

Down to Zero

Fighting sexual exploitation of children



Endline Outcome Evaluation and Learning Report: Stepping Up the Fight Against Sexual Exploitation of Children (SUFASEC) 2023-2026

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sexual exploitation of children (SEC) remains a critical and evolving challenge in Northern Thailand, particularly among vulnerable groups such as ethnic minority, migrant, and stateless children. Rapid digitalization has further increased exposure to online risks, while persistent social norms, stigma, and fragmented service systems continue to limit effective prevention and response. In this context, the **SUFASEC project (2023–2026)** was designed as an integrated, multi-level intervention to address SEC through behavioural change, strengthened protective environments, and enhanced system-level engagement.

This report presents the findings of the **Endline Outcome Evaluation and Learning Report**, which aims to assess the project's contribution to changes across three key outcomes: (1) social norms and behaviours, (2) access to protective services, and (3) participation and accountability of duty bearers. The evaluation applied a **qualitative, outcome-oriented approach**, using key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and document review across six sub-districts in three districts (Fang, Pang Mapha, and Chiang Khong) of Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son, and Chiang Rai provinces. A hybrid evaluation model was used, with an external consultant leading the design, analysis, and interpretation, while the project team supported coordination and data collection. Findings were triangulated across multiple stakeholders, with analysis focusing on contribution rather than attribution.

The evaluation finds that SUFASEC has made **substantial progress at the outcome level**. Under Outcome 1, there is clear evidence of behavioural change among parents and youth, including increased adoption of positive parenting practices and greater awareness of online risks, grooming, and self-protection. Youth have emerged as active agents of change, contributing to peer learning and awareness. However, broader social norm transformation at the community level remains in a transitional stage.

Under Outcome 2, the project has significantly improved access to **child-friendly protective environments**, particularly through the establishment of Youth-Friendly Corners (YFCs) in schools. These spaces have increased help-seeking behaviour and facilitated linkages to health and protection services. Nonetheless, referral systems remain largely informal, with limited standardization and institutionalization.

Under Outcome 3, the evaluation identifies **early but important progress in system-level change**, including the integration of SEC issues into District Quality of Life Committees and improved multi-sector coordination. However, institutionalization is still at an early stage, with limited budget allocation, unclear accountability mechanisms, and continued reliance on individual leadership.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that SUFASEC demonstrates **high relevance, strong effectiveness at behavioural and service levels, and emerging system-level impact**. The project has successfully established a foundation for integrated child protection responses. However, it is currently at a **critical transition point from pilot innovation toward institutionalization and sustainability**.

To consolidate and scale these results, the evaluation recommends: (1) institutionalizing SEC prevention within local governance systems, including formal mandates and budget allocation; (2) developing standardized referral mechanisms (SOPs) to strengthen service delivery; (3) enhancing sustainability by embedding roles within institutions rather than individuals; (4) expanding outreach to vulnerable and underserved groups; and (5) strengthening responses to emerging digital risks. Continued investment is required to ensure that the gains achieved are sustained and translated into long-term systemic change.

2. PROJECT BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1 Context of Sexual Exploitation of Children in Thailand

Sexual exploitation of children (SEC) remains a significant and evolving challenge in Thailand, particularly in the northern border provinces where structural vulnerabilities are concentrated. Children in these areas—especially those from ethnic minority, migrant, and stateless backgrounds—face compounded risks due to poverty, limited access to services, and legal invisibility.

Evidence indicates that children and youth are increasingly exposed to online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA), driven by rapid digitalization and widespread access to mobile technologies. At the same time, reporting rates remain low due to stigma, fear, and social norms that discourage open discussion of sexuality and abuse.

These dynamics create a context in which SEC risks are both underreported and insufficiently addressed, requiring interventions that go beyond awareness-raising to address behavioural, normative, and systemic drivers simultaneously.

