


Family Strengthening

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SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES



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A girl helping her mother in their kitchen garden - a family supported by the family strengthening programme of SOS Children's Villages Bangladesh

1

Family strengthening: Preventing child- family separation

The family strengthening programme of SOS Children's Villages is a story of dynamic adaptability in the face of constant social change. It is our care solution which prevents family breakdown and minimizes the need for alternative care for children. It is also a testament to how SOS Children's Villages opens up to creative opportunities to provide quality care for children in their own families, the best place for a child to grow up in as long as the family is providing adequate care.



A family supported by the Family Strengthening Programme - Luang Prabang, of SOS Children's Villages Laos



The family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,
Preamble

2

Our guiding framework

SOS Children's Villages Strategy 2030

Our Strategy 2030 is premised on our firm belief that a caring and protective family is central to a child's wellbeing and development. Directly relating to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in key areas such as poverty, inequality, education, health, social and child protection, and decent work, the seven strategic initiatives in the strategy gives us direction to achieve our goal of ensuring that many more children have a loving home and an equal chance to succeed by 2030. Of these seven, the second strategic initiative in particular gives our family strengthening programme its mandate.



Strategic Initiative 2

We shall strengthen families by increasing our focus on preventing family separation and providing emergency response.

To achieve this, we will:

- Increase our focus on preventing family separation and promoting quality care for children without parental care or at risk of losing it.
- Strengthen partnerships to assure access to high quality essential services for these children and their families, especially in education, health and economic empowerment.
- Establish preparedness and capacity for emergency response.¹

SOS Care Promise

Our family strengthening programme is firmly anchored in our principles, core values and commitments articulated in the SOS Care Promise, especially care commitment 3.

Care Commitment

We promote family strengthening and strong gatekeeping and ensure the best care options for every child.

The family of origin is the best place for a child to grow up. We support vulnerable families to stay together through our locally contextualized family strengthening services. We also commit to identifying the most suitable care option for every child according to the child's best interests and in close collaboration with the responsible authorities.²

Family Strengthening Programme Manual

This manual is the official policy framework for the global implementation of family strengthening programmes within the SOS Children's Villages. It lays out the principles, procedures, standards and guidelines that govern the operationalization of the programme.³

READ MORE: Refer book 1 of this Information Pack for details on the international and internal policy frameworks that guide our programmes.

¹ *No Child Should Grow Up Alone: SOS Children's Villages Strategy 2030* (Austria: SOS Children's Villages International, 2016).

² *SOS Care Promise: How SOS Children's Villages Ensures the Best Care for Children and Young People* (Austria: SOS Children's Villages International, 2018).

³ *Family Strengthening Programme: Manual for the SOS Children's Villages Organization* (Austria: SOS Children's Villages International, 2007).

3

Our purpose:

