecting specific venues, rescheduling activities, and raising awareness about heat management. Additionally, virtual meetings have been used to ensure continuity, with flexible work plans, contingency plans and disaster preparedness strategies implemented to mitigate these risks.

Environmental issues pose additional threats to livelihoods and well-being. In Bolivia, Colombia and Guatemala, climate-related risks have been identified. In Guatemala, forest fires have severely affected intervention areas, forcing families to migrate in search of resources. This migration leaves children without support and protection, exposing them to multiple risks, including child labour and SEC. In Bolivia, illegal gold mining and logging in protected areas threaten indigenous communities, while the arrival of foreign company camps in the Amazon creates high-risk situations for the local population. The consequences of these extractive activities include pollution, deforestation and fires, which disrupt local communities. Legislative discussions on mining laws often neglect the social consequences of forced displacement, such as SEC. Environmental concerns have severely impacted local economies in countries such as Nepal, leading to increased urban migration and higher school dropout rates. Local partners are addressing unsafe migration by raising awareness about the risks of trafficking, especially for children and young people. They provide life-skills training and support for vulnerable groups to promote self-reliance and income generation for families of at-risk children. The economic strain has also worsened child protection issues, increasing rates of child labour and child marriages, and the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse.

## 3.5. INFORMAL AND ENTERTAINMENT SECTORS AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Additional risks were identified related to the increased involvement of children and young people in the informal and entertainment sectors, with a major supply chain related to tourism and the film industry, as well as to social media (influencers) in Nepal, India and the Philippines. This is compounded by under-reporting due to taboos, stigma and a victim-blaming culture in most of the programme countries. Mitigation strategies include adopting a holistic approach to address structural barriers, including working with the private sector and encouraging them to create safer environments for children, working towards effective systemic change, and strengthening community-based child protection mechanisms.

Moreover, new technologies and indiscriminate and unguided access for children continue to pose significant risks of harassment by exploiters and traffickers, both in Asia and Latin America, where online social networks are used for recruitment and deception indicating a continuum of online and offline forms of sexual exploitation, with digital technologies increasingly being used to facilitate in-person exploitation. Partners are developing permanent information strategies for the prevention and responsible use of social

networks, recognising the risks and taking necessary measures with the support of competent entities. Partners also work with parents and children and young people themselves to make them aware of the online risks. These efforts aim to protect children and young people from online exploitation and trafficking while promoting safer online environments. The regional L&A efforts in Asia also focus on online safety and information and communication technology (ICT) (see Chapter 6 for more).

## 3.6. COUNTRY-SPECIFIC RISKS

Additional country-specific risks identified in Brazil include potential conflicts between rival gangs in communities, leading to delayed or cancelled activities, and government inertia in reinstating child-focused agendas central to combating violence. In addition, conservative social norms and resistance from conservative religious communities in Brazil pose a major risk. As a mitigation measure, partners proposed clearly stating the project's central theme, emphasising children's rights and protection. This approach was implemented in a conservative rural community, training adolescents to be part of a committee. Despite initial challenges, educational strategies such as practical, dynamic activities from methodologies such as Champions of Change, and support from religious social educators, facilitated dialogue to deconstruct social and gender norms.

Furthermore, partners in the Dominican Republic faced implementation delays due to the deterioration of the political crisis in Haiti and concerns regarding the legalisation of adult sex work in Colombia. To mitigate these risks, partners have implemented ongoing risk monitoring and dialogue via national and local media and with community leaders to track conflicts in Haiti and Brazil, demonstrating the Alliance's adaptive programming approach, to be able to adapt to different challenges due to the diverse evolving contexts we are working in.

Overall, the SUFASEC programme has demonstrated proactive risk management strategies, including staff training, community engagement, and diligent oversight of external partners and stakeholders, including collaboration with government. These measures have ensured the programme's continuity and effectiveness in addressing challenges related to child trafficking and SEC.

# 4. Programme progress

The SUFASEC programme is grounded in a ToC developed through country analyses of the root causes and effects of SEC. It incorporates intersectional and gender dimensions, recognising the complexity and context-specific nature of drivers of SEC. SUFASEC operates with three main outcomes supported by 11 intermediate outcomes, allowing countries to customise their approaches based on their unique contexts and the expertise of implementing partners. Each country has a specific results framework tailored to its needs, enabling a strategic focus on selected outcomes while maintaining unity in the ultimate goal.

For instance, in Lao PDR, the implementing partner, the sole in-country partner in year 1, follows a strategic focus on Outcome 2 due to the specific context, budget allocations and organisational expertise. Conversely, partners in the Dominican Republic, in accordance with their national context and location, target intermediate outcomes focusing on SEC in travel and tourism in major tourist destinations. Building on the foundational work of the previous Building Back Better programme and the increasing relevance of the online sphere, partners in Nepal and Bangladesh focused on intermediate outcomes enhancing prevention, protection, and support for survivors, including those related to OCSE. Despite this focus, the overall aim aligns with the broader objectives of the SUFASEC programme.

The programme commenced in March 2023 with an inception phase that included finalising detailed work plans and budgets, contracting, drafting the Alliance's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), recruiting staff, and obtaining government approval in some countries. This phase also involved writing a MEAL manual, fine-tuning the results framework and initiating baseline studies (see Chapter 10 for more information regarding the SUFASEC baseline). Consequently, actual implementation began in most countries in June or July. Below are some examples of how countries worked on the three main outcomes and intermediate outcomes.

## 4.1. OUTCOME 1

**Outcome 1: Children and youth and their communities successfully challenge social norms and harmful practices related to sexual exploitation of children.**

**1.1. Parents/caregivers exercise positive parenting and strengthen family ties**

From the baseline report, it clearly emerged that despite the context, social norms on parenting were similar across the DtZ countries: most parents reject violence and exploitation; however, a widespread practice of physical punishment was observed. During the reporting period, to address some of the above-mentioned social norms, implementing partners in countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, India and the Philippines provided training on positive parenting and raised awareness about OCSE through parent–child communication and country-specific reporting mechanisms. Partners in Nepal, Bolivia, Colombia and Guatemala worked with parents, caregivers and particularly survivors' families to create a safe family environment through **positive family reintegration processes**, overcoming societal stigma to facilitate family reintegration of survivors. Family reintegration processes in Nepal included built-in family counselling and positive parenting techniques, raising awareness about human trafficking and SEC while creating a supportive

and nurturing environment for survivors. This helped address stigmatisation of victims, often mentioned during the baseline report, and supported their proper reintegration in their families and communities. In the Philippines, positive parenting initiatives have facilitated discussions on SRHR in Muslim and indigenous communities where topics around sex and gender are traditionally taboo. These initiatives cover corporal punishment and healthy parent–child relationships, serving as gateways to broader conversations about sexuality and other SRHR issues, thereby extending their reach.

In alignment with the inception phase, partners prioritised raising awareness and understanding of SEC, SRHR and positive parenting, and overachieved the targets for year 1 (indicator 1.1.1: number of parents reached with positive parenting). The targets for indicator 1.1.3, related to parents practicing positive parenting, have been rescheduled to year 2 of implementation. This adjustment is due to the expectation that the outcomes will reflect the impact of the training conducted in the first year. Similarly, the targets for indicators 1.1.4 and 1.1.5, which measure children and youth reporting that their parents and caregivers understand their problems and worries, have also been moved to the second year of implementation. The results for these indicators will also be observed starting from the second year, following the initial year of training and interventions. The actual achievements particularly of boys in year 1 have fallen short of expectations due to the difficulty working with boys. This is due to the invisibility of cases affecting boys, prevailing taboos, and inadequate approaches by the authorities to identify boy victims.

> *"One of the biggest problems in the communities is that parents still don't dare to talk about sexuality or SRHR with their children or with the younger ones, which is why you see so many girls pregnant or with illnesses. They don't talk freely about it."*
>
> Community leader, La Guajira, Colombia

### 1.2. More children demonstrate knowledge on action to take to protect their bodies and lives

**Children and youth** played a crucial role and participated in community events, such as Theatre for Development groups in Bangladesh, which performed educational plays on child-related risks and protection measures. In India, youth consultations inspired children to establish forums for **peer-to-peer discussions** on preventing OCSE, fostering safe online behaviour, promoting digital literacy, and stressing the importance of reporting their online experiences to parents. Youth in Thailand and Indonesia successfully used social media, including **TikTok** and Instagram, to disseminate SRHR information, education and communication materials on topics such as **sex education**, **menstruation**, **online safety**, **grooming**, **sextortion** and **reporting mechanisms**, addressing the victim-blaming culture and stigma attached to survivors of sexual exploitation.

> **BEST PRACTICE**
> In Indonesia, partners involved 18 children and youths as champions in this project. These young people are responsible for providing peer support within their communities, sharing good practices related to SRHR and sexual violence. In addition to preparing them as peer supporters, partners also offered counselling services through the #BERSAMAMU helpline, a mental health service. These champions can refer cases detected to this counselling service to ensure appropriate handling. Since the beginning of the programme, they have referred 187 clients (171 females and 16 males), with 91 continuing counselling with 34 psychologists.
>
> *"I got many benefit from the SUFASEC programme through the Voice of Youth training. I have a better understanding of the Convention on Children's Rights (CRC) and prevention of SEC. Moreover, following several activities at SUFASEC opened my awareness about the importance of improving my soft skills such as teamwork, leadership, public speaking, critical thinking and creative thinking."*
>
> Najwa, youth from KOMPAK Jakarta, Indonesia

### 1.3. Communities (including families) take action to change social norms and harmful practices

Misogynistic and discriminatory social norms that persist from one generation to another pose significant challenges in addressing SEC. In Colombia, harmful norms such as "there is no problem with children receiving gifts or favours in exchange for having sex with adults. The girl is the one who offers herself to those gentlemen" and "it doesn't matter how they get money, only that they bring it home to help with food and rent" shift responsibility away from perpetrators who take advantage of these situations of extreme vulnerabilities and enforce victim-blaming. Other harmful norms and practices impacting SEC include the commodification of sexual relationships, which overlooks the exploitation and its negative physical and/or mental consequences. In Bolivia, some parents actively seek affluent partners for their daughters, regardless of age, further highlighting the deep-rooted issues associated with harmful social norms and practices, such as the commodification of sex and transactional relationships, in intersection with poverty and socio-economic factors.

The Alliance also worked with different actors to challenge social norms that normalise sexual violence against children. In India, Indonesia, Nepal, Thailand, the Philippines and the Dominican Republic, partners engaged **in state-level orientation, community dialogue and sensitisation sessions** with local government unit (LGU) representatives, community-level child protection actors, religious and community leaders, public health offices, the hotel and tourism industry, and schools. Partners in Indonesia rolled out

adult and youth socialisation sessions. These sessions raised awareness about human rights (SRHR, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, gender-based violence (GBV) and SEC, and the negative effects of harmful practices, including online safety and community vigilance). In Bangladesh, partners organised multisectoral meetings to engage religious leaders, local authorities and CSO representatives in role-playing activities focused on rescues and referrals of survivors.

School teachers played a vital role in preventing SEC and raising awareness about OCSE. In India, sessions on online safety and SRHR were integrated into government schools, alongside advocacy towards education boards to draft and introduce cyber curricula, including cyber safety, personal safety, relevant child care and protection acts, including the Information and Technology Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act. Community-based child protection committees were established, including diverse stakeholders such as teachers, journalists, public representatives, doctors, lawyers, guardians and religious leaders.

The Alliance engaged in diverse awareness-raising campaigns and community activism. In Brazil, the 'Faça Bonito Protect Our Children and Adolescents' campaign on the National Day Against Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation led to a resolution and a presidential decree establishing the Intersectoral Commission to Combat Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents. Partners in Bolivia worked on forming neighbourhood councils, including shopkeepers and transport workers, to strengthen community capacities in addressing SEC. In other Latin American countries, awareness-raising efforts were conducted with indigenous populations, requiring strategies that involved local language speakers and context-specific materials, such as the 'parents' schools' initiative in Colombia. In Bangladesh, Thailand, the Philippines and Colombia, special occasions such as Girl Child Day, World Day Against Trafficking, Safer Internet Day and the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence were leveraged to inspire and empower young girls through rallies, art competitions, open discussions and experience-sharing.