2.2 Structural and Systemic Challenges

The evaluation identifies several persistent structural and system-level constraints that limit effective prevention and response to SEC:

- **Fragmented service delivery systems**, with weak coordination between schools, health services, and child protection actors
- **Lack of standardized referral mechanisms**, resulting in inconsistent responses to cases
- **Limited institutional capacity at the local level**, including insufficient budget allocation and unclear mandates
- **High dependency on individual leadership**, making progress vulnerable to staff turnover
- **Barriers to access for vulnerable groups**, particularly stateless and migrant children
- These challenges directly affect progress under:
- **Outcome 2 (protective environments)**, where service access and quality remain uneven
- **Outcome 3 (accountability and system strengthening)**, where institutionalization is still limited

2.3 Social Norms and Cultural Context (Outcome 1)

Social and cultural norms continue to play a critical role in shaping SEC risks and responses. In many communities, discussions around sexuality remain sensitive, and issues related to exploitation are often stigmatized or silenced. The evaluation finds that such norms contribute to:

- Limited communication between parents and children on sexual health and safety
- Low reporting of abuse cases
- Normalization of certain harmful practices or behaviours

These factors underscore the importance of **Outcome 1**, which focuses on enabling children, youth, and communities to challenge harmful norms and adopt protective behaviours.

2.4 Rationale for the SUFASEC Approach

In response to these interconnected challenges, the SUFASEC project was designed as a **multi-level intervention** addressing:

- **Behavioural change** at individual and family levels (Outcome 1)
- **Access to services and protective environments** (Outcome 2)
- **Strengthening of local governance and accountability systems** (Outcome 3)

The approach reflects an understanding that SEC cannot be effectively addressed through isolated interventions. Instead, it requires **coordinated action across family, school, community, and institutional systems**.

The selection of project areas—Fang, Pang Mapha, and Chiang Khong—was based on their high vulnerability profiles, including ethnic diversity, cross-border dynamics, and limited access to formal protection systems.

2.5 Analytical Framing

The evaluation adopts an integrated analytical lens, recognizing that SEC risks are shaped by the interaction of:

- **Structural vulnerabilities** (poverty, legal status, marginalization)
- **Social norms and behaviours** (stigma, silence, gender norms)
- **System gaps** (service fragmentation, weak coordination)
- **Emerging digital risks** (online grooming and exploitation)

This framing aligns with the SUFASEC Results Framework and supports the assessment of changes across **Outcome 1–3**.

2.6 Implication for Evaluation

Given this complexity, the evaluation focuses on assessing **contribution to change across multiple levels**, rather than direct attribution. It examines how the project has influenced behaviours, norms, and systems within a challenging and evolving context.

3. PROJECT DESIGN AND INTERVENTION MODEL

3.1 Overall Programme Design

The SUFASEC project was designed as an integrated, multi-level intervention to address sexual exploitation of children (SEC) through simultaneous changes at behavioural, social, and system levels.

The design is grounded in the understanding that SEC is driven by interconnected factors, including harmful social norms, limited protective environments, and weak institutional coordination. As such, the project adopts a systems-oriented approach, targeting three mutually reinforcing domains aligned with the Results Framework:

1. **Outcome 1:** Children, youth, and communities challenge harmful social norms related to SEC
2. **Outcome 2:** Children and youth access strengthened protective environments
3. **Outcome 3:** Children and civil society participate in holding duty bearers accountable

These outcomes are interdependent and designed to reinforce one another. Behavioural change (Outcome 1) increases demand for protection, while strengthened services (Outcome 2) and improved governance (Outcome 3) enable sustained and systemic responses.

3.2 Theory of Change

The implicit Theory of Change underpinning SUFASEC can be summarized as follows:

If children, youth, and caregivers develop knowledge, skills, and agency to prevent and respond to SEC (Outcome 1), and if accessible, child-friendly protection mechanisms are strengthened (Outcome 2), and if local systems and duty bearers are engaged and accountable (Outcome 3), then communities will be better equipped to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation of children in a sustainable manner.

This Theory of Change reflects a shift from **awareness-based interventions toward system-oriented change**, emphasizing:

- Behavioural transformation at individual and family levels
- Normative change within communities
- Institutionalization within local governance systems

3.3 Results Chain and Intervention Logic

The project's intervention logic follows a Results Chain structure:

Inputs

- Technical support and funding
- Capacity-building resources and training materials
- Partnerships with schools, CSOs, and local authorities

Activities

- Positive parenting training and community awareness sessions
- Youth capacity-building and peer-led initiatives
- Establishment of Youth-Friendly Corners in schools
- Strengthening coordination through District Quality of Life Committees
- Multi-sector engagement and advocacy activities

Outputs

- Increased knowledge and awareness among parents and youth
- Functioning youth-led platforms and safe spaces
- Improved collaboration between service providers
- Increased engagement of duty bearers

