



# REPPER

International Exchange Network for Programs and Projects for  
Street Children

N°7

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A dozen or so reader friends have replied to some of our questions on girls. Thanks to them for having been so good as to share their experiences. The replies received are, for the most part, extremely emotive, even when the writer endeavours to keep the style descriptive, objective ... thus we have chosen not to impoverish these testimonies, not to summarize them, but to devote the next 2 or 3 issues of the newsletter to tales from Moscow, Guatemala City, Ghana, F. Lefort ... and others which we are sure to receive.

**Brother S. James - F.S.C.**  
**23 Panagal Road, Shenoy Nagar**  
**Madurai 625 020 S. India.**

"My hand shivers and the pen quivers with hesitation and a deep sorrow when I get down to writing about the Girl Child. The very mention of the Girl Child evokes tremendous bias and misinterpretation in the society we live in, to the extent that it keeps me wondering whether I should remain silent and suppress the truth or come out straightforwardly and lay down the naked facts of the Girl Child who has been degraded and demoralised by the values set by our society.

One example among hundreds:

A scorching summer ... just another day, until, out of the blue, like the Immaculate Conception in Indian mythology, a six-month old Girl Child arrived from the threshold of death on the 22nd May 1996 at 12.30 p.m. A refugee found this little soul and very naturally went straight to the police who are supposed to help and assist the public. With the degrading standards of corruption and falsehood, ... it was no surprise that the police very bluntly said that they could not help and suggested that he dump the child in some

orphanage. It was indeed God's Grace that the child was guided to Nanban. At first, on the arrival of the little soul, there was rejoicing, we spontaneously thanked the Lord for saving a life just born and also the mother of the child for having been humane enough just to abandon the child and not bury her alive, burn or strangle her, as is the accepted mode and practice of female infanticide in our society. There are countless such incidents reported in our papers almost every day.

Female infanticide is considered an act of mercy to avoid future hardship and suffering. There is also in our society an aversion to baby girls, even on the part of their own mothers, given the financial burden of their upbringing. To this must be added superstitions and popular beliefs that have considerable influence: the death of a girl, for example, is believed to ensure the birth of a boy.

Methods vary from area to area: the children are given grains of paddy in their milk to choke them, or the juice of poisonous leaves, or pesticides. Still worse is letting the baby girl starve to death slowly, manual strangulation or burying alive. These practices are openly admitted and regarded as a purely private affair in which any publicity or police interference is resented. **Just because of the superstition that a girl child is a curse, these horrendous killings go on. This does not stop at the birth stage but is prevalent among older girls too.**

An example: **Cinderella**, a child from an urban background. One fine morning her mother decided to show Cinderella's horoscope to the local fortune-teller to find out what was in store for the future of her daughter. The fortune-teller said that Cinderella was a curse and would bring misfortune upon the family, that when she married her husband would die. The mother, who for so many years had affectionately nurtured her daughter, now set out to destroy her, tried to push her into prostitution, tried to burn her alive with kerosene, but failed. This was when Cinderella came to Nanban, hopeless, frightened and dejected. Today she is in the process of standing on her own two feet and gaining self-confidence. **This in a society which loudly proclaims that the Girl Child is precious!**

This degradation and discrimination is created around girl children not only among the illiterate, uneducated, poverty-stricken class of society, It is the case in all classes of society, and we have seen potential adopting parents, already deeply involved in an affectionate relationship with a child, drop the child without warning or explanation, because its horoscope is bad! In such cases educated and knowledgeable adults do not differ from illiterate couples.

Each child who comes to the Centre has an individual parable, a tale of woe, many not different from the others as far as the trauma and tribulations they have suffered are concerned. **It is only the degree of their sufferings that differs.** Little Malathi is four years old. To say that she had been mauled by a beast would be insulting to beasts, as no beast is known to assault sexually an infant of its own kind. She was the victim of a brutal assault by a soulless, mindless paedophile who passed as a human being, a maniac masquerading as a man. He left her to die at the riverside. She was found and taken to hospital where the doctors sutured some of her wounds but estimated that dealing with some of her internal wounds to make her fit for a normal woman's life would cost four hundred thousand Rupees. That was two years ago. Malathi is being cared for at Nanban and growing up with the help of everyone. Her future, however?