Campaign Poster Faça Bonito, Brazil. Photo: Ecpat Brazil

In the Philippines, awareness-raising activities were organised for Safe Internet Day, World Day Against Trafficking, and National Children's Month. In India, youth at the India–Nepal border raised awareness about OCSE among those crossing the border, enhancing their confidence in engaging with border forces and community organisations. As a result of the multiple events celebrated, indicator 1.3.1, which tracks the number of community leaders engaging in dialogue to transform social norms or harmful practices, has been surpassed. Similarly, indicator 1.3.4, related to informing society about the rights of children and adolescents and engaging in the fight against SEC, has also been exceeded significantly. In particular, online reach through digital platforms such as the May 18th Campaign in Brazil received notable visibility from the government, with prominent political figures, including the President and the First Lady, actively involved. In Bangladesh, the Child Rights Defenders Forum (CRDF) engaged in awareness-raising and motivational sessions, campaigns, dialogues and advocacy on child protection issues, acting as active change agents.

**CASE STUDY**

Sama (17, name changed) from Nepal grew up with her brother and sister facing domestic violence. Her father sexually assaulted and beat her and and her mother when drunk. One day, her mother disappeared, with Sama assuming responsibility for her two siblings. Even after her father remarried, he continued the abuse, threatening to kill her if she made a noise. Sama endured this for a long time out without being able to notify anyone. Only when relatives noticed a change in her behaviour and being afraid her father would start abusing her younger sister did she dare to file a complaint against him. The authorities apprehended him, initiating legal proceedings, leading to her father being fined and sentenced to 15 years in prison. Sama was able to attend college and worked, her income however was insufficient to cover the family needs and her studies. Through the Child Helpline Kathmandu run by SUFASEC implementing partner and in coordination with the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens, she received educational, medical and food support. She also joined the peer educator training which is a 3-day capacity building training for peer educators including SRHR and SEC. She wholeheartedly engaged in each session and extended care and support to her fellow participants. Through informal discussions, she shed light on the often-overlooked reality of sexual violence within families. Recognizing the complex psychological impact of their experiences, the programme further extended counselling services from the Child Helpline Counsellor to her brother and sister.

Sama's story serves as a powerful testament to the resilience and determination of survivors navigating immense challenges, including domestic violence and sexual abuse, Sama displayed remarkable courage in seeking help and initiating legal proceedings against her abuser. Her journey underscores the critical importance of comprehensive support mechanisms, including legal assistance and psychosocial counselling, facilitating healing and empowerment for survivors. Recognizing Sama's potential to inspire and educate others, the SUFASEC programme engaged her as a peer educator. Being a peer educator empowers herself but also supports survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse within her community.

In conclusion, these experiences confirmed the importance for communities of defining and addressing social norms/harmful practices that perpetuate SEC prevailing in their communities, to end the culture of impunity, join forces to tackle SEC in a holistic way, strengthen the support system and raise awareness regarding SRHR and SEC, so that children in all their diversity can be better protected from SEC.

*SRHR Training at Schools, India. Photo: Sanlaap*

## 4.2. OUTCOME 2
**Outcome 2: Children and youth have access to and are supported by strengthened assets and protective environments.**

**2.1 Increased families' economic resilience**
Partners are working closely with each other and government actors to provide comprehensive support to vulnerable children. In India, partners have supported families through family-strengthening initiatives, following skills development training. Families were selected based on their interest and capacity to pursue additional skills to improve their financial situation and their willingness to support child survivors. In Nepal, partners have worked directly and indirectly to enhance the economic resilience of individual children, young people and their families, linked to rehabilitation services, including shelter and other forms of associated support. In the Philippines, partners fostered employability skills by providing orientation for learners in the alternative learning system and career orientation for young people. Young parents were also referred to employment opportunities, such as training to make bread and pastry.

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**CASE STUDY**
Anshu (6) from Nepal lives with her mother and siblings. Her mother married at 14 and is now 24 and has lost her husband.. "After losing my husband I have no income to take care of my children and for their education. I'm very worried about my children's future, and how to provide for them? When I was young, I learnt tailoring and sometimes went to my relative's tailoring shop to sew clothes. If I can receive support, I can start the tailoring business in my house and will earn a living for my family."

In collaboration with the local government, the local partner and Child Helpline Rupandehi provided IGA support and assistance for the children to attend school, and a sewing machine was provided to Anshu's mother, allowing her to tackle the financial challenges for her children's education. Partners continue to monitor her progress to ensure the strengthened economic resilience as key aspect in preventing SEC.

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**2.2 Greater and safer access to quality child protection and local SRHR information and services**
Various activities were carried out, including in Bolivia, Colombia, Bangladesh and Nepal, to meet the **basic needs** (clothes, medical and psychosocial services, food etc., depending on the specific needs of the survivor) of children/young people staying in **shelters**, where implementing partners created spaces where children and youth would be safe and could join in various activities. These spaces aimed to restore the young people's rights by providing psychosocial care and basic needs, as well as training on SEC, SRHR, family planning, online risks, leadership, life skills, gender, child protection, early marriage, human trafficking, disaster risk management and vocational orientation, to enhance their well-being, knowledge, skills and agency. In Bangladesh, basic education on life skills, child protection, gender, SRHR and intersectionality was integrated into **socialisation centres**. These community centres located strategically in urban and rural slum areas offered basic education on social issues, recreational activities, non-formal education, and awareness-raising on SEC, including OCSE, and SRHR.

As seen in the baseline results, **health sector collaboration** remained crucial: implementing partners collaborated with the public health sector to promote SRHR and identified allies in local government before starting activities in the project's second year. Extra measures are being taken in conservative communities to ensure use of acceptable terminology, and parental consent to address barriers faced by girls trying to access SRHR services. SRHR and health support were extended to survivors through referrals to health institutions, including private and government hospitals, and this included sessions on personal hygiene, reproductive health and unwanted pregnancy in Bangladesh. In Nepal, Bolivia and Colombia, partners engaged with health workers to enhance child-friendly services, training them to manage SRHR cases involving children and adolescents, including those from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) community.

*Community members developing prevention actions on the Day of the Dead, Bolivia. Photo: Fundación Munasim Kullakita*

**Advancing counselling and legal support:** Implementing partners in different countries provided individual, family, group and community counselling to reduce trauma, encompassing trauma-informed care, as well as child-friendly and gender-responsive care, and facilitate the socialisation process for survivors reintegrating into their communities. Partners carry out screening and safeguarding checks before reintegration to prevent re-victimisation and ensure a safe living environment. In Nepal, safety arrangements linked families with local authorities to protect against threats from perpetrators. Case workers provided legal counselling and support to survivors and their families, empowering them to file cases against perpetrators. Furthermore, legal support to secure children's rights to identity (birth certificates and identity cards) was crucial in Nepal and Bolivia, smoothing access to child protection services. In Guatemala, partners worked with the Referral Network of San Pedro Carchá, led by the Public Prosecutor's Office, to develop training on human trafficking and GBV prevention. Due to social taboos, the invisibility of male survivors, and the lack of disclosure of gender identity, the targets for indicator 2.2 SRH001m and SRH001x, which concern 'male' and 'other' youth using SRH services, have been below the estimated target for year 1. In contrast, SRH001f (female) and SRH001 (non-specified) have been successfully met and exceeded, respectively. More work to target boys and those with other gender identity will need to be done during year 2. During the inception period, which included contracting and recruitment, activities for indicator 2.2.1, related to referrals and peer-to-peer sessions on information about SRHR, and indicator 2.2.4, concerning families receiving legal and social advice, were rescheduled for year 2 and have therefore not met the targets. However, the target for indicator 2.2.6, which involves health workers trained on SRHR and case management, has been exceeded.

### 2.3 Increased access to life skills, vocational education and/or formal education for children and youth

Partners in Lao PDR coordinated closely with relevant government agencies, such as the Ministry of Education and Sports and the Department of Non-Formal Education, to enhance access to vocational training. Building on an assessment of target groups, especially vulnerable groups, including students in shelters, need to complete vocational training before setting up their chosen small business. Vocational training is provided on diverse subjects, such as tailoring, cooking, beauty salons and agricultural training. Conducting a market assessment and developing their business, including monitoring income, expenses and profit margins, are crucial. Upon assessment of the commitment of each participant, small grants or in-kind support are provided – for example, a sewing machine or materials – to enable them to start up their small business. Partners support participants by monitoring them closely; meetings between new and old graduates further enhance knowledge exchange; and shadowing visits enable participants to see other small business start-ups.

> **CASE STORY**
> Recognizing the importance of an education certificate for securing employment in Thailand, local partners have been diligently working to ensure children in the targeted area have access to education. One notable success is the reintegration of a 14-year-old out-of-school boy with a hearing impairment, nicknamed Lupin, at high risk of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEC). After being out of school for more than five years, Lupin is now back in the education system. Through non-formal education sessions, in collaboration with the Education Promotion Department of the Ministry of Education, Lupin is preparing for his 6th-grade exam. This intervention has significantly decreased his risk of SEC and provided him with better protection.
>
> *"I am extremely happy to be able to study again. I now have friends to hang out with. I get to learn many interesting things. My favourite subject is science. I love learning how things function, and I hope to be a mechanic one day."*
>
> Lupin, 14, Thailand

Partners in the Philippines also established partnerships with local government and learning centres, providing vocational training on baking pastries. They also support transport provision, allowing participants to attend school or technical training centres.

In Bolivia, the Alliance advanced the economic resilience and income-generating activities of SEC survivors by providing them with training in writing business plans and with technical training through collaboration with Manq'a cookery schools.[2] This training included LGBTQI+ youth in La Paz, as this group is at heightened risk of sexual exploitation as a result of being marginalised in society and spending more time online. In Thailand and Indonesia, activities included economic resilience training, vocational training, life-skills sessions, non-formal education, awareness-raising sessions, peer-to-peer sessions, case referrals, and case conferences with relevant stakeholders. The implementing partners aimed to strengthen the livelihood skills of girls and mentors through vocational and agricultural training, complementary to providing start-up grants in the second and third years. Thus, all indicators related to indicator 2.3, which focus on increasing access to life skills, vocational education and formal education for children and youth, have been consistently exceeded, demonstrating remarkable progress.

Exploited girls often belong to families facing economic hardships, many of whom have discontinued their education. Coordinated efforts aimed to address the vulnerabilities these girls faced, providing them with a chance for a better future. These efforts demonstrate the importance of economic empowerment through vocational training, as well as the crucial role of law enforcement agencies, CSOs and community leaders working together to create safer environments and protect vulnerable children and youth.

**CASE TESTIMONY**

*"My name is Antonia (name changed), I came to the shelter when I turned 17, I am Bolivian. My life has been marked by many adversities since I was transferred to the city of La Paz. However, my life turned around the moment I entered the shelter. There, I learned valuable lessons. From the first day here, I was given countless opportunities. I decided to take advantage of them and continue my education. I managed to graduate from high school. Before that, I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. I always took care of my siblings. From a very young age, I longed to be a nurse or a chef, because from the age of 7 I took on the responsibility of taking care of my siblings. I had to play the role of a second mother, sacrificing hours of sleep.... I am passionate about cooking. When I prepare a dish, I pour all my love and leave all the stress behind. I never imagined I would have the opportunity to study at the Manqa School. Despite the many adversities, I continue to fight for my dreams. I yearn to keep moving forward, despite the wounds I have had to heal. I want to finish my career and proudly state that I have achieved my goals. I have learned many new lessons, including that as a woman I have the same rights as men. I feel empowered and valued, I am happy and determined to go ahead and show to the shelter that I have come through because of them."*

See Antonia's video story **here**.

### 2.4 Improved coordination of child-friendly service delivery (between sectors and across levels)

In Brazil, the Alliance made a major milestone possible as main organiser of the transnational **Preparatory Meeting for the Third Brazilian Congress on Combating Sexual Violence**, which united participants from all five regions, mobilising more than 30 organisations with professionals from 51 institutions across all states. This platform facilitated dialogue among different sectors of the child and adolescent protection network, involving civil society and government actors. The exchange of intersectoral experiences provided valuable insights to identify barriers to preventing sexual violence against children and adolescents and assisting survivors, effectively creating a space for CSOs and government to tackle SEC. In the Philippines and Nepal, training and capacity-building activities for law enforcement officers, community leaders, school principals, teachers, health workers, village officials and social workers covered SRHR, SEC prevention and response, and case management protocols. A dedicated **project management team** was established for the SUFASEC programme in the Philippines, including village chairpersons, the National Police – Women and Children Protection Desk (PNP WCPD), City Health Office, City Population Office, City Social Welfare and Development Office, Youth Council, City Council, and the Women and Children Committee. Two Child Welfare Boards were developed, and existing child protection actors were oriented on OCSE/SEC. Their role is to follow OCSE/SEC cases, and provide support and referrals. Training sessions for programme staff, community members and relevant stakeholders, including law enforcement agencies, such as in Indonesia, focused on trauma-informed care and creating child-friendly legal spaces.