Outcomes (aligned with Results Framework)

- Outcome 1: Behavioural and normative changes among children, youth, and communities
- Outcome 2: Improved access to child protection services and safe environments
- Outcome 3: Strengthened participation and accountability within local governance systems

Impact (Long-term)

- Reduced vulnerability of children to sexual exploitation
- Strengthened and sustainable child protection systems

3.4 Key Intervention Components

The evaluation identifies four core components that operationalize the project design:

1. **Behaviour Change and Social Norm Transformation (Outcome 1):** The project promotes positive parenting, youth empowerment, and community awareness to challenge harmful norms and practices. Youth play an active role as change agents, contributing to peer learning and community engagement.
2. **Strengthening Protective Environments (Outcome 2):** A key innovation is the establishment of **Youth-Friendly Corners**, which serve as accessible, confidential spaces for counselling and information. These are complemented by efforts to improve linkages with health services and child protection mechanisms.
3. **System Strengthening and Governance Engagement (Outcome 3):** The project works through **District Quality of Life Committees (QoL Committees)** to integrate child protection into local governance structures. This enables multi-sector coordination and promotes shared accountability among duty bearers.
4. **Multi-Stakeholder Engagement:** SUFASEC engages a wide range of stakeholders, including children and youth, parents, teachers, schools, public health services, local authorities, and civil society organizations. This approach supports **collective ownership and sustainability**.

3.5 Assumptions and Risks

The effectiveness of the intervention model is based on several key assumptions:

- Stakeholders are willing to engage in sensitive discussions on sexuality and child protection
- Local authorities have sufficient capacity and commitment to integrate SEC into governance structures
- Children and youth are able to participate meaningfully in programme activities
- Coordination across sectors can be sustained over time

However, the evaluation identifies risks, including:

- Leadership turnover affecting continuity
- Limited institutional budgets
- Cultural resistance to norm change
- Rapidly evolving digital risks

These factors influence the pace and sustainability of change across all three outcomes.

3.6 Analytical Reflection on the Intervention Model

The evaluation finds that the SUFASEC design is highly relevant and conceptually strong, particularly in its integration of behavioural, social, and system-level interventions.

The model demonstrates:

- Internal coherence, with mutually reinforcing components across outcomes
- Contextual relevance, addressing key drivers of SEC in vulnerable communities
- Emerging effectiveness, particularly at behavioural and service access levels

However, the transition from project-based implementation to institutionalized systems remains incomplete, particularly under Outcome 3.

3.7 Adaptive Learning and Evaluation Approach

The SUFASEC project incorporates an **adaptive learning and evaluation approach** as an integral part of its intervention design, enabling continuous reflection, evidence generation, and improvement throughout implementation.

This approach adopts a **hybrid model**, combining the complementary strengths of the implementing organization and an external evaluator.

The project team (TLSDF) plays a central role in facilitating stakeholder engagement, coordinating the evaluation process, and supporting data collection activities, including key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). This ensures strong contextual grounding and access to diverse stakeholders.

An external consultant provides technical leadership in the development of the evaluation framework, including the formulation of evaluation questions, design of data collection tools,

and analytical approach. The consultant also leads the **analysis, interpretation of findings, and overall assessment**, ensuring methodological rigor and analytical independence.

This integrated approach enables the evaluation to balance:

- **Contextual relevance and participation**, through active involvement of the project team
- **Objectivity and analytical rigor**, through independent assessment by the external consultant

As such, the evaluation process is not treated as a standalone exercise, but as part of a broader **learning-oriented design**, supporting adaptive management and strengthening the overall effectiveness of the project.

This approach aligns with adaptive programming principles and strengthens the project's capacity to respond to complex and evolving risks related to sexual exploitation of children.

4. EVALUATION FINDINGS

4.1 Outcome 1: Children, youth, and communities challenge harmful social norms related to SEC

Evidence of Change:

The evaluation finds consistent evidence of behavioural change at the individual and family levels. Parents reported a shift from punitive discipline toward **positive parenting practices**, including increased communication and openness to discussing sexuality and online risks.

For example, in Fang district, a parent participating in the positive parenting sessions described a change in approach:

“Before, when my child made mistakes, I would scold or punish immediately. Now, I try to listen first and explain calmly. My child talks to me more, especially about what they see online.”