To end on a note of optimism: youth unemployment is getting worse and Nanban decided that something must be done. The Nanban Juvenile Girls Home in Madurai takes in girls who have left home. One of these girls who has had a

most painful past has chosen to drive an AutoRickshaw, in Madurai where girls don't even ride bicycles! Thanks to a loan from Brother James, Secretary at Nanban, she has bought her vehicle and has become the first woman rickshaw driver in Madurai.

Following her example, five more girls now drive rickshaws and a dozen more are preparing to ... The newspapers are talking about this novelty, these girls calling into question society by choosing jobs reserved for men ... may they serve as an example!

Thanks to Manos Unidas of Spain, a project has been set up whereby youths undergo training to drive rickshaws as a profession. At the end of a stipulated time they will pay back their loan and own their own autorickshaw. It is also stipulated that marriages will be arranged, as is the custom in Indian culture, between the youths and young women from Nanban. Given the dowry system still very prevalent in our society, it is an extremely serious duty for Nanban to support our girls to settle down in life with worthy partners. The rehabilitated youth of the Auto Project are an ideal choice.

**Krousar Thmey (New Family) 4 rue 257 - TUK Laâk - Toul Kauk - Phnom Penh - Cambodia - Benoît Duchateau-Arminjon**

Context in which I provide this testimony: for 95 years we have continued our development in our traditional branches of activity, linked always to children in difficulty. We have at present around twenty programmes in the following areas:

**Social** firstly, with two temporary welcome centres for street children (welcome, shelter, education) for a period of six months - the children are free to come and go as they please, the aim being to re-integrate them into their families or to find an adequate solution.

**A permanent welcome centre**, of the family home kind, for a dozen ex-street kids.

**3 protection centres** for orphaned, abandoned children, or for those sold or used by their parents.

**A village** (25 houses) for single women (often widows) with their children and also for Cambodian children released from prisons in Thailand.

**Educational**, next, with two schools for blind Cambodian children (Braille books in Khmer are made), the only school for deaf children, and schools for training street kids in seagoing jobs (see the programme Thalassa - 27/2/98).

**Cultural**, finally, with two shadow theatre workshops, 3 dance and music troupes, an exhibition on Khmer heritage.

To this end, I have a team of 160 Cambodians and am helped by, on average, 4 volunteers who spend at least a year with us to deal with administrative problems at our Krousar Thmey Headquarters. All our programmes are directed solely by Cambodians, there is no foreign involvement in our programmes except for short training periods. This means a great deal of activity, and problems too,

in a country where solutions are frequently sought by means of armed violence. Lately, we have had to battle (administrative struggles with the people concerned) to have the military evacuate our land at Poïpet (near the Thai border) where we built 25 houses for widows and children. Part of the terrain had been demined and built on but there remained 5 hectares that the military took over illegally. They dug up 50,000 cubic metres of land to build a hotel on! My local teams received death threats ... the problem seems to have been resolved, but as long as the land has not been evacuated I shall continue to have my doubts.

Other than these sorts of problems, the system as a whole seems to work well, thanks to the responsibility of the teams. I should like to stress this point, for other NGOs retain expatriates on their programmes, considering the Cambodians incapable of facing up to their own responsibilities. I confirm what was discussed at Rufisque: with a real will to delegate and transmit responsibility, it works! It is only possible, however, with specific objectives, adequate technical training together with ethical training is important ... and the most difficult. To transmit to them and get them to integrate these ideas of devotion, care and respect for others, ideas which are, I believe, ours and increasingly the attributes of Christians, is not easy. I speak all the more knowledgeably in that, after receiving a classical Christian education, I am no longer a believer. This requires a great deal of involvement and regular organisation of meetings and events that mould a constructive spirit to change the mentalities of those who are usually more inclined to be consumers of humanitarian official aid than people involved disinterestedly. After 7 years, I see these efforts are beginning to bear fruit, good fruit, even though we must continue to toil if we are to reap a regular crop.