In the Philippines, implementing partners worked closely with local authorities, enhancing the capacity of law enforcers, teachers, social workers, rural health officers, community leaders and LGU members to manage and respond to SEC cases. Training sessions for law enforcement agencies, focusing on investigations related to SEC, understanding trauma and victimhood, and implementing child-friendly courtroom procedures, took place in Bangladesh, Bolivia and other countries. Child-friendly officers stationed in police facilities were trained to provide services to children, enhancing the competence of government officials in SEC investigation, traumatisation, victimhood and child-friendly courtroom procedures, and strengthening the capacities of staff in the justice system, including the National Police, resulting in exceeding targets for indicator 2.4 on improved coordination of child-friendly service delivery.

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[2] Manq'a cookery schools work closely with the State to enable young people to gain access to their certificates as auxiliary cookery technicians.

These activities to strengthen the child protection system were made possible through the concerted efforts of Alliance partners, local law enforcement agencies, various local partners and other stakeholders.

## 4.3. OUTCOME 3

**Outcome 3: Children and civil society meaningfully participate in holding duty-bearers, including government and local authorities, to their obligations towards improved (implementation) of laws, policies and systems.**

### 3.1 Increased capacity of CSOs, youth and communities on L&A

**Child and youth-led awareness-raising**: Based on baseline results, there is limited awareness of legal frameworks in the DtZ implementing countries. Various initiatives taken by implementing partners significantly contributed to enhancing the capacity of stakeholders at multiple levels in advocating for their rights and policies around SEC. For instance, a two-day province-level workshop conducted by a partner in Nepal aimed to enhance the capacity of CSOs, youth and communities on L&A issues, with a specific focus on improving access to justice for survivors of human trafficking. This workshop created opportunities for collaborative efforts in accessing justice for survivors. Additionally, the need for policy reform was recognised as a crucial step to address obstacles in providing justice to survivors. The SUFASEC project acted as a catalyst to initiate dialogue with government authorities and make recommendations on OCSE concerns for inclusion in Nepal's upcoming 16th Five-Year Plan. Partners conducted a series of consultations with children and CSOs, documenting the voices of children on OCSE-related concerns and gathering recommendations from CSOs. These recommendations were handed over to the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens for inclusion in the upcoming 16th Five-Year Plan.

In Bolivia, partners worked with a group of at-risk children trained as **youth leaders** who act as '**SEC prevention agents**' in their communities. The youth leaders participated in meetings at regional, national and international levels, highlighting their role in protecting their peers. In La Guajira, children of Colombian returnee parents and the Wayuu ethnic group, who were specifically targeted due to their particular vulnerabilities related to their indigenous background, were enrolled in public schools and trained in online SEC, GBV and SRHR. **Peer-to-peer dialogues** facilitated by young people built trust and addressed various risks related to sexual exploitation.

In Lao PDR, the implementing partner developed a handbook preparing youth mentors/facilitators to run girl groups/peer education sessions in schools and target communities. The partner recruited mentors in schools, formed girls' clubs, trained mentors, and held a planning meeting with provincial and district governments. The handbook covered six key topics: child rights, SRHR, violence against women and children, gender equality, SEC, and life skills.

Summing up, these diverse initiatives across multiple countries and sectors highlight the comprehensive and context-specific approaches of the SUFASEC programme. Through strategic partnerships, awareness-raising campaigns, legal reforms, community engagement, and child and youth participation, the programme strives to hold duty-bearers at different levels accountable for their obligations to create a safer environment for children and youth through improved laws, policies and systems addressing the root causes of SEC and abuse. Therefore, basket indicator 3.1, which measures the increased L&A capacity of CSOs, youth and communities, has shown consistent

success and has been surpassed. For indicator 3.1.1, products are currently being developed, with the target expected to be reached in year 2 of implementation.

**3.2 Increased participation of duty-bearers in SEC prevention and responses on national and international commitments to business and human rights**

SUFASEC partners have established solid collaborations and raised awareness with diverse duty-bearers at different levels, including social welfare officers, law enforcement officials, courts, local leaders and government officials. This broad engagement aimed to enhance the cooperation of duty-bearers in creating a safer environment for vulnerable populations.

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**CASE STUDY**

The CID Cyber Cell in West Bengal, India, introduced an initiative to raise awareness among school-going children. Traditionally, the police is used as a threat to discipline children, fostering a negative image of law enforcement. The SUFASEC team has been collaborating with police personnel since the inception of the DTZ programme, establishing strong relationships with various departments.

The SUFASEC team requested the Cyber Cell to train them on "Online Safety," which was promptly organised. The officials expressed interest in partnering with SUFASEC Sanlaap to further create awareness among school children, recognising that children are more comfortable sharing with the Alliance partner team due to their long-standing association and regular interactions. With this collaboration, the partners in collaboration with the CID Cyber Cell conducted awareness sessions in 10 formal schools, reaching over 1,100 students on the topic of "Online Safety." This collaboration has had a significant impact on the students, helping them develop a positive, non-threatening relationship with the police and authorities.

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**Online safety:** Tailored to the specific context and addressing the evolving role of OCSE, an ongoing action research initiative was launched in India to generate evidence-based reports for advocacy purposes. Partners facilitated dialogue between government duty-bearers, including education, police, District Child Protection Units, and Child Welfare Committee members. This initiative aimed to improve coordination in preventing and addressing OCSE and advocating for stronger measures to enhance child security in the digital space. Nepalese partners played the role of catalyst to initiate dialogue with government authorities and take recommendations on OCSE concerns for inclusion in the nation's upcoming 16th Five-Year Plan. Partners in Colombia also applied case studies to identify challenges in family, school, community and state contexts, and developed risk maps. An implementing partner in Nepal organised a cross-border workshop with relevant authorities to address human trafficking, discussing current trends and strategies for reversing these trends. This workshop emphasised the importance of cross-border cooperation and the implementation of measures to mitigate trafficking. Indicators 3.2.2 and 3.2.3, which measure the number of duty-bearers engaged in developing knowledge products to guide prevention and response on national and international commitments and involved in L&A activities/actions, respectively, have not been applicable for this year. The knowledge products to guide prevention and response will be developed at a later stage of research and studies, scheduled for years 2 and 3 of the project.

**3.3 Increased private sector participation in SEC prevention and responses on national and international commitments to business and human rights and other relevant codes**

Partners have also engaged closely with the private sector, including financial service providers and travel and tourism stakeholders, as well as the finance, technology and ICT sectors. This resulted in overachievement of indicators 3.3.4 and 3.3.8, which pertain to raising private sector awareness and training on SEC, and supporting companies in due diligence and child protection measures. Meanwhile, activities related to indicator 3.3.7 on CSO co-creation exercises have been rescheduled for year 2, following comprehensive coordination efforts regarding the inclusion of partners in regional L&A efforts.

**SEC in travel and tourism:** Implementing partners in Indonesia and the Philippines conducted meetings with people on the front line of tourism (including boatmen, travel agencies, tour guides, boat operators, hotel and resort associations) in major tourism destinations to identify potential risks and challenges, share best practices and develop risk mitigation strategies. Training sessions for various tourism-related associations focused on the unique role of front-line tourism workers in combating SEC in travel and tourism. These efforts aimed to create a safer and more responsible tourism environment, prioritising children's safety. It underscores the collective effort of government agencies, the private sector and CSOs in promoting ethical tourism practices and safeguarding vulnerable populations, particularly children, from SEC.

In the Dominican Republic, travel and tourism companies reiterated their commitment to incorporating child protection measures into their operations and services, including participating in training for staff. A study on the scale, scope and context of SEC in Bangladesh led to orientation sessions with transport workers and railway authorities. Partners in Bolivia advanced the role of transport providers by forming transport committees and positioning themselves as key actors in the early detection of SEC. This included the certification of 'Safe Terminals' and organisation of public L&A events involving several entities, including the Ministry of Government and the Vice-Ministry of Tourism.

**Financial sector:** Implementing partners in Indonesia produced evidence-based documents targeting the responsibilities of the financial sector. Multi-stakeholder meetings were organised to enhance collaboration with the financial sector, focusing on children's rights and business principles, and the misuse of financial services for SEC-related criminal transactions. Media engagement raised awareness about these issues, exemplified by a report on the [Misuse of Financial Service Providers for the Sexual Exploitation of Children in Indonesia](), including the use of e-wallets for purchasing pornographic content, highlighting the urgent need for action in this area.

**3.4 Adoption and effective implementation of policies and programmes related to SEC**

**Legal and policy reforms:** In Asia, implementing partners contributed to drafting the Penal Code Revision Act regarding OCSE in Thailand. The draft was approved by the cabinet and is now being reviewed by the Council of State. Once the law enters into force, acts of OCSE such as sexting, grooming, online stalking and online bullying will be criminalised. Implementing partners also conducted capacity-building training with the law enforcement sector, aiming to prepare participants for the upcoming law and the new nature of SEC.

> **BEST PRACTICE**
> Thanks to Indonesian partners' efforts, coordination on child protection between government agencies and the private sector, in particular the finance sector, was strengthened, consolidated by agreements and MoUs. Key stakeholders such as Western Union and OCBC Bank actively contributed through participation in multi stakeholder meetings and sharing info and insights. In addition, collaborative initiatives from AFTECH, a platform for fintech companies, further strengthened engagement with stakeholders in the financial sector.

In Koshi Province, Nepal, the implementing partner collaborated with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Law, aiming to increase civil society's collective action with the Nepali government to combat trafficking. Meetings strengthened the capacity of duty-bearers on issues related to trafficking, and a capacity development programme was initiated with the Nepal Police to inform law enforcement officers of their responsibilities and equip them with the skills needed to combat trafficking and protect vulnerable populations.

> *"We highly appreciate the new initiative taken by ECPAT Indonesia through the Down to Zero programme- Stepping Up the Fight Against Sexual Exploitation of Children (SUFASEC) that addresses how financial service providers and policy makers, as well as their overseer can play an active role in responding to cases of child sexual exploitation. The involvement of financial service providers in efforts to protect children is something new to us, and we fully support this initiative. This collective step not only reflects a commitment to protecting children from sexual exploitation but also aligns with the implementation of Presidential Regulation on the Prevention and Handling of Trafficking in Persons, the Elimination of Violence against Children, and the Roadmap for Child Protection in the Digital Environment. We believe that this collaboration will have a significantly positive impact on increasing awareness and encourage the broader role of stakeholders in child protection"*
>
> Mr. Nahar, M.Si, Deputy for Special Child Protection at Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, Indonesia

**Codes of ethics:** In Latin America, Bolivian local partners proposed setting up technical roundtables to generate a national code of ethics for the private sector through legislation, in coordination with the Vice- Ministry of Tourism. Coordination with the Gender Unit of the Bolivian Police led to proposals for reformulating the institutional gender policy. Brazilian partners participated in the preparation and official ceremony for the presentation of the federal government's agenda of 18 actions to combat sexual violence against children and adolescents, attended by approximately 500 participants. Furthermore, alliance members resumed dialogue with the Brazilian Ministry of Tourism to revisit national policies, such as the code of conduct for the sector. Indicator 3.4.3, tracking engagements with intergovernmental bodies, has been below target due to planned rollouts in year 2 after regional L&A coordination efforts. However, the target for indicator 3.4.2 on multisectoral meetings has been successfully exceeded due to partners' efforts.

# 5. Cross-country collaboration

To foster collaboration between Alliance members and implementing partners within and between countries across the programme, three initiatives are carried out under the SUFASEC programme:

**Youth Voices for Change (YVfC):** The third edition of YVfC was set up in 2023, involving six SUFASEC countries across two regions and various implementing partners. MoUs have been established with 11 partners to ensure focal points for each partner, facilitating implementation and aligning results with SUFASEC objectives, particularly objectives 1.2 and 3.1. The initiative involves 210 children and young people organised in seven youth committees in Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, India, Indonesia and the Philippines. The

committees build on the previous experience of YVfC and aim to enhance advocacy and communication skills, positioning youth as change agents to mobilise their communities through both digital and face-to-face strategies. The focus is on preventing SEC, combating GBV and promoting SRHR.