Similarly, teachers in Pang Mapha reported that students are more willing to raise concerns related to online risks and peer relationships. In one school, a teacher noted that:

“Students now come to consult teachers when they feel uncomfortable about messages or online interactions. This did not happen before.”

In addition, youth-led activities have contributed to peer-level change. In Chiang Khong, student leaders facilitated awareness sessions on online grooming, resulting in increased peer discussions and mutual support.

Interpretation:

These findings suggest that the project has been effective in influencing knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) among key target groups. The integration of youth-led approaches appears particularly important in reinforcing behavioural change and enabling peer-to-peer influence.

However, while individual and interpersonal changes are evident, normative change at the broader community level remains partial. Cultural sensitivities around sexuality continue to limit open discussion and full normalization.

Significance:

Changes observed under Outcome 1 are foundational for longer-term impact, as they increase both the capacity and willingness of individuals and families to prevent and respond to SEC.

The emergence of youth as active agents of change represents a critical shift from passive beneficiaries to contributors, strengthening the sustainability of behavioural change.

Limitations:

- Evidence is largely perception-based and not supported by quantitative baseline data
- Changes in deep-rooted social norms require longer timeframes
- Variability exists across communities depending on local context and leadership

4.2 Outcome 2: Children and youth access strengthened protective environments

Evidence of Change:

The project has contributed to **improved access to safe, child-friendly services**, particularly through the establishment of **Youth-Friendly Corners (YFCs)** in six schools.

Students consistently described these spaces as accessible, confidential, and supportive. Teachers reported increased engagement from students seeking advice or assistance.

A concrete example from Chiang Khong Wittayakom School illustrates this change. A student experiencing distress related to online harassment approached the YFC. The teacher provided initial counselling and subsequently referred the case to a local health service provider. This demonstrates an emerging **functional referral pathway**, even in the absence of formalized procedures.

Students also highlighted increased confidence in seeking help:

"Before, I didn't know who to talk to. Now I can go to the YFC. It feels safer."

In addition, coordination between schools, health services, and protection actors has improved. In several cases, schools were able to link students to external services more effectively than before.

Interpretation:

The findings indicate that the project has contributed to enhancing protective environments, particularly at the school level. YFCs function as effective entry points into the child protection system, bridging gaps between children and formal services.

However, the system remains partially institutionalized. Referral pathways are often informal and dependent on personal relationships rather than standardized procedures.

Significance:

Improved access to safe spaces and services is a critical enabling factor for both prevention and response to SEC. The presence of YFCs contributes to increased visibility of protection mechanisms and reduces barriers to help-seeking.

The strengthening of coordination across sectors represents an important step toward system-level functionality.

Limitations:

- Absence of formalized referral protocols (SOPs)
- Inconsistent confidentiality standards
- Uneven access for out-of-school and highly vulnerable children
- Sustainability of YFCs depends on school-level commitment and resources

4.3 Outcome 3: Children and civil society participate in holding duty bearers accountable

Evidence of Change:

The evaluation identifies **early but meaningful progress in system-level engagement and governance integration.**

In Pang Mapha district, the local administration issued a formal order establishing a **district-level working group on sexual exploitation of children**, involving schools, health services, and social development actors. This reflects a shift from ad hoc coordination to more structured, institutional engagement.

Similarly, District Quality of Life Committees (QoL Committees) in target areas have begun to integrate child protection and SEC issues into their agendas. This has facilitated **multi-sector dialogue and joint planning.**

Youth and civil society actors have also participated in engagement platforms. For instance, youth representatives contributed perspectives on online risks and protection needs during district-level discussions.

Interpretation:

These findings suggest that the project has contributed to initiating system-level change, particularly in strengthening coordination and elevating SEC as a local governance issue.

However, institutionalization remains limited. Current progress relies heavily on individual champions and project facilitation rather than formal structures and mandates.

Significance:

The integration of SEC into local governance mechanisms represents a strategic entry point for sustainability and scale. It signals a shift from project-driven activities toward system ownership.

Strengthened engagement of duty bearers enhances accountability and creates opportunities for long-term policy and budget integration.