Thus, I can progressively withdraw from Krousar Thmey, to take a little time for myself, without worrying about what might happen in my absence.

## **GIRLS IN THIS SET-UP**

The problem of street girls is much more marginal than that of boys. As in many countries, Cambodian girls are kept at home for daily tasks (housework, cooking, looking after brothers and sisters). They are rarely, therefore, abandoned, and less likely to escape from the family, no matter how bad it may be.

The girls we come across in the street are often from street families. They stay on the street only when very young and are quickly recruited or kidnapped for brothels or bought as servants (like Cosette, in a way). In the brothels, bought by the owner (often a woman), they have no way of escaping.

Considered to have a debt to repay, (which the girl will often acknowledge from ignorance or fatalism), they will remain, under the female pimp's thumb, subjected to customers, mostly Cambodian or Asian of Chinese origin, who come in increasing numbers on sex tours. Although we are beginning to see Western clients, these form only a small proportion.

When we contact the young women in the street, it is vital that a woman speak to them to ascertain their problems, endeavour to calm them down, talk about health problems, make them aware of the risks of remaining on the street. Our male helpers are there chiefly for security or to try to solve problems with the police or the brothels, should we learn that one of the girls we know is working in one. It is never easy. If we are successful in getting a girl out of a brothel (a rare occurrence) without the proprietor's consent, it is vital that the latter should be

prevented from finding the girl, for that would imperil the security of our centres. The police and the army are more likely to collaborate with those who have money than with those seeking to protect the children whom they consider merely to be putting up with their bad "karma", resulting from their bad actions in previous incarnations. In fact, rather than protectors, it is not unusual to find the police or the military themselves engaged in this human traffic. In spite of this reality, it is important not to generalize and not to reject outright those institutions in which we are sometimes surprised to find excellent and honest collaborators, but without real power.

This is a dangerous area and after having been "somewhat engaged" in freeing children, taking wrongdoers to court, we have had to admit that we cannot change the world but merely help it evolve, to allow these children to have a slightly more dignified existence.

To move too quickly, too forcefully, would jeopardize our activity and, given the outreach of our programmes into other areas since 1996, we have adopted a lower profile in direct action. Recently we have recommenced a public awareness programme by means of posters.

If the girls are on the street, we try to get them into a temporary welcome centre to reintegrate them into their family or to find them a stable solution (often a protection centre). A girl who has been a prostitute in a brothel is always a serious problem and it is not a good idea to let her mix with boys. Her self image is often that of a prostitute, girl/object, and, to exist, she will try to tempt the oldest, even the educators, installing a veritable "suk" in the welcome centre. You wouldn't believe it! If she cannot be transferred straightaway to an organization taking care of girls of the same kind, it is vital to keep her occupied permanently, to allow her first of all to change her daily activities by taking part in simple tasks with the cook, give her the younger children to look after (she often does this very well), but we must be aware that she has a short attention span. We must quickly find her something to do and little by little get her involved in activities that will help her to develop a more positive image of herself, show her that each individual must decide for herself what she wants to do and be responsible for her actions. In short, turn back the tide of fatalism. We must at all costs avoid her labelling herself "prostitute" and being ridiculed as such by the others.

We are lucky to have in our child protection centres several highly competent Khmer music and dance groups. This has proved an excellent means of stabilizing girls who have been in prostitution or lived on the streets. They very soon become aware of their bodies, and, from the first graceful movements, find, in the admiration of others, a reward for their efforts, a positive image of themselves. This is very important, but they frequently won't make the effort if they are too sullied by prostitution.