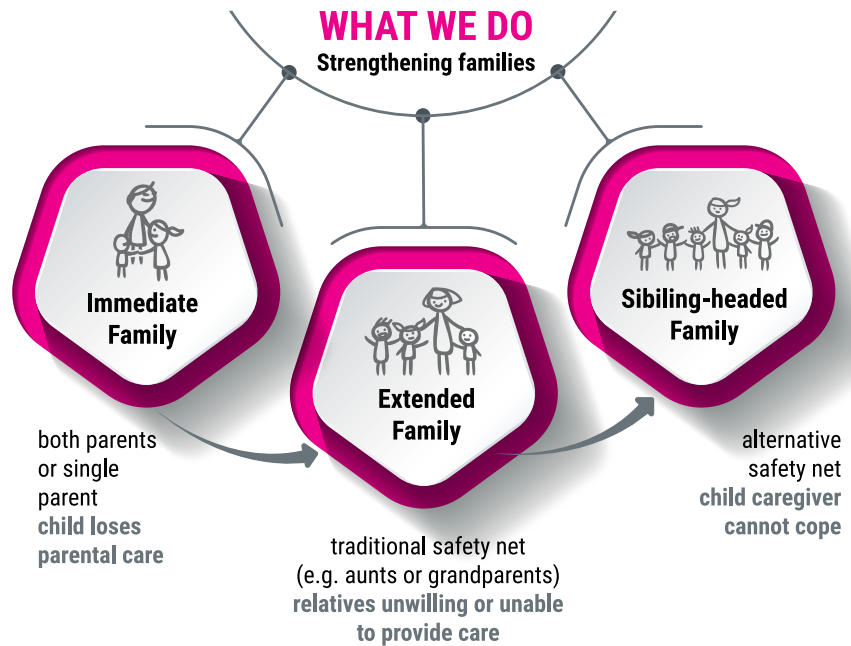
Keeping families together



Children studying with her mother - a family supported by the family strengthening programme of SOS Children's Villages Nepal



We enable children who are at risk of losing the care of their family to grow within a caring family environment. We work directly with families and communities to empower them to effectively protect and care for their children, in cooperation with local authorities and other service providers.



WHAT WE BELIEVE

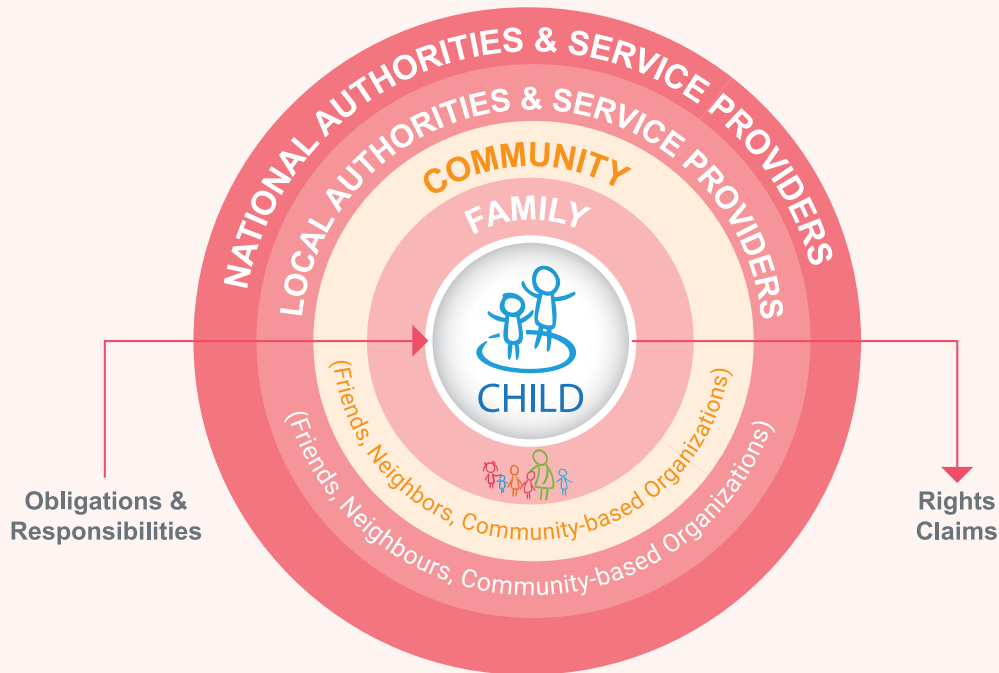
Where we would like children to grow up = biological family

Source: *Family Strengthening Programme: Manual for the SOS Children's Villages Organization*. SOS Children's Villages International, 2007.

Where families are able to and willing to provide adequate care to their own children, it is in a child's best interests to remain with the family of origin. When families are willing to care for their own children but cannot, due to the lack of resources, due to the inability to mobilize their own social support, due to gaps in knowledge or child rearing capacity, we consider these problems entirely possible to resolve with additional support.

Our support which is tailored to the specific needs of each family literally prevents the family from breaking apart. Therefore, in partnership with state (local government) parties, and likeminded non-state, community-based organization's that support child rights and child care we work to strengthen vulnerable families in order to prevent the separation of children from their families.

THE DUTY BEARERS WE EMPOWER



Source: *Family Strengthening Programme: Manual for the SOS Children's Villages Organization*. SOS Children's Villages International, 2007.