Limitations:

- Limited budget allocation for SEC within local systems
- Lack of formal mandates and accountability frameworks
- Vulnerability to leadership turnover
- Participation of children and civil society is not yet systematically embedded

4.4 Cross-Cutting Analysis

Across all three outcomes, the evaluation identifies several key patterns:

1. **Strongest Progress at Behavioural Level:** Changes at the individual and interpersonal levels (Outcome 1) are the most advanced and consistent.
2. **Intermediate Progress at Service Level:** Protective environments (Outcome 2) show clear improvements but remain partially institutionalized.
3. **Early-Stage Progress at System Level:** System-level change (Outcome 3) has been initiated but requires further consolidation and formalization.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The evaluation concludes that the SUFASEC project demonstrates **high relevance, strong effectiveness at the outcome level, and emerging system-level contributions** in addressing sexual exploitation of children (SEC) in vulnerable contexts in Northern Thailand.

The project's integrated design—linking **behavioural change (Outcome 1), strengthened protective environments (Outcome 2), and system engagement (Outcome 3)**—has proven to be **conceptually coherent and operationally effective**.

1. **Strong Progress in Behavioural Change (Outcome 1):** The project has achieved **substantive and consistent changes in knowledge, attitudes, and practices** among children, youth, and caregivers. Positive parenting, increased communication, and youth engagement indicate that **behavioural transformation is well-established**. However, **social norm change remains partial**, reflecting the longer-term nature of normative transformation.
2. **Functional but Partially Institutionalized Protective Systems (Outcome 2):** The project has successfully established **accessible and trusted protective mechanisms**, particularly through Youth-Friendly Corners and improved coordination between service providers. Nevertheless, these systems remain **dependent on informal practices**, with limited standardization and institutional anchoring.
3. **Early-Stage System Change (Outcome 3):** The integration of SEC into District Quality of Life Committees represents a **significant entry point for system-level change**. The project has strengthened multi-sector collaboration and increased engagement of duty bearers. However, **institutionalization is not yet secured**, with limited budget allocation, unclear accountability structures, and reliance on individual leadership.
4. **Transition Phase Toward Institutionalization:** Overall, SUFASEC is at a **critical transition point**: From **pilot and innovation → toward institutionalization and sustainability**. While foundational systems are in place, further investment is required to consolidate and scale these gains.

5.2 Strategic Recommendations

Based on the findings, the evaluation proposes the following strategic priorities:

1. **Institutionalize SEC within Local Governance Systems (Outcome 3)**
 - Integrate SEC prevention into **formal mandates and district development plans**
 - Secure **dedicated budget allocation** within local governance structures
 - Define clear **roles, responsibilities, and accountability mechanisms**

2. **Develop and Standardize Referral Systems (Outcome 2)**
 - Establish **standard operating procedures (SOPs)** for referral pathways
 - Strengthen **confidentiality and case management protocols**
 - Improve coordination between education, health, and protection sectors
3. **Strengthen Sustainability Mechanisms**
 - Institutionalize roles within schools and local systems
 - Reduce reliance on individual champions
 - Embed training and capacity-building within existing systems
4. **Expand Inclusion of Vulnerable and Underserved Groups**
 - Extend outreach to **out-of-school children, stateless, and migrant populations**
 - Adapt service delivery models to reach remote and marginalized communities
5. **Enhance Response to Digital Risks (Cross-cutting)**
 - Strengthen digital literacy among children, parents, and teachers
 - Develop tools and strategies to address **online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA)**
 - Integrate digital risk prevention into existing programme components
6. **Consolidate Behavioural and Norm Change (Outcome 1)**
 - Scale up positive parenting programmes
 - Support sustained youth engagement and peer-led initiatives
 - Promote community dialogue to gradually shift social norms

5.3 Implications for Future Investment

The evaluation finds that SUFASEC has developed a **tested and adaptable model** for addressing SEC in complex and vulnerable contexts.

However, the current level of progress represents **early system transformation rather than full institutionalization**.

Strategic investment is therefore required to:

- Consolidate system-level gains
- Scale the model to additional geographic areas
- Strengthen institutional ownership and sustainability
- Enhance adaptive capacity to emerging risks

5.4 Final Reflection

SUFASEC demonstrates that meaningful and sustainable change in child protection requires integrated action across behavioural, service, and system levels.

The project has successfully laid the foundation for such change. The next phase must focus on deepening, institutionalizing, and scaling these results to ensure long-term impact.

6. ANNEXES

Annex 1: [SUFASEC Case Studies 2025-2026](#)