If they have been subjected to prostitution for too long and too deeply, it will be very difficult to get them out of a system where they might make good money, even if this is a complete fiction, for the brothel keeper keeps all the money they make. It will be very difficult to get them stabilized and to suggest a job likely to provide the wherewithal for their daily needs. In Cambodia, as in most poor countries, little jobs require a great deal of perseverance for very small rewards. If the girls do not collaborate, there is very little chance of reintegration.

As to pregnant girls, we have never come across any street births. In spite of the problems linked to protecting children and their being abandoned (part of traditional tales), babies are respected and hospitals will usually accept young

mothers-to-be. Abortion is also the solution often taken by young single girls, even if society looks down on this practice.

As to prevention, an awareness programme is carried out by the NGOs directed towards women in several villages in the countryside. This awareness is integrated in literacy programmes in which, for example, learning to read will be directed towards themes such as trade in women and children, prostitution, AIDS prevention, the risks involved in moving to the big towns, of going onto the street, etc.

**Dominique Lemay - VIRLANIE FONDATION, INC,**  
**No.1 Mola Street, corner Sunrise Avenue, La Paz Village,**  
**Makati City, Philippines**  
**tel: 896 22 89 or 896 31 12 - Fax: 897-2584.**

I feel strongly and passionately about the problem of girls on the street.

The foundation has set up some programmes. What answers have we for young prostitutes, street girls, girls in prison, mentally-handicapped girls on the street, girls who have suffered incest ... ? Lots, and, at the same time, very few. We seek, we create, we press for answers.

VirLANIE has been working with the street children of Manila for ten years. We estimate, in comparison with boys, that girls make up 20% of the street population, i.e., about 2,000 to 3,000 girls. We do not include in that number underage girls working in bars or massage parlours.

At the moment, we have about 130 girls living at the Foundation and a dozen or so mothers with their babies.

Street children often set up a network of relations. They meet other children to create "children's syndicates".

The Foundation encounters girls in the street, in children's prisons, but also in slums where we work with girls who are extremely marginalized.

The task of the street educators is to contact, discuss and propose that the girls come to live in one of the Foundations's homes. This is an area of potential failure.

In Manila most street girls prostitute themselves, some regularly, others from time to time in accordance with the needs of the syndicate.

From the beginning of 1989 the foundation has taken in girls and boys. In 1992 we opened family homes specially for girl prostitutes. We feel their problems are different from those of the other girls and boys on the street (money, relationship with adults ...). In fact, subsequently, we have continued to welcome without difficulty girl prostitutes in our mixed homes.

We welcome more and more sexually abused children, particularly girls. Incest is one of the factors leading to prostitution. Many of the girl prostitutes have been abused in their childhood.

Some girls run away from the foundation and prefer to remain on the street. It is easy for girls to earn a little money from prostitution. We try by schooling and training to get them to stop prostitution.

We try to be available, welcoming, to care for them when ill. I am thinking of Maribel, 14 years old, prostitute, who we have known for several years. She

came to us one evening extremely ill. She was hospitalized in the emergency ward for a few days and on leaving hospital went back on the street.

The street educators with the foundation's volunteers find activities for the children. The medical team works with the educators on the streets, and in the prison.

On a daily basis we endeavour to give them the maximum means of getting off the street. We have set up a medical and psychological system in the foundation. Lots of girls have, on arriving, serious problems. We must try to help them resolve them or endure them.

Health, contraception, hygiene training is given regularly by the medical team in the various homes. These training schemes are mixed.

We also welcome pregnant girls or young women with babies born on the street. At present, in the home "mother-child", we have all the facilities needed to help these young pregnant girls or mothers and their babies to the maximum: regular medical check-ups, psychological check-ups, discussion groups, training on the premises (hairdressing salon) or outside.

Outings, leisure activities, music, dance, are all part of our activities for the young mothers. We teach them to love their baby, to educate it, to live with it ... but it is hard!

Some of the girls go back to the street, leaving us with the baby. We are preparing, for 1999, a specific family therapy programme for these young girls.