Our family strengthening programmes across Asia aim to empower families by strengthening their capacity to protect and care for their own children through the provision of various support services.

The programme also strengthens the community around the child, focusing on the safety nets for vulnerable children and their families within the community. Where children have lost the care of their biological family, we provide family-based care options such as kinship care whereby a child's extended family is similarly empowered to provide reliable, stable care to the child.

Where necessary, we partner with state and other stakeholders to provide access to basic healthcare and quality education to support children and families to become self-reliant.



A meeting between SOS Children's Villages and a local partner organization supporting the family strengthening programme in Battambang, Cambodia

4

Our principles in strengthening families

1 The best place for children to grow is within their biological family. The family is at the heart of society and is the natural environment for the healthy development and well-being of children.

2 Caregivers are responsible for the development of their children. The caregiver is the person who fulfils the parental role in the life of the child, with primary responsibility for creating the caring family environment required for the child's healthy development.

3 Communities are a direct source of support for children and their families. Children and families are part of the wider community in which they live. Community members have a responsibility to protect children's rights and can mobilize their own resources to address to the problem of children.

4 The goal of development is the realization of human rights. Girls and boys, as well as their caregivers, are entitled to all the rights stated in international human rights treaties, Governments and other duty bearers have the obligation to recognize, respect, protect, promote and fulfil these rights.

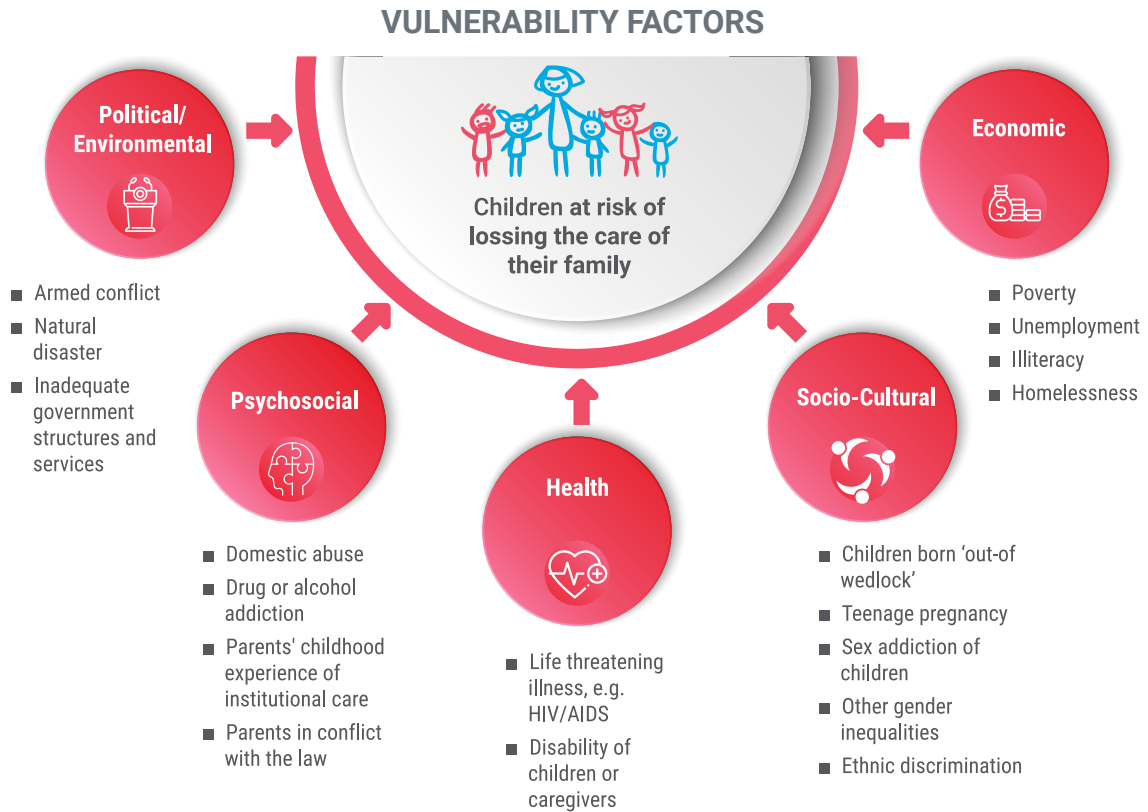


Binota Sarker, a participant of the family strengthening programme of SOS Children's Villages Bangladesh, could buy a cow with her own savings after receiving training on livestock and financial management. This is a very hard battle won for Binota who was left to fend for her whole family including her two children after her husband became paralyzed.