**Youth Advocacy in Asia:** As a pilot initiative under the Asia SUFASEC programme, child and youth change-makers from India and Nepal participated in a regional consultation of children and youth from South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries, hosted by the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) in collaboration with the South Asian Coordination Group for Ending Violence Against Women and Children (SACG), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Royal Government of Bhutan. The youth change-makers actively participated as session moderators and panellists, developing a declaration to submit to the organising bodies, aiming to influence SAARC governments to ensure children are safe from all forms of violence, including sexual abuse and exploitation.

**Boys Initiative:** This initiative, part of the **Global Boys Initiative**,[3] addresses the often overlooked issue of boys and LGBTQI+ children affected by SEC. The focus is on recognising and supporting these vulnerable groups, ensuring their inclusion and protection within the broader SEC prevention framework. Preparations for the Boys Initiative started in 2023, with actual implementation starting at the beginning of the second year, with a first online meeting to explain the initiative to the participating partners. The Boys Initiative aims to create 'training of trainers' and a community of practice on the topic of sexual exploitation of boys and LGBTQI+ communities. Initially designed to be led by an implementing partner whose Foreign Contribution Regulation Act permit was denied by the Indian government, the coordination team has since reorganised to implement the initiative differently while still aiming to deliver on the original objectives. The initiative is led by one consultant in India and a trainer based in Cambodia, with participants from India, Bangladesh and Nepal. This initiative aligns with efforts to improve knowledge on addressing SEC of boys and LGBTQI+ individuals, and builds on the handbook created by a consultant for the DtZ Alliance a few years ago.

# 6.  Lobbying and advocacy

## 6.1. FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL – L&A AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

The L&A strategies and activities within the SUFASEC programme were designed to closely align with the programme's ToC. L&A supports the following outcomes: (1) children, youth and their communities successfully challenge social norms and harmful practices related to SEC; and (2) children and civil society meaningfully participate in holding duty-bearers, including governments and local authorities, accountable for their obligations to improve (implementation of) laws, policies and systems.

L&A activities are carried out at diverse levels. L&A at the regional and international levels are fuelled by experiences from the national and local levels, and vice versa, to ensure that commitments made in the regional and international spheres start to be translated into realities and enforced in the programme countries. At the local and national levels, they are carried out by implementing partners. ECPAT International, as the technical implementing partner of DCI-ECPAT, leads the regional-level activities in Asia and Latin America, as well as the international work. EU L&A is led by TdH NL. L&A efforts are intended to influence laws, policies, regulations and practices at different levels, targeting international bodies, government institutions, policymakers and the ICT sector.



*Youth Voices for Change Youth Activists, Guatemala. Photo: Refugio de la Ninez*

[3] To meet the challenge of limited information regarding the adaptation of SEC services to boys, the Global Boys Initiative embarked on a series of research projects in 10 countries around the world, to shed light on the scale and scope of the issue, how boys come into these vulnerable situations, and what their protection rights are. The findings of the global literature review and the country reports are aligned, showing us that the vulnerability and risk factors, barriers to access, and ideas of masculinity behind the sexual exploitation and abuse of boys are a global issue that require global solutions. More at: **www.ecpat.org/global-boys-initiative**.

## 6.2. ENHANCED COUNTRY ENGAGEMENT IN L&A

In 2023, efforts were directed towards establishing the L&A framework and operationalising active engagement from countries to improve exchange, collaboration and communication among Alliance members and L&A country experts. Operationalising country engagement at regional and international levels required careful consideration and preparation to ensure evidence-informed L&A practices. Various discussions took place at different levels to advance this initiative, and two online sessions were held to gather country feedback, provide clarity and initiate concrete actions. The Alliance will continue to engage country teams by facilitating regular L&A meetings, providing a platform to exchange information, refine plans, and discuss and prepare forthcoming actions. These meetings offer opportunities for countries to actively participate in regional and international L&A efforts, showcase their work, amplify the voices of children and young people, and engage local partners in L&A for valuable learning experiences. To ensure sufficient time for meaningful country engagement, the work plan and timeline were revised accordingly.

*Survivors watching TV in their leisure time , Nepal. Photo: Maiti Nepal*

The SUFASEC programme's **international L&A initiatives** prioritised three focus areas:

**Law enforcement engagement:** In the Philippines and Indonesia, global experts and stakeholders collaborated to enhance law enforcement agencies' understanding of and role in SEC prevention. They provided recommendations for strengthening prevention efforts, emphasising multisectoral and international collaboration. Qualitative interviews identified significant gaps in prevention models, which informed L&A messages and created opportunities for improvement in year 2.

**BEST PRACTICE**
Civil society in Brazil is actively advocating for coherent processes, exemplified by initiatives such as the Preparatory Meeting for the 3rd Brazilian Congress on Combating Sexual Violence, which fosters collaborative agendas and agreements between civil society and the government. Additionally, local lobbying and advocacy efforts continue in Colombia to prevent legal loopholes that may affect the recognition of sexual exploitation of children as a crime.

**Private sector collaboration:** Key global partners, including the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), collaborated to embed child protection in the tourism industry's sustainability efforts. New travel companies underwent a due diligence process based on the code of ethics, a dynamic tool to engage the travel and tourism industry with the evolving global regulatory environment. This collaboration between SUFASEC countries in Asia and Latin America, duty-bearers and decision-makers resulted in enhanced policies to safeguard children from SEC.

**Advocacy with decision-makers:** In 2023, implementing partners focused on building evidence and coordinating advocacy in key thematic areas. This included research on engaging the informal sector in two pilot countries in Latin America (Bolivia and Brazil), webinars on meaningful engagement and the participation of children and young people in advocacy, and advocacy for child protection through international treaties and extraterritorial laws, such as sex offender registries to protect children from SEC and abuse. Partners actively participated in global advocacy events with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children and the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children. These efforts contributed to placing child protection at the core of sustainable development and reshaping voluntourism practices.

At the United Nations General Assembly, Alliance partners convened global leaders, advocates and experts to discuss two United Nations reports on child protection in travel and tourism, aiming to innovate, collaborate and create solutions for child protection in travel, tourism, online and financial contexts, thereby guiding advocacy efforts in 2024.

## 6.3. EU L&A

In 2023, L&A efforts towards the EU centred around the **VOICE (Values, Opinions and Insights of Children and their Caregivers on E-Safety) research project**. This initiative, undertaken in collaboration between TdH NL, ECPAT International and Eurochild, engaged children and caregivers across 10 EU countries, two Latin American DtZ countries and three Asian DtZ countries. By providing a platform for participants to articulate their experiences and concerns regarding online risks, the **VOICE project** aimed to fill existing gaps in the discourse surrounding child sexual abuse regulations within the EU. A webinar on research amplifying youth voices on online safety took place in November 2023 to present the early findings. Throughout the year, social media was used to post about the findings. Participating local partners used the research to further spread awareness about safety from OCSE.

The research findings highlighted children's and caregivers' perceptions of online safety. Children showed a high tolerance for online harms, taking it as part of their online experience. A significant gap between children and caregivers was noted about how to remain safe online. Children's strategies to prevent or respond to risky scenarios relied on a self-protection approach, including platform reporting and blocking. Parents and caregivers seemed confident that children would reach out to them if anything dangerous happened online. Despite the different strategies, both groups saw themselves as those most responsible for online safety, and tended to underestimate the responsibility of technology companies and governments. Overall, children want to be heard about online safety and are involved in addressing online safety concerns, highlighting the need for them to speak out and reach policymakers.

## 6.4. REGIONAL L&A IN ASIA

In consultation with Alliance country teams, the regional L&A efforts in Asia focused on engaging the ICT sector, recognising its significant role as a driver of SEC. The primary aim was to amplify the voices of children and foster an inclusive process, engaging country teams in advocacy efforts targeting various stakeholders within the ICT sector. In 2023, key events in the region were mapped, identifying advocacy gaps for the Alliance to address where relevant. These gaps encompassed both sectoral aspects, such as the online gaming sector, and thematic dimensions, with a focus on gender as a key element of child online safety advocacy. Implementing partners participated in significant events such as the Internet Governance Forum and GamesCom Asia. Additionally, Alliance partners represented the Alliance at the Second ASEAN ICT Forum on Child Online Protection, leading to increased access to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat and enhanced communication and collaboration with both ASEAN and UNICEF. An expert roundtable on the online gaming sector was convened, involving key actors and facilitated by international, Thai and Indonesian Alliance partners. This roundtable aimed to foster better advocacy and cooperation, enhance understanding, and ensure child safety in diverse digital environments.

## 6.5. REGIONAL L&A IN LATIN AMERICA

The Alliance experienced initial delays in achieving alignment and clarity among its members regarding the joint L&A plan for Latin America, requiring more time and effort in 2023. The L&A efforts in Latin America are based on research focusing on SEC affected by the Venezuelan crisis. In 2023, a draft literature review on SEC affected by the Venezuelan crisis was prepared, along with a country overview for Venezuela. A comprehensive methodology and research protocol were developed to collect evidence, including the voices of child migrants affected by the Venezuelan crisis and survivors of sexual exploitation, as well as those of front-line practitioners. Data will be collected in Bolivia, Colombia and Peru, as these countries have been significantly impacted by the Venezuelan refugee crisis and can provide relevant data for the research. Preparations completed in 2023 have paved the way for the research to take place in 2024, laying the foundations for advocacy efforts in Latin America.

# 7. Main reflections

## 7.1. REFLECTIONS, TOC AND ASSUMPTIONS

The programme's ToC statement and assumptions remain valid and a cornerstone of our efforts to combat SEC, embodying a comprehensive and inclusive approach to protect children at risk of SEC, and survivors. It steadfastly highlights our programme's overarching objective: ensuring the holistic protection of children from sexual violence, both offline and online, across diverse communities. Central to this approach is the ToC's emphasis on 'children in all their diversity', underscoring the importance of addressing the unique needs and vulnerabilities of different groups, including girls, boys, LGBTQ+ children, children with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and those from marginalised backgrounds.


*Implementation of Baseline Survey Youth Component, Colombia. Photo: Fundación Renacer*

The programme's focus on **prevention, protection, victim support and holding duty-bearers to account** as the backbone, with three interlinked outcomes ultimately contributing to achieve the long-term impact/overall objective of the programme, acknowledges the complexity of SEC and advocates for multifaceted approaches. This includes empowering children and young people, strengthening protective environments and calling on duty-bearers to hold them to account, addressing harmful social norms, and shifting power dynamics to include grass-roots involvement. Moreover, it recognises the importance of adopting an intersectional perspective when engaging with stakeholders and working at multiple levels, targeting individuals, families, communities, duty-bearers and duty-holders, service providers and the private sector to effectively address SEC. By empowering children and youth with knowledge about their rights, and skills to exercise them, we aim to strengthen their protection. Furthermore, the focus on social norm change has proven to be important, as an example from Bolivia, Colombia and Guatemala shows, where the need for engagement with the public sector goes hand in hand with community interventions and protection mechanisms to ensure sustainability. Complementary to social norms and behaviour change, it prioritises provision of protection services, legal assistance, SRHR services, counselling, reintegration and other services through referral and linkages, in addition to effective L&A to implement SEC-related laws and policies demonstrating government commitment to end SEC.

*Art Contest with Girl Survivors on International. Women's Day, Bangladesh. Photo: Association for Community Development*

The Alliance made significant strides in bringing these issues into the spotlight. Through our efforts, we have shed light on the harsh realities of SEC, its underlying causes and its profound and long term consequences. This increased awareness has led to commitments and increased participation in activities aimed at tackling the issue head-on, both within the environments where children grow and develop and within sectors susceptible to SEC, such as the tourism industry. Recognising the ongoing evolution of our understanding of SEC, we acknowledge the importance of periodically reviewing and refining our ToC, particularly regarding the roles of children and the government in SEC prevention, as well as the broader structural context. This ensures its continued relevance and alignment with our objectives, allowing us to maximise our impact to protect children and promote their well-being. As we move forward, it is imperative to sustain follow-up actions and implement new initiatives that empower effective participation and ensure comprehensive protection for all individuals vulnerable to SEC.