We try to facilitate their return with their baby into their family whenever possible. We are full of admiration for Romelda whose baby Karla has been operated on for hydrocephaly. Since the child's birth, she has looked after this 18 month old handicapped child day and night, with a great deal of love.

(The foundation is well aware of the problems of handicapped children and has set up a programme "Jade" for these children. Perhaps the handicapped child could be the them of future issues?)

**INFORMATION:** for five years now, the foundation has welcomed throughout the year about 15 volunteers, principally Europeans, for periods from a month to two years. They are aged from 18 to 70. To be a volunteer at Virlanie you do not need to be a doctor, lawyer, ..; you must above all love children, bring joy, good humour, and respect.the Philippine culture.

**NEXT REPPER MEETING, SATURDAY, 10 OCTOBER,  
10 a.m. to 6 p.m.  
at MEDECINS DU MONDE - 62 rue MARCADET, 75018 PARIS**

**Send all correspondence to 'CONSTRUIRE',  
16 rue de la GLACIERE, PARIS 75013  
Telephone & Fax: 01 47 07 87 14, or, at home: 01 45 35 92 53**

**We have a REPPER site at Macon:  
code:www.enfants-des-rues.com|www.street-children.com**

## SMALL ADS ..... SMALL ADS ... SMALL ADS....

**Pierre Boutaud, President of "Enfants du Soleil" Madagascar**, writes us that "At present, I am working with the EEC for food aid and I have been offered help with tools. Unfortunately, my needs were too few! For example, I can have 1,000 cases of tools, but not 50, because tenders are made through the EEC. I intend to send your requests to **Joël Rousseau - Les Enfants du Soleil - 103 rue Legendre 75017 Paris**. This offer concerns cases of tools for wood work, metalwork, building, and also sewing machine needs.

If every one indicates his or her needs, we can make up a standard tool case under the name "Enfants du Soleil". We shall need somewhere in Paris for dispatching. If the idea appeals to you, I'll go on with it. I now have a place in Paris. If it interests you, I can ask whether REPPER might be housed there. Just an idea."

Those responsible for the association "**ART CHILD**" have contacted us on the subject of their project "**CHILDREN FOR OTHER CHILDREN**". The idea is that, with the support of UNESCO, Save The Children, Care and others, children between 8 and 12 years old will express themselves by means of frescoes (using any kind of material: cardboard, fabric, ...). The theme for all of them will be "**THE FUTURE**", theirs and the world's. Two frescoes per country will be chosen by a local jury. Other stages are foreseen...

On completion of the project, an exhibition of 400 frescoes will be organized and the frescoes will be auctioned by Sotheby's International in New York in April 1999. The sums obtained will be given to associations dealing with children.

Since Art Child's dossier is extremely full, complex (and weighty!), please contact them directly and they will forward it to you. All we give here is the minimum information.

**PATRICE ALLOU - ART CHILD 2000 - 136 Quai Louis Blériot, 75016 Paris**  
**Tel: 01 44 15 97 46; Fax: 06 61 65 97 46.**

The newspaper Le Monde of 2 June 1998 had a full page article on the exploitation of little girls as servants in the Côte d'Ivoire. A fitting complement to this dossier.

A very complete thesis on prostitution in sub-Saharan Africa has been drafted by **Parivash Ardei-Amini** and financed by the Scelles Foundation. It is entitled "A bane on African culture - prostitution: causes and consequences". To obtain this voluminous document, contact the **Scelles Foundation, 14 rue Mondétour 75001 Paris**.

**The friend who translated REPPER into Spanish is no longer available. We must find urgently, therefore, someone to replace her. We already have two issues to translate. Thanks to he or she who will be willing to devote a few hours, twice a year, to this task. And Thanks to Sylvie for having done so up to now.**

**URGENT: Athanese Rwamo, in charge of the O.P.D.E. in Burundi is seeking FF 1,200 per month, to pay a psychologist treating children having witnessed the atrocities, and having been subjected to them.**