5

Our programme participants

Choosing our programme participants is an important decision which is guided by our principles and clearly articulated in our selection criteria. Vulnerability factors and resilience are considered in making these choices. We consider vulnerability in the following areas as criteria for selection.



Source: *Family Strengthening Programme: Manual for the SOS Children's Villages Organization*. SOS Children's Villages International, 2007.



© Jakob Fuhr

After Linh's father lost one leg in a bicycle accident her mother left the family and he struggled to support his daughter. Today, Linh and her family receive support from SOS Children's Villages Viet Nam to raise a bull that helps the family to make a living. One day, Linh wants to become a doctor.

Each member association develops its own criteria of selection based on the socio-cultural, a economic and political realities of the participant communities. General criteria used by most member associations would include:

- Families that have no regular income (e.g. no government jobs or pension, no shops or alternative means of income generation).
- Families from particularly marginalized communities which are denied access to or cannot access mainstream services due to their social status, distance or lack of ability to reach appropriate mainstream services.
- Families that have land but are unable to cultivate due to lack of capital or knowledge.
- Families taking care of children who have lost one or both parents.
- Families with members who have disabilities (which are recognized by government services as disabilities).
- Families with a dependency ratio of 1:6, that is, one person providing for six or more people.
- Families of children who have no access to education due to lack of finances, or due to cultural issues that prevent girl children from going to school.
- Single parent households that are vulnerable or at risk.

The process of family strengthening

6

01

Once selection is done, beneficiary families are taken through a process involving assessment of all needs, gaps, available resources, existing skills, abilities and capacities.

02

Design of Family Development Plan with clear goals and milestones, including areas in which capacity building is needed.

03

Regular monitoring of their Family Development Plans, in monthly meetings with program staff and beneficiary families. Amending plans as needed and tracking milestones and development.

04

Families achieve the indicators of self-sufficiency which they have aimed for and are released from the programme.

Steps in the process

Family strengthening is, for us, a long term, committed process, which is spearheaded by the SOS family strengthening team of the given programme location and which draws in the collaboration of relevant state (local government) and non-state partners.

Our process typically involves the following six aspects:

Correctly identifying our target group: Children who are most likely to lose family care

1

We use clear criteria to identify children who run the greatest risk of losing the care of their biological family due to economic difficulties, family sickness, conflict or any other form of family dysfunction.

Providing children with access to essential services for their healthy development

2

We enable the child's family, communities and governments to carry out their care responsibility effectively by strengthening their links with all other services a child needs such as education, nutritious food supplies, medicine and medical attention, guidance and counselling, sports and recreation. This is in order that a child may not only survive but thrive and live with full rights of protection and participation.

Empowering each family using a tailor-made package of enablement

3

We assess the specific needs and capacities of each family and implement a structured family development planning process, helping them to become self-reliant while also educating them in aspects of child rearing such as:

- Information on the rights of children.
- Skills enabling better parent-child communication and healthier relationships.
- Knowledge on how parents can support the education of their children better.
- Skills in how families can address issues such as domestic violence and alcoholism in order that they can live healthily as a family together.
- Education on how they can select a livelihood, become skilled in it and become financially stable to support their children themselves.

4

Empowering Communities to respond effectively to vulnerable children and their families

We support whole communities to organize themselves, in order to address the situations of vulnerable families and their children. We work with community leaders and representatives towards the clear goal of the community becoming self-reliant in the support of children who are at risk of losing the care of their families. We achieve this by strengthening networks in the community and key service providers such as the school system for education, health services, social services and psychosocial support.