# 8. Shifting the power

## 8.1. BUILDING THE ALLIANCE IN THE NETHERLANDS

In May 2023, the SUFASEC programme commenced with a **two-day meeting of the Global Steering Committee** (GSC) held in the Netherlands and attended by CRC Asia and Conexión colleagues. There were two primary aims: to foster team cohesion and discuss programmatic issues. GSC members engaged in reflective exercises, reviewing the developmental and proposal writing phases. Discussions covered key DtZ principles, the strengths of individual Alliance members, and effective communication channels. Participants also reflected on the new governance structure and whether and how Alliance members needed support to set up the structure and publish in IATI, aiming for operational efficiency and accountability. An Alliance learning session provided valuable insights into measuring social norm change. Additionally, presentations on SUFASEC L&A strategies were delivered, covering regional and international/EU L&A plans.

## 8.2. LOCALISATION AND SHIFTING THE POWER

In 2023, the Alliance embarked on implementation of the 'shifting the power' concept, guided by a comprehensive **power analysis** conducted during the programme's development phase. This analysis revealed a strong desire among country teams to have greater autonomy and decision-making authority, particularly concerning budget allocation, learning initiatives, and monitoring and evaluation processes. To facilitate this shift towards decentralised decision-making, a **new governance structure** was established, featuring country teams and country steering committees. The country steering committees comprise mandated representatives from Alliance members and implementing partners, entrusted with making key decisions at the country level. Furthermore, countries have access to dedicated funding for joint activities, including learning. Integral to this decentralised approach is a mentality shift at all levels, becoming aware of our own biases and mentality patterns, reflecting on power dynamics, and creating open spaces to safely and constructively discuss concerns, questions and suggestions. This is to change traditional ways of working. One crucial step to foster this new mechanism is the newly appointed country and cross-country coordinators, whose role is to facilitate coordination and communication among country steering committees and country teams.

The **(cross-)country coordinators**, serving in a neutral capacity, play a vital role in ensuring transparent information dissemination, organising country meetings and national (or cross-country) steering committee sessions, and facilitating the implementation of learning agendas. They foster knowledge exchange, best practice sharing, and learning among country teams. Throughout 2023, efforts were focused on recruiting and integrating the coordinators into the Alliance's operational framework. Regular meetings between the GSC

and coordinators facilitated effective communication and alignment of objectives. In 2023, the coordinators led in-country collection of the baseline data, the analysis, interpretation and report-writing. Towards the year's end, the coordinators were instrumental in compiling consolidated annual plans for each country. This process unfolded smoothly, with timely submission of country plans and a validation workshop held to refine and validate inputs for the overall consolidated annual plan.

Learning from and adapting to the practices of working with (cross-)country coordinators remains a priority for the Alliance. Feedback from countries underscores the importance of **providing regular updates on programme progress and increasing their involvement** in Alliance meetings. To address these needs, several initiatives were undertaken in 2023. **Newsletters** were reintroduced to provide concise updates on Alliance activities at all levels. Additionally, regular meetings between the global-level and (cross-)country coordinators were established to facilitate communication and collaboration. There is ongoing recognition of the need for further improvement to enhance country involvement in Alliance meetings, aligning with the principle of shifting power. Some countries have requested clear guidelines for the use of shared country budgets, highlighting the need for transparency and clarity in accessing these resources.

## 8.3. BUILDING THE ALLIANCE AT COUNTRY LEVEL

Throughout 2023 and into early 2024, the role of (cross-)country coordinators has been pivotal in enhancing communication and coordination among Alliance partners, fostering a focused and robust approach to joint action planning. Most countries experienced smooth communication channels and improved coordination mechanisms. Despite some challenges, such as the resignation of coordinators in the Philippines and Thailand/Lao PDR due to differing expectations, these issues were addressed promptly. Early 2024 saw the successful recruitment of a new cross-country coordinator for Thailand. In the Philippines, the recruitment took a bit longer, but the process was ultimately completed. In the Dominican Republic, the recruitment of a country coordinator was finalised by the end of Q1 2024. These efforts have strengthened the Alliance's capacity for effective collaboration and implementation across the regions.

Feedback from countries underscores the positive impact of inclusive decision-making processes facilitated by country coordinators. In Nepal, this shift has empowered local actors and resulted in more holistic and inclusive programme strategies by actively seeking input from implementing partners and beneficiaries, fostering greater involvement and ownership. Some countries report that the shift towards inclusive decision-making processes and authority over the shared country budget targets is seen as a significant achievement. This facilitated greater involvement of country teams and implementing partners, resulting in more comprehensive and inclusive programmes. While this transition has been highly effective in some countries, more time may be required in other countries.

In Latin America, cross-country coordination between Bolivia, Colombia and Guatemala has been effective, with regular meetings addressing key topics such as monitoring and evaluation, regional training, and governance structures. Discussions also centred on managing youth advisory groups, with a focus on building their capacity in advocacy and leadership skills for youth in YVfC. In Brazil, ongoing efforts are focused on defining the new governance structure and establishing a youth advisory group and a shared country budget. The country coordinator has been instrumental in strengthening the country alliance and fostering closer collaboration. Ongoing discussions are focused on the importance of engaging local teams in meetings beyond the coordinator's involvement, and the need to ensure inclusive communications from the global level in Portuguese or Spanish to address language barriers.

## 8.4. SHARED COUNTRY BUDGETS/JOINT ACTIVITIES

Since the inception of the programme, shared country budgets have been allocated to facilitate collaborative decision-making in the SUFASEC countries, particularly to undertake **joint learning, capacity-building, research and collective action** appropriate to their specific contexts.

Countries initially required time to familiarise themselves with the shared country budget model and to prioritise activities and start implementation. However, some countries have already begun leveraging this resource to great effect. For example, in the Philippines, the shared country budget was used to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment among partners, a crucial step in aligning project objectives with resource allocation. Also, the Philippines jointly developed key SRHR messages, playing a pivotal role in advancing the project's objectives and success. This early use of the shared country budget demonstrates its potential as a catalyst for effective collaboration and strategic decision-making by country steering committees. In Latin America, three countries share a cross-country budget and are planning to hold a regional meeting of community leaders to share good practices – for example, in the formation of community (indigenous) leadership.

## 8.5. CHILD AND YOUTH (ADVISORY) GROUPS

**Children's active participation** lies at the heart of the SUFASEC programme, with most countries having already established child and youth groups. In 2023, efforts were made to ensure that children and young people had various opportunities to share their insights and perspectives.

One significant initiative was the integration of a **child participation process during the baseline exercise**, enabling 53 children and young people (42 females and 11 males, aged from 14 to 22 years) to contribute to the baseline. Involving children and young people in the baseline exercise allowed them to gain insight into how CSOs design and implement programmes, thus empowering them to play a more active role in shaping programmes that affect their lives, and providing the Alliance members and implementing partners

with rich and diverse information reflecting the children's and young people's perspectives. Children were also involved in the **VOICE research**. Focus group interviews were conducted with children/young people in five SUFASEC countries, enabling them to express their views on issues related to online safety and SEC. By engaging diverse children and youth (in terms of age, urban and rural settings, diverse gender and sexual identities, migrant and indigenous children), the programme aims to amplify their voices and indirectly influence policymakers.

Moving forward, the establishment of **child and youth advisory groups** is a key priority, with a focus on engaging children and young people from existing child/youth groups in countries and ensuring diversity, inclusivity and meaningful participation. Country teams started to consult children and/or youth and obtain their input on progress made in the programme – for example, by asking them to reflect on a few key indicators. Through these initiatives, the SUFASEC programme continues to prioritise the active involvement of children and youth, recognising their valuable contributions by sharing their insights and opinions on different aspects of the programme.

## 8.6. GLOBAL ADVISORY GROUP

The initial idea of establishing a global advisory group comprising country representatives was considered unfeasible given the number of countries (12) and effort required to have clear terms of reference, including roles and responsibilities, and a mandate for effective exchange and decision-making.

To address this, a more pragmatic approach was adopted for 2024: with input from the countries, the GSC will identify two or three key aspects of the programme, such as 'shifting the power' or measuring social norm change. Hybrid events will then be organised, inviting **experts from both within and outside the Alliance to share their knowledge, experience and insights**. These events will serve as platforms for collaborative analysis, enabling participants to assess progress, draw lessons, and learn from diverse experiences and perspectives. While such expert meetings were not organised in the first half of 2024, they will be prioritised in the second half of the year. By responding to feedback and implementing these initiatives, the Alliance aims to foster greater collaboration, transparency and participation at all levels based on evolving needs and insights gained, ultimately strengthening its ability to effectively combat SEC.

# 9. Communications

External communications on and about the SUFASEC programme are spearheaded by the DtZ Alliance Communications working group (WG), consisting of communications professionals representing each Alliance member. In 2023, the Communications WG has been working on the **SUFASEC Communications** Plan for the Netherlands. This plan focuses on the Dutch audience to inform stakeholders and constituencies of the DtZ Alliance, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, about the progress and results of SUFASEC and ensure visibility of the involvement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in addressing SEC. To guide its communications work in particular, the Communications WG has developed **communications safeguarding principles** that further fine-tune and complement DtZ's safeguarding protocol, providing additional safeguarding guidance specifically for content collection and publication. For content collection, the Communications WG has started developing a **storytelling concept**, in close consultation with the SUFASEC implementing countries. The idea is to follow selected youth leaders in their journey of development throughout the programme, by co-creating their stories. It entails guidance and training where needed, and ensures agency for the youth leaders involved.

**Publications** on SUFASEC were mainly about the launch of the partnership, with a **general introduction to the programme**. A key milestone was the **VOICE** initiative, with **publication of the first findings (fast facts)** of the research.

# 10. Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning

In 2023, the monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) WG, comprising experts from all six Alliance members, formulated the MEAL approach for the SUFASEC programme, including a comprehensive **MEAL manual** and a detailed **MEAL plan**, aligning with donor requirements, deliverables and deadlines.

Each Alliance member and implementing partner updated its country-specific progress using a provided results framework template [HERE WE REMOVE THE LINK!!]. This framework, with dedicated tabs for each country, tracks indicators at both Alliance member and country levels, specifying targets and actuals across the three years of implementation. Variances exceeding 20% between actual and targeted results were explained. A consolidated version of the result framework with consolidated Alliance-level results can be consulted **here**. Quantitative and qualitative progress against the four Ministry of Foreign Affairs SRHR basket indicators by each Alliance partner is further summarised in this **reporting table** with results published into IATI on 1 May. The Alliance's **annual plan for 2024** was also published into IATI.

In collaboration with country teams, the MEAL WG designed an **internal baseline**, encompassing adult participation components across 11 countries, and child/youth participation components across four countries. An external consultant supported the design and development of data collection tools and consolidated results at the Alliance level. Data collection and analysis were done internally by Alliance members and/or implementing partners at country level. For the child/youth participation component, children/youth were responsible for developing the data collection tools, analysing the collected data and producing a final product of their choice. As described in detail in the **baseline report**, the process was supported by trained mentors. Thanks to the flexible, participatory and child-centred approach, the results were diverse, context-specific and creative. Children and youth created amazing products such as informational videos and podcasts for baseline data collection (see **Podcast – Bolivia**, **Video – Colombia**, **Report – Indonesia** and **India**).

In collaboration with the MEAL WG, countries also devoted efforts to developing their **learning agenda tool**. A cross-country consolidation workshop is scheduled for July 2024 to harmonise learning approaches across the SUFASEC programme. Additionally, **basic training on Outcome Harvesting** was conducted for (cross-)country coordinators and partner staff in Asia and Latin America, enabling the identification, description, verification and analysis of outcomes, particularly changes in the behaviour of social actors.

Last but not least the MEAL WG developed a **capacity-building plan** to guide teams in organising capacity development efforts. This plan collected local partners' needs to match them with diverse expertise across all implementing partners and Alliance members, fostering learning opportunities for partners tailored to their needs and strengths. The tool will be finalised in Q2 2024, to be rolled out in the second half of year 2.