5

Building partnerships between families, local government and non-state community organizations to achieve common goals

We work together with individuals, state and non-state services, community groups, and organizations and institutions, wherever this contributes to strengthening families and making them self-reliant in their ability to care for their own children. Through our cooperation, we encourage state and non-state duty bearers to meet their commitments towards children and their families. To do this we support the development of self-help groups, community networks and any other institutions within the community that provide care and support to vulnerable children.

6

Ongoing planning, monitoring and evaluation to keep programmes relevant and effective

Our programmes involve regular in-depth assessment of the situation of our target group within the community. This evaluation informs the Family Development Plan and tools for ongoing monitoring and evaluation.



7

Strengthening
family capacity



A programme participant who is receiving livelihood support from the family strengthening programme of SOS Children's Villages Thailand

Empowerment and education of families is a significant part of the family strengthening process. Here is what we want to see as a result of this capacity building of families.

- Enhance self-reliance enhanced livelihood skills and knowledge of technical aspects of chosen livelihood.
- Develop better family dynamics: Regular and strong communication, listening, encouraging child participation and decision making in the home and give children more dignity.
- Strengthen children's and parent's awareness on children's rights, safety and security issues so that vulnerability to numerous abuses within the community is reduced.
- Enable regular schooling and reduce dropout rates by providing direct financial support for educational and nutritional purposes based on immediacy of need.
- Assist families by establishing essential links with government and other community-based organizations and groups which support education, health and other public services as needed and help families find better opportunities to make use of existing services.
- Better household management skills for parents that enhance quality care and provide a cleaner, more orderly home environment, less conflict and stronger family functionality.

Training topics

Parental skills trainings

- Training for parents on Healthy Home covering topics such as quality nutrition, disease prevention including vaccination, personal hygiene, sanitation and maintaining a clean and healthy environment which contributes to wellbeing and academic success.
- Skills in parent-child dialogue and communication.
- Encouraging child participation in family decision making.

Training on Child Friendly Local Governance for local government officials.

Psychosocial counselling training for SOS field staff implementing the family strengthening programmes.

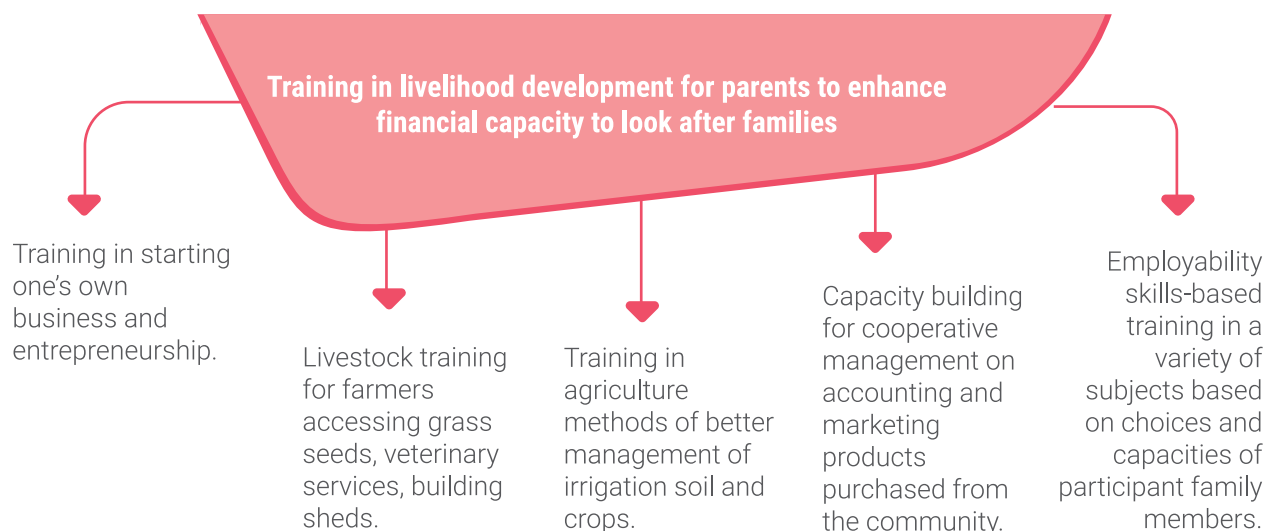
Training on all aspects of child rights for both members of children's clubs and parents.