## 10.1. LEARNING

The learnings from the different SUFASEC countries are summarised in the table below. These learnings were identified through different learning activities such as learning/reflection meetings/events, country visits, desk reviews and action research. Based on their learning, countries have adopted their programming and activities accordingly, and the Alliance encourages countries to reflect on their learning and include it in their programme where possible.

| COUNTRY | LEARNINGS |
|---|---|
| Bangladesh | o Children, adolescents and youth can become more effective agents of change when they are empowered with advocacy skills and knowledge, ensuring their participation is meaningful.<br>o Engaging child protection and government actors in recognising their respective roles and coordinating efforts improves the quality and availability of child-friendly services related to SEC and SRHR.<br>o When duty-bearers and decision-makers are held accountable and are aware of the severity and scope of SEC, they are more willing to develop, review and effectively implement relevant laws and policies with public support.<br>o Using alternative methods such as online platforms, virtual meetings and individual consultations makes the sharing of learning and knowledge more effective. |
| India | o The main reasons why children use social applications include stress relief, coping with isolation, seeking fame, identity construction, substance use and financial gain.<br>o Patterns in approaching victims include sending friendship requests on Facebook, helping them achieve higher targets in online games, connecting them to famous groups/celebrities, and assisting them with financial gain and drug use. Based on these insights, capacity-building sessions were designed to educate youth advocates and children. |
| Indonesia | o Due to poor living conditions, parents often have sex in the same room as their children, creating confusion among children, as sex is considered taboo and not discussed, yet they inevitably experience it in their household.<br>o The main risk factors for OCSE were identified as limited digital literacy, a lack of parental supervision, and exposure to harmful online content.<br>o To effectively reach our beneficiaries, simple explanations and terminology must be used in our activities. |

| COUNTRY | LEARNINGS |
|---|---|
| Nepal | o Considering the growing access of young people to online platforms, these should be used to reach larger audiences with various training activities.<br>o Young people find online platforms more convenient than using in-person services, as they can comfortably ask questions and seek information. They prefer animated videos over documentaries for educational purposes.<br>o To guarantee the sustainability of activities, coordination with local government must start from the beginning.<br>o The process for the repatriation of human trafficking survivors must be simplified, including providing birth certificates and citizenship in their mother's name, especially for those whose families refuse to accept them back. |
| Philippines | o Misinformation and misconceptions among children regarding SRHR, particularly about sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV, menstruation, contraception and sex, are very common. These topics are often taboo. Interventions aimed at correcting misinformation and addressing misconceptions should be a priority in educational programmes and community initiatives related to SRHR – for example, via targeted educational campaigns, interactive workshops, and ongoing dialogue with children and adolescents to ensure they have access to accurate, age-appropriate information. Such initiatives would empower them to make informed decisions about their health and well-being.<br>o Parents fear their children will be mistreated and discriminated against if they express non-cisgender sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics. This fear causes some parents to withhold open support for their children with different sexual orientations. Partners are preparing an online campaign correcting common misconceptions involving children and youth.<br>o Youth digital safety practices are bordering on risky and harmful behaviours, such as online dating, talking to online friends, watching pornography, reading online stories and trash-talking. |
| Thailand | o The key factors contributing to OSCE and SEC are poverty and a lack of self-awareness among children. Many children accept small amounts of money in exchange for sexual favours because they may not have enough money to sustain their living and are not fully aware of the possible consequences.<br>o Parents can be re-traumatised by the criminal procedure in SEC cases, indicating they also need to be empowered and supported. |
| Brazil | o Conservative social norms and resistance from religious leaders and communities in Brazil present challenges to accessing and engaging youth in discussions around SRHR and SEC. To address these challenges, partners adopted alternative approaches, framing discussions around the defence of children's and youth's rights and their protection, which are better received in these communities. Additionally, utilising social educators who are both respected religious figures and advocates for the rights of children and youth has proven effective in facilitating these crucial conversations. |
| Dominican Republic | o Reflecting on previous processes funded by DtZ, it has been useful to push for nationally agreed plans, such as the strategic plan to strengthen the child protection system. This plan was built on a strong theoretical framework validated by UNICEF worldwide.<br>o Furthermore, the process for the Dominican Republic was based on evidence from a study also funded by DtZ, which was presented to the highest authorities. This led to a high-level international seminar promoted by UNICEF and Plan, supported by national authorities, advocating for a national strategic plan with concrete steps to improve the child protection system. |
| Bolivia, Guatemala, Colombia | o In the communities, the training process to generate social leadership involves not only commitment but also the potential to strengthen and develop capacities for confronting and transforming the social and gender norms that have enabled crimes such as SEC. The acceptance and invisibility of these violations are directly related to social permissiveness, re-victimisation, stigmatisation and victim-blaming. Through the baseline process, we identified and recognised perceptions, myths, beliefs and social norms that need to be addressed and transformed. This transformation is based on the interest of these actors in contributing to SEC prevention and becoming agents of protection in the community. |

| COUNTRY | LEARNINGS |
|---|---|
| International and regional L&A | o SEC and OCSE are closely interlinked, with ICT playing a significant role in facilitating various forms of SEC, such as trafficking. <br><br> o While policies on OCSE may be in place in countries, implementation on the ground often lacks effectiveness. There is frequently no safe environment for reporting, and intimidation and mob mentality are common in cases involving high-profile perpetrators. It is crucial for policies and commitments to be reflected on the ground to benefit everyone, which requires strong political will from all stakeholders. <br><br> o Governments have a key responsibility to keep children safe, working closely with CSOs and other stakeholders. Continuous follow-up is essential to ensure that policies trickle down to communities, especially given the increased risks posed by online technologies. Governments must ensure compliance with laws, including labour laws, in collaboration with CSOs, particularly community-based ones that are familiar with local issues and concerns. <br><br> o There is a need to advocate and collaborate on influencing the informal sector, which is not effectively reached through regulations. More efforts are required to target the financial sector to address these issues comprehensively. <br><br> o Connecting national, regional and global levels is key to strengthening synergies, exchange and learning across countries and regions. A collaborative approach involving different stakeholders at local, national and regional levels is essential to ensure child protection in online spaces. <br><br> o Companies in the entertainment sector must comply with national legislation. Registration is crucial to apply the legal framework and ensure compliance with sector-specific regulations and laws. <br><br> o Technology is increasingly used to reach children, with perpetrators exploiting this evolving problem. Continued conversations and dynamic solutions are necessary to address these challenges effectively. |
| EU L&A | o Children showed a high tolerance for online harms, viewing them as an inevitable part of the online experience. There is a gap between children and caregivers regarding how to remain safe online. Children's strategies for preventing or responding to risky scenarios relied on self-protection methods, such as in-platform reporting and blocking features. In contrast, caregivers believed that children would reach out to them if something dangerous occurred online. Despite proposing different strategies, both groups saw themselves as primarily responsible for online safety. <br><br> o Both children and caregivers tend to underestimate the responsibility of technology companies and governments in ensuring online safety. <br><br> o Children want to be heard and involved in addressing online safety concerns. |



*International Women's Day Rally, Nepal. Photo: Maiti Nepal.*

# 11. Cross-cutting issues

## 11.1. CHILD PARTICIPATION AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The Alliance remains committed to a child-centred approach, ensuring the inclusion of children's rights, needs and perspectives in all programme activities and decision-making processes. Recognising the agency of children and youth is paramount, alongside acknowledging the legitimacy of their collective representation and the unique experiences each child holds. Despite challenges posed by entrenched paternalistic structures, particularly affecting marginalised groups such as girls, the Alliance employs diverse methods to address these issues:

**Safe and inclusive spaces** are established to empower children to express themselves freely. Through child-friendly workshops, play sessions and peer support groups, the Alliance fosters trust, respect and open communication, providing avenues for children to voice their opinions without fear of judgement or reprisal.

**SUCCESS STORY**

In Northern Bangladesh, 150 children (including boys and girls, school drop-outs, children living with disabilities, indigenous/ethnic children and SEC survivors) became members of children groups. Following selection meetings and social mapping tools to identify social barriers, social norms and mitigation measures during the group formation process, the implementing partners facilitated discussions on how children can take part in prevention of SEC, including child marriage, GBV, trafficking, and provided information for survivors. A series of trainings on Standardised Adolescent Empowerment Package (SAEP) was organised for the children to build their skills and knowledge on life skills-based education, child protection, gender and sexuality, health, ICT, moral education, food and nutrition, pre-parenting, livelihood skills, emergency response, human diversity, and the role of adolescents.

*"I was not capable to protest against child abuse because , I was alone. Now, we are united. On the other hand, our skills and knowledge have increased through attending various programs of SUFASEC"*

Ashik, Member of Children Group

The children are now sensitising their classmates, peers and participating in various discussions and community mobilisation to protect children from SEC. After forming groups, children have worked for the protection of a child victim in their village as well as raised awareness. Apart from this, they celebrated Children's Day, Girl Child day, and World Day Against Trafficking in Persons. Children who were previously isolated are now united, are able to express their views and contribute to the development of their community.

**Peer support networks and safe spaces for youth** serve as platforms for sharing experiences, seeking guidance and accessing support. These initiatives build resilience and foster solidarity among peers, offering emotional support, encouragement and practical advice to navigate challenges related to sexual violence and online safety.

Investing in **age-appropriate capacity-building and awareness-raising** of children on SRHR, SEC, gender and their rights empowers them to become active agents of change. Youth ambassadors and champions represent their communities in various platforms, including training events, meetings, workshops and seminars, advocating for their rights and sharing good practices related to SRHR and prevention of sexual violence. Youth leaders/champions such as in India, Lao PDR, the Philippines and Indonesia provided peer-to-peer awareness-raising initiatives, sharing good practices related to SRHR and sexual violence in their communities, villages and schools, demonstrating the importance of behaviour change and serving as role models for their peers.

**Engagement in learning and advocacy:** Children and youth actively participated in learning and advocacy campaigns, developing information, education and communication (IEC) materials, leading awareness-raising initiatives and participating in commemorative events. Activities included developing IEC materials in local languages and crafting accessible concepts for young children in an online safety campaign in India, celebration of the International Day of the Girl in Brazil, and planning and leading campaigns such as the Children's Month Celebration in the Philippines and artistic participation in commemoration of the Day to Combat SEC in Colombia, an intersectoral initiative between the public and private sectors and the community to make visible and mobilise against SEC, highlighting that the voice of children is important to be part of the local call to prevent and combat SEC. The Alliance prioritises linking children and youth to larger networks and forums, amplifying their voices and facilitating their participation in advocacy events for policy change.

**Accountability of systems and stakeholders:** The Alliance works to hold systems and stakeholders close to children accountable, providing spaces for children's voices to be heard and their best interests to be protected. Initiatives such as regional consultations and involvement in project implementation empowered children to express their perspectives and demand the fulfilment of their rights. Through these networks, the children and youth were able to take part in larger advocacy events for policy change where they were able to get their voices heard – for example, via regional consultation of children and youth from SAARC countries hosted by SAIEVAC.

## 11.2. INTERSECTIONALITY

The Alliance integrated **intersectionality** throughout its interventions, ensuring the meaningful participation and agency of children and young people at the intersections of various identities such as gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and disability. This holistic approach acknowledges the complex interplay of these factors, aiming to address the unique vulnerabilities and empower all children and youth. Partners in the Philippines integrated gender and sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) sessions in SEC awareness-raising sessions and capacity-building provided to peer educators, in addition to training on gender-transformative programming.

Alliance members and implementing partners promoted **power awareness and meaningful participation** by training partners and children and youth on intersectionality and gender dynamics to enhance their understanding of how different factors impact children's vulnerabilities. For instance, in India, such training sessions strengthened comprehension of intersecting identities, including power awareness, inclusion and meaningful child participation, helping participants to understand the impact of different intersecting factors on children's vulnerabilities. In Thailand and the Dominican Republic, discussions on power dynamics and intersecting identities helped children become more aware of their agency, ensuring equal access and participation for all, including those with diverse SOGIESC.

Collaboration with **organisations of persons with disabilities and LGBTQI+ groups** such as in Nepal, Bolivia and the Philippines is important for the programme. These partnerships enhance the understanding of social complexities and the development of culturally and linguistically sensitive communication materials. They also advance discussions on SRHR and SOGIESC, fostering inclusive and comprehensive support systems.

The Alliance has established **safe spaces for dialogue, disclosure** and support – for example, during training, in the shelters and child and youth groups – which are crucial for meaningful participation and empowerment. This also includes implementing inclusive policies, regular feedback mechanisms, confidential reporting for survivors, and providing psychological support services. These measures ensure that all voices are heard and respected, promoting a culture of continuous reflection and adaptation.