Child protection and safeguarding training for all stakeholders of the programme.

- Sensitization on the physical, mental, social, economic and legal impacts of child marriage.
- Impact of alcohol and drug abuse by parents on the general psychosocial wellbeing of children, their personal development as responsible citizens and their school performance.
- Domestic violence and its impact on children.

Women participants of the Family Strengthening Programme - Faridabad, India, being educated on personal finance





Trainings & Support Package Received by Families	No. of Families
Child care and parenting support	11851
Economic support	5909
Educational support to parents/caregivers	208
Food and nutrition support	10124
Health care support	10042
Housing support	4146
Legal support	4503
Material support	5741
Psychosocial support	8796
Services provided in: community centre, self-help group, social centre	5861

Note: Data as on December 31, 2020, excluding family strengthening programmes in Japan and South Korea

8

Creating sustainable change:

Family strengthening in practice



Children in the community eagerly attending computer classes offered by the family strengthening programme of SOS Children's Villages Indonesia

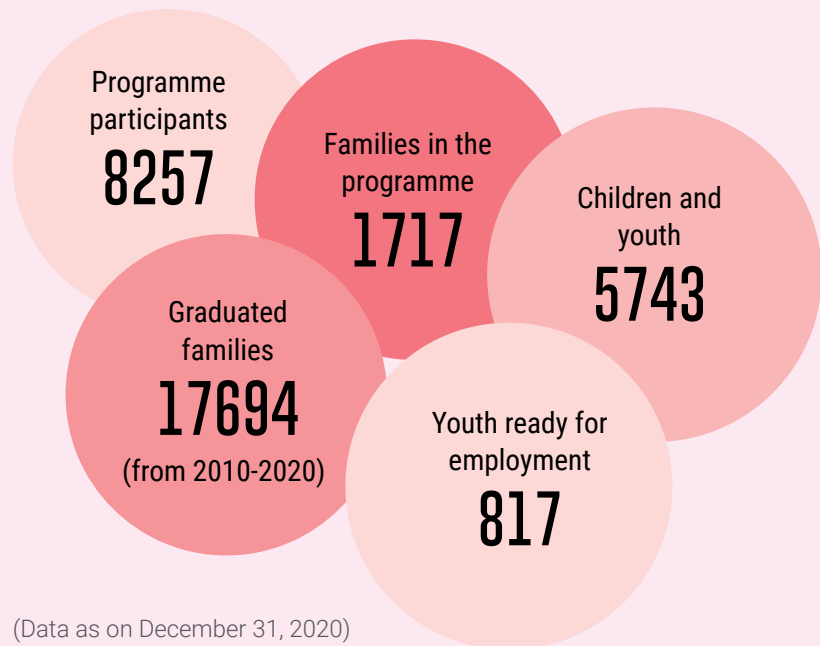
Of these many family strengthening programmes across Asia, we highlight two programmes in order to provide for you a more detailed understanding of the kinds of interventions typically covered in a family strengthening programme. We present a macro view through the programmes of SOS Children's Villages Philippines and a micro view through the programme's implementation in one location in Sri Lanka, as they demonstrate the widespread impact and influence a family strengthening programme can have on children, families and whole communities.

Family strengthening in the Philippines:

Building community resilience

Since 2007, the family strengthening programme of SOS Children's Villages Philippines has been supporting families in seven programme locations across the country.

We recognize that six prominent aspects have led to the success of our family strengthening programme in the Philippines: Successful partnerships, systematic needs assessment, structured and regular family interactions, capacity building of families, community engagement, and research.



(Data as on December 31, 2020)

1 Successful partnerships: Partnerships with local government units, civil society organizations, community (Barangay) leaders and schools have enabled closer monitoring of the families' wellbeing and their children's education.