Voice of Youth Workshop to strengthen youth capacity and participation in SEC prevention, Indonesia. Photo: ECPAT Indonesia

Furthermore, implementing partners identified and addressed specific barriers hampering access to the programme – for instance, groups that are difficult to include in activities, such as street children, boys, and children engaged in sexua exploitation with no family support, exacerbated by societal discrimination and low self-esteem. In Thailand, monthly awareness-raising activities for these groups are conducted, and the implementing partner ensures that children in need have access to psychosocial services. In Lao PDR, the implementing partner intentionally targets girls in rural districts for training, providing transportation and accommodation. Further, child-friendly spaces are provided for young parents in the Philippines, to support child care during activities. Interventions and activities have been tailored to address the specific needs, vulnerabilities and experiences of different groups within the community, including disability and age – for example, by developing particular training modules for early childhood, youth and parents in Indonesia to improve their capacities and skills in body anatomy, boundaries and the prevention of SEC as per their particular vulnerability to SEC. Age-appropriate learning materials and activities allow everyone the opportunity to share their experiences and perspectives, and use of the Washington Group questionnaire[4] helps arrange accessibility for people with disabilities in the Philippines.

Finally, gender equality is a cross-cutting theme in all programme activities. Gender-responsive approaches are integrated into programme design and implementation, including messaging to promote gender equality and address gender-based vulnerabilities to SEC. This integration is tailored to the specific context of each country.

For instance, LGBTQI+ children in Nepal, who are particularly vulnerable to SEC, often spend significant time online where they feel more comfortable socialising with peers. Participants from the LGBTQI+ group have not only been involved but have become youth change-makers, engaging in OCSE awareness-raising in the communities. Nepalese partners have employed strategies that ensure the participation and agency of children and young people living at intersections of gender and gender identities, including LGBTQI+, age, socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and disability, in their interventions. In rural communities, engaging with parents is an effective strategy to challenge gender norms that discourage girls from attending school, which often leads these girls to migrate to larger cities at a young age in search of income. In South Asia, issues such as dowry and child marriage pose significant risks to girls, including trafficking related to child marriage.

Programme activities also focus on boys – for example, in India in the Boys Initiative but also in Brazil – aiming to raise awareness about the SEC of boys. Social norms often prevent boys from discussing these issues openly, perpetuating myths that boys cannot be victims of SEC. By focusing on men and boys, the programme acknowledges their crucial roles in communities and addresses often overlooked victims of SEC. Boys affected by SEC are invisible victims in both programme regions. Additionally, boys are sometimes targeted to become 'brokers' to groom girls into trafficking for SEC purposes.

Another critical aspect is the involvement of single-parent families, particularly in Latin America, where social norms dictate that females (mothers, grandmothers or older sisters) are responsible for the siblings. Fathers and brothers are less involved in the social reintegration process of victims or in identifying male victims. The programme aims to address this imbalance and encourage greater male participation in these processes. SRHR-related activities across the programme involve raising awareness about basic gender-related issues, including having a keen eye for an intersectional approach. Peer-to-peer activities in both Asia and Latin America encourage children and young people to talk about and challenge stereotypes, such as GBV, including the normalisation of sexualisation of girls. In India but also in other countries, training modules have been developed on SRHR and are used for youth advocates. The module includes understanding OCSE, the legal frameworks involved, recognising signs and prevention, resources and support.

## 11.3. SRHR AND SEC

The SUFASEC programme addresses result areas 1, 2 and 4 of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs SRHR results framework through diverse activities aimed at transforming harmful social and gender norms at both personal and community levels. These efforts include raising awareness about SRHR, providing sexuality education, and facilitating referrals to SRHR services. Additionally, the programme works towards governments recognising SRHR and adapting policies recognising SRHR and adapting policies and legislation to better protect these rights. The SUFASEC programme also contributes to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3: "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages" and SDG 5.2: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls."

SEC cannot be combated without guaranteeing SRHR. SEC constitutes a severe violation of the rights of children as stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It significantly undermines the realisation and enjoyment of SRHR for children and young people. SEC is a global issue affecting both girls and boys, with a notable increase in cases linked to technology. Offline exploitation increasingly connects with various forms of OCSE, such as grooming, spreading of child sexual abuse material, and sextortion, but also trafficking and child marriage.

Victims of SEC face severe and long-lasting sexual and reproductive health consequences, including sexual violence, unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Additionally, SEC leads to long-term mental health issues, school dropouts, addictions, vulnerabilities to further violence, and socio-economic consequences. SEC also violates victims' bodily integrity, threatening their safe and positive sexual development. Growing up free from SEC is essential for developing healthy sexual

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[4] Set questions developed by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics designed to identify people living with disabilities consistently and comparably across different cultures and settings.

relationships, having control over one's body, and enjoying SRHR. Partners in the Philippines, Nepal and Bangladesh and others provide SRHR information and referrals to health facilities facilitated by child helplines for medical/SRHR service provision.

SRHR remains a **sensitive topic** in many countries, often shrouded in **stigma and taboo**. This stigma makes it difficult for victims, parents and others to report SEC to the authorities. In SUFASEC countries, partners work with parents, community members and professionals to recognise warning signs or discuss SEC and SRHR within their families or communities, using appropriate terminology. Prevailing social norms around gender and sexuality in many countries condone sexual violence against children and young people. Sexuality education is often missing from (secondary) education, leaving many adolescents unaware of their SRHR.

In 2023, the SUFASEC implementing partners actively engaged adolescents and other stakeholders in discussions **linking SEC and SRHR**. These discussions covered topics such as consent, healthy relationships, signs of abuse, and GBV. Sessions specifically focused on SRHR, including information on STIs, HIV/AIDS, and the availability of free SRHR services. These sessions aimed to promote awareness of the importance of knowing one's health status and understanding how it affects individual well-being. **Parents and child protection actors** were also **educated on SRHR topics**, including definitions of gender and sexuality, myths and misconceptions about contraceptives, and available SRHR services. However, access to STI checks and sexual health services remains limited or difficult to access for young people in some countries, such as Brazil. To address this, the Alliance is engaged in ongoing dialogues with local municipal health departments to explore potential partnerships for promoting STI tests, sexual health care, family planning and other SRHR-related topics. Additionally, through the work of a local implementing partner in Brazil, dialogues take place on issues related to sexual exploitation and SRHR, and cases of sexual violence are monitored by the local partner, supported by health policies.

## 11.4. SAFEGUARDING

The SUFASEC programme places paramount importance on the **safety and well-being of children and adolescents**, ensuring they feel welcome, safe and comfortable. Both Alliance members and implementing partners are committed to the principle of 'Do No Harm' and to creating environments free from abuse, neglect or exploitation, where children can express themselves freely and confidently. All activities conducted by Alliance members and implementing partners are designed with a preventive approach, methodologically centred around the needs and safety of children.

Key safeguarding strategies include:

o    **building trust** by establishing an environment where children/young people feel safe and their needs are heard and prioritised;
o    **maintaining confidentiality and privacy** by safeguarding children's information and ensuring their privacy is respected; and
o    **empowering children** by fostering an environment that empowers children and young people to express themselves and participate actively in programme activities.

Specific **safeguarding policies and provisions** include ensuring that informed consent is always sought from parents or caregivers by professionals working with local implementing partners before engaging with children. The MoU between DtZ Alliance members incorporates basic safeguarding principles. As the lead organisation, TdH NL has developed a comprehensive set of documents on integrity, including safeguarding policies, codes of conduct and a 'Speak Up' manual. These documents have been disseminated to all Alliance members. All Alliance members have comprehensive safeguarding and protection policies that clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of staff and implementing partners in protecting children. Safeguarding measures are integrated from the outset of activities involving children, with policies communicated in appropriate, child-friendly language.



*Training on Life Skills, Thailand. Photo: TLSDF*

Prior to implementing the storytelling concept, the SUFASEC Communications WG formulated specific guidelines related to safeguarding in communications, in particular regarding the collection and publication of content. These guidelines ensure that any content shared respects the dignity and privacy of children and aligns with the programme's safeguarding principles. Similarly, Alliance members discussed and considered safeguarding principles prior to embarking on the YVfC initiative, to ensure that we conduct these activities with children and youth in a thoroughly prepared way, taking into account potential safeguarding risks and thinking around and formulating mitigation strategies.

Partners applied safeguarding measures and vigilant monitoring across the SUFASEC programme. The programme's commitment to safeguarding ensures that all activities prioritise the safety and well-being of children and adolescents. By embedding comprehensive safeguarding policies and preventive measures into all aspects of the programme, the Alliance creates a secure environment where children can thrive and actively participate in shaping their futures. Alliance members apply pre-screening for recruitment purposes; this is done in different ways depending on the country context.

# 12. Challenges, Good Practices & Lessons Learnt

## 12.1. GOOD PRACTICES

A range of good practices emerged during the reporting period, such as:

**Youth and children's empowerment:** Empowering youth as peer educators and advocates has crystallised as a successful best practice in promoting awareness, changing attitudes and mobilising action against sexual violence. Ensuring the meaningful participation of children and adolescents in decision-making and programme implementation is crucial for guaranteeing their rights and empowerment. The peer-to-peer approach has proven particularly effective in raising awareness, expressing opinions and concerns, and strengthening support systems and the sustainability of interventions. Partners organised meetings in their communities by change agents in Bangladesh as platforms for children and youth to share their perspectives, experiences and concerns regarding diverse topics such as child protection, SEC and SRHR issues. These meetings were facilitated by inclusive methodologies and age-appropriate activities. Additionally, partners reunited previous youth advocates from various states in Indonesia to mentor new youth advocates on effective advocacy skills. In Bolivia there is the Uyuni youth group, whose involvement not only demonstrates its commitment but also its capacity to influence grass-roots organisations, justice operators and the private sector.

**Community engagement:** Engaging with local communities and local actors has been identified as a best practice crucial for ensuring the effectiveness of interventions and the sustainability of the programme. Local partners demonstrated commendable practices by maintaining strong engagement within communities through participatory approaches such as community dialogues, consultation sessions, and follow-ups with children and families. They cultivated positive relationships with key stakeholders, including community leaders, local organisations, teachers and school managers, to enhance community support for the project. A successful joint effort was the Carnival campaign meeting in Brazil to strengthen civil society, building on learning from previous years, and to bring the government closer to the SEC-related discussions proposed by civil society. This strategy proved highly effective in building trust, fostering ownership and ensuring that interventions are contextually relevant and sustainable.

**SUCCESS STORY**

The **Red Ants movement**, consisting of young peer educators in Nepal, provided life skills and online safety education to their peers, linking survivors to relevant service providers. Comprehensive training for youth leaders in many countries covered advocacy, leadership, communication, negotiation skills, case monitoring, and reporting, ensuring required support services for children.

Thanks to the Red Ants movement the case of Erik (name changed) a young social influencer (21) with 22.4k followers. One day he saw private videos made in his previous relationship stored on his Facebook account posted in his Facebook reel. Thinking they were posted by accident, he deleted them, while soon he received a message from hackers to pay 2500 EUR. The Red Ants movement successfully referred the case to Alliance partners and the Nepal Police Cyber Bureau for legal support and counselling.

**Partnership-building and multi-stakeholder engagement:** Establishing strong partnerships with local organisations, LGUs, national government agencies (including public health institutions and child protection agencies), schools and community leaders has been instrumental in leveraging resources, expertise and networks to enhance programme reach and effectiveness. Collaborative approaches following a multisectoral strategy led to the development and implementation of comprehensive strategies, including awareness-raising campaigns, capacity-building workshops and community empowerment initiatives that address the multifaceted challenges posed by sexual abuse and exploitation. For example, in Bolivia, the Alliance organised a local meeting to share best practices related to the prevention of SEC, OCSE, SEC in travel and tourism, gender and SRHR. This meeting involved a variety of actors, including rights-holders

(children), responsibility-holders (community, family), duty-bearers (municipalities, governors, justice operators) and the private sector (national and international commitments). The meeting succeeded in reaffirming commitment and strengthening collaboration to achieve greater impact in the prevention of SEC and in the formulation of public policies.

**Capacity-building:** Lastly, strengthening the capacities of communities and local implementing partners by investing in capacity-building for staff, volunteers and community members on topics such as SEC prevention, OCSE, SRHR and citizen participation has empowered them to take a leading role in the prevention of and response to SEC. This investment has improved the quality of programme implementation and sustainability.

## 12.2. LESSONS LEARNED

**Flexibility and adaptation:** A key lesson learned was the importance of flexibility and adaptation to contextual changes, such as related to humanitarian crises and elections. Local partners effectively mitigated these challenges by synchronising project activities with the school schedules, harvesting season and festivities in Thailand and other countries, adapting and postponing activities due to elections that disrupted school schedules and contextual priorities in the Dominican Republic and India, and aligning programme activities with LGU schedules.
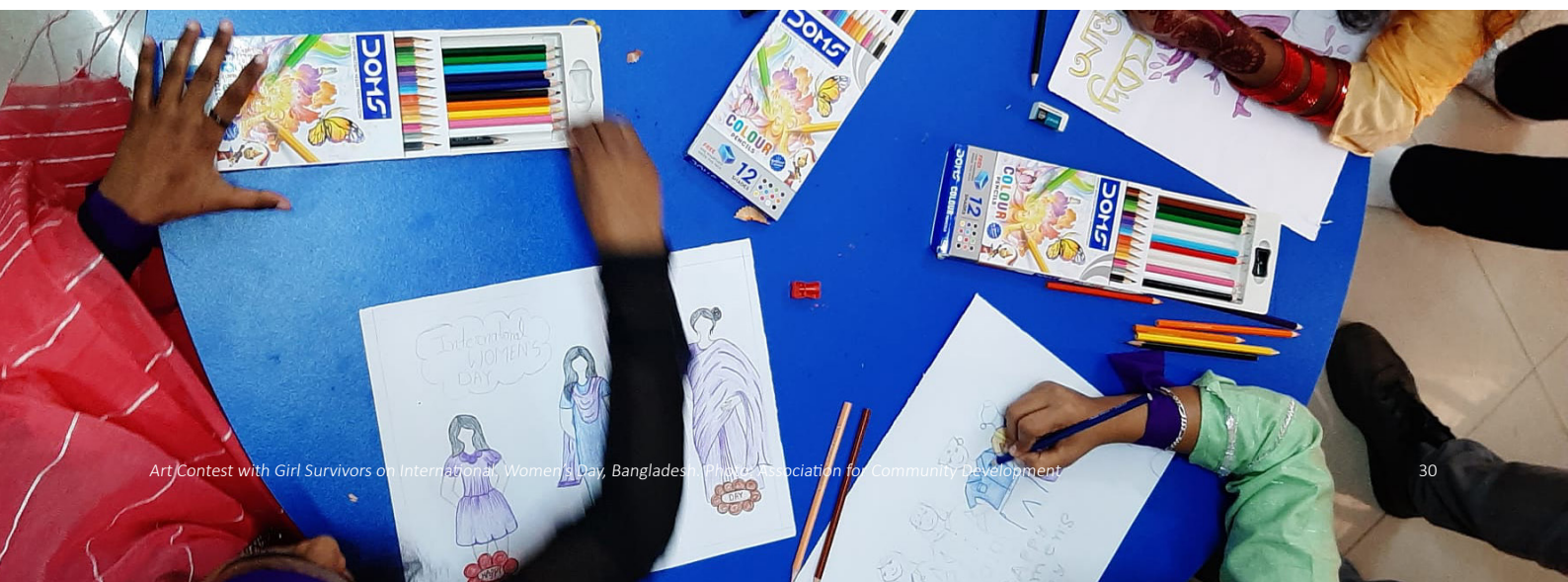
**Local–regional L&A collaboration:** The L&A process highlighted the need for strengthening linkages between the regional and national lobby initiatives and participation by country teams in priority setting. Online sessions, an in-person workshops, and insights from ECPAT International and countries provided proved valuable in sharing knowledge and insights, determining L&A priorities and shaping strategies. Country participants provided nuanced understanding of context and realities, ensuring that regional and international L&A messages are relevant and localised. Key insights on L&A opportunities and strategies were discussed, as well as opportunities for participation and contribution by the partners. Collaborative discussions, both online and meeting offline, facilitated the drafting of unified L&A messages and confirming key regional L&A opportunities to engage in to enhance policy impact. Interactions aligned participants on key priorities and principles, such as prioritising children and amplifying their voices in advocacy. Lessons learned confirmed that clear communication channels across all the levels of the programme are essential for alignment and addressing differences. To ensure common understanding and expectations, an L&A guidance document for the participation and engagement of countries in L&A efforts, as well as clarifying the role and responsibilities of the different actors involved is in the making to inform future activities.

**Child-friendly spaces:** The establishment of child-friendly spaces, such as those in the Philippines, and having support staff or community volunteers during activities with young parents allowed these parents to focus on the discussions. This approach ensured that the needs of young children were met, thereby enabling their parents to fully engage in the programme activities.

**Home visits:** Regular home visits to enrolled beneficiaries in the Philippines allowed partners to closely monitor progress in positive parenting practices. These visits helped establish rapport and provided support to young parents, guiding them in effectively raising their children. This hands-on approach proved to be instrumental in ensuring ongoing support and effective implementation of the programme's objectives.

## 12.3. CHALLENGES

**Influence of online social media:** The growing diversification of the online social media world and its impact on young people's opinions and decisions has introduced new risks. While children have a greater understanding of internet use, their exposure to risk of exploitation is also higher due to high-end technologies. This challenge is compounded by the lack of adequate policies to address these risks. Access to internet connections in remote areas through unregulated wi-fi networks without online child safeguarding measures adds to the challenges. For instance, internet service providers in India declined to acknowledge their responsibility in filtering or blocking harmful online content. This experience underscored the need to lobby the Ministry of Telecommunication to regulate internet service providers and hold them accountable for managing harmful content on their platforms.



*Art Contest with Girl Survivors on International Women's Day, Bangladesh. Photo: Association for Community Development*

**Stigma** associated with SEC and **social exclusion** hinder meaningful participation of children and young people and are also a barrier to reporting.

**Competing priorities and a lack of SRHR information:** In different programme countries, including in the Dominican Republic and the Philippines, less priority is given to combating SEC compared to local efforts focused on tourism, the economy and agriculture. Additionally, there is a significant lack of access to accurate information on SRHR, which contributes to an increase in the number of cases of adolescent pregnancy and GBV.

**Streamlined rehabilitation process:** There is a significant need to establish an adequate, streamlined rehabilitation process for child victims. In India, child victims are often returned to their families after a short stay at a child care institution without proper healing. This situation often leads families to send the child to distant relatives or arrange early marriages due to the lack of necessary mental, economic and emotional support. This makes it difficult for the SUFASEC team to follow up with the child and provide the necessary counselling support.

At the start of 2023, efforts focused on **strengthening country engagement in L&A** and improving the exchange of information, collaboration and communication channels for those involved in L&A at various levels. This required careful consideration, communication and preparation to ensure meaningful engagement from the countries and to bolster evidence-informed L&A practices. Various discussions at different levels took place on how to move forward, and both online sessions and an in-person workshop guided concrete actions with countries in the different levels of L&A.

# 13. Sustainability and looking forward

The Alliance's strategies extend beyond immediate interventions, focusing on fostering long-term resilience and social and systemic change. Central is the engagement of **youth groups and youth as agents of change**. Initiatives such as peer education programmes, youth clubs and awareness-raising campaigns empower youth to lobby local and sometimes national governments to ensure their rights and safety, fostering a culture of awareness and activism. By equipping youth with knowledge, skills and platforms for advocacy, the Alliance empowered them to disseminate their learnings to peers and other stakeholders in their communities and beyond. It also cultivates a culture of leadership that can endure beyond the programme's duration. Beyond building the children's capacity, partners such as in the Philippines also encourage them to form their own organisation in which, by nature, youth and children, oriented with adult supervision, can advocate for themselves and lobby duty-bearers for improved services and policies. These initiatives foster long-term commitment and encourage sustainability, paving the way for child and youth advocates to potentially continue their work after the programme has finished.

Furthermore, the Alliance invests in **capacity-strengthening** of community members, including parents, teachers and local leaders, as agents of change. Training sessions and workshops on child protection empower communities to take ownership of child protection efforts and implement preventive measures independently. Similarly, survivors are mobilised and empowered to raise awareness of their legal rights and entitlements, advocating for justice and support from authorities. Through partnerships with parents and community members, such as via parenting sessions and counselling with parents of survivors before and after reintegration, the Alliance strives to cascade knowledge and awareness in a long-term process to enhance attitudinal change, to create safer environments for survivors and prevent re-victimisation.

**Addressing underlying social norms and attitudes** that perpetuate sexual violence is crucial for achieving sustainable change. Through community dialogues, awareness-raising campaigns and behaviour change communication strategies, partners challenge harmful gender norms, stigma and cultural barriers that contribute to the normalisation of violence. By challenging existing norms in their communities, promoting positive social norms and fostering a culture of respect, equality and zero tolerance for violence, the Alliance lays the foundations for long-term societal transformation. The Alliance is investing in continued learning and capacity development related to social and gender norm change, to be taken further in years 2 and 3 of the programme.



*Parents Group Meeting, Bangladesh. Photo: Association for Community Development*

Another crucial pillar entails **partnerships** and actively engaging with LGUs at every stage of the project, **collaborating with government agencies and local institutions** to institutionalise the programme's interventions and integrate child protection measures into existing systems. Consultation meetings prior to implementation to obtain the buy-in, support and commitment of various local actors, including local government, community leaders, public health offices and schools, ensured government endorsement, paving the way for sustainable adoption and implementation of programme interventions. Strengthening local committees/institutions such as community-based child protection committees and child welfare boards in Bangladesh further expanded child-friendly services for children, adolescents and youth, activating bottom-up structures to identify victims of SEC and SRHR and refer them to services.

Also, implementing partners provided **training to authorities**, such as training for paramilitary forces stationed at high-risk trafficking border areas in India, resulting in the formation of a specialised unit for Anti-Human Trafficking to address trafficking from Bangladesh and Nepal. Training for policy officers, government agencies and CSO networks in Thailand raised their awareness of SEC and the importance of children's rights in policy development, law reform and development of the protection referral system. Intersectoral dialogue and training sessions focused on strengthening the capacities of health, social assistance and education professionals in Brazil, to guarantee child-friendly services and the prevention of SEC in its many forms.

Finally, **L&A actions** at the state, national, regional and international levels further strove to influence governments and other stakeholders to strengthen policies, legislation and mechanisms to combat SEC, such as via the Intersectoral Commission to Combat Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents in Brazil, and national consultations by the India National Human Rights Commission, ensuring a safer online and offline environment for children and addressing actors in the ICT sector under the regional L&A work in Asia.

*LEA training with Cyber Crime Department on SEC Investigation, Thailand. Photo: Thai Hotline*

# 14. Audited financial report

In line with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs grant agreement (No. 4000005900, dated 23 February 2023), the Alliance presents an aggregated audited financial overview plus the audited financial reports from the Alliance members for the period 1 March 2023 to 29 February 2024, in separate documents, as outlined in Annex I. The audit process, conducted according to the Ministry's audit protocol, involved individual audits for each Alliance member's financial report and a consolidated audit by the TdH NL auditor (Mazars). This process concluded on 18 June with an unqualified audit report. The consolidated audited financial report, which includes the total budget of EUR15 million for three years, is presented per country, per result area and per budget line in compliance with the Ministry's financial reporting requirements. The expenditure for the first year was 22% of the overall three-year budget. The total budget for the reporting period was EUR4,909,150, with an updated annual plan and a budget of EUR3.8 million to accommodate evolving needs. Actual expenditures were EUR3,235,170 or 84% of the updated projection of EUR3,855,181 as indicated in the annual plan for year 2. The Alliance agreed to reallocate the underspent funds to years 2 and 3 of the programme as a result of the inception phase of cross-Alliance coordination allowing the smooth launch of activities following the programme's approval in February 2023. During the first year, Alliance members and partners finalised detailed work plans and budgets, formalised contracts and recruited staff while obtaining necessary permissions from local authorities, which delayed the start in several countries. Alliance members also finalised an MoU, establishing collaboration agreements, Ministry of Foreign Affairs requirements such as reporting periods, and auditing. This MoU facilitated the release of the first instalment of funds to Alliance members, which then distributed funds to implementing partners. A new governance structure was established, including country teams and steering committees, which manage shared country budgets (estimated at EUR200,000) and coordinate country-level efforts. Additionally, a refined results framework, a MEAL work plan and manual, and baseline assessments were developed, incorporating a child participation component. Finalising the international and regional L&A frameworks required time to ensure strong coordination for country participation and align national and regional efforts. Preparations for YVfC (EUR400,000) and the Boys Initiative (EUR200,000) took place in 2023, with full implementation planned for years 2 and 3. The Communications WG created a work plan and a storytelling concept for young leaders in 2023, which will be finalised and rolled out in year 2.

Due to this extensive groundwork, full implementation of most programme activities began in June/July 2023, with some elements starting in year 2. Unspent funds have been reallocated to the 2024 and 2025 budgets, with corresponding activities scheduled primarily for the second year of the programme.