2 Needs assessment: Systematic and well-targeted analysis of families yielded accurate data, enabling sustainable and suitable livelihood initiatives which have been crucial in helping families reach self-reliance.

3 Family sessions: Regular discussions between social workers and families in the programme held in a timely and efficient manner enabled families to prevent or prepare for some key issues, and successfully respond to others. Focus Group Discussions among community members is one means of arriving at these key issues.

4 Trainings and seminars: Teaching and capacity development for primary caregivers, parents, and household heads in all seven programme locations include the following topics: parenting skills, effective communication as a family, child protection law and rights of a child, entrepreneurship to enable financial self-reliance, employability skills training to increase chances of finding more suitable employment opportunities, and financial management to maximize benefits of the money earned.

5 Community engagement: growing stronger together

- Families are encouraged to engage in civic activities such as clean-up drives and community meetings.
- Capacitating the families in emergency response has helped them to develop great resilience in a highly disaster-prone locality.
- Shared learning activities for children and young people such as backyard gardening, joint tutorials and baking parties promote the enjoyment and learning at the same time.
- College youth have been given employability trainings, educational materials and guidance for the preparations of their licensure exams.⁴
- The families were able to lead community-based groups in their communities by being empowered through the family strengthening programme.

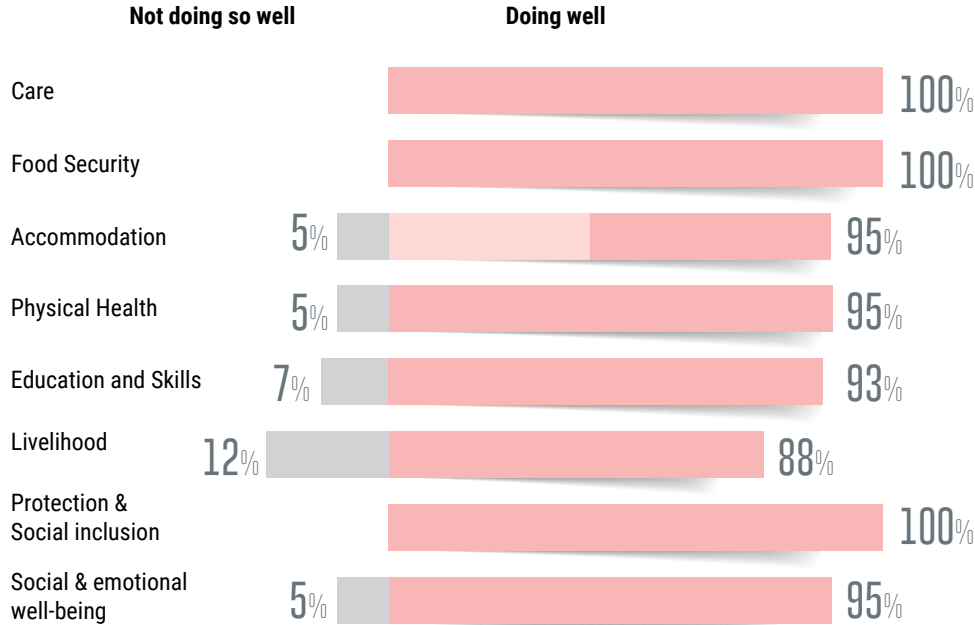
6 Research: Social impact assessment

In 2019, a social impact assessment was carried out at SOS Children's Village Davao. It involved interviewing 82 former participants of the programme and complementary focus group discussions, as well as carrying out 20 stakeholder interviews with programme staff, community-based organizations, and local authorities. Results demonstrate the positive impact at both the individual level and community level as well as in terms of social return on investment (SROI).⁵

⁴ A qualifying exam to get a license to practice in a specific occupation, e.g. nursing.

⁵ *Social Impact Assessment: Country Snapshot – Philippines* (Austria: SOS Children's Villages International). For the full report, refer Ruby Ann L. Ayo and Salvacion L. Villafuerte. *Social Impact Assessment SOS Children's Village Davao, Philippines: Final report 2020* (Philippines: SOS Children's Villages Philippines, 2020).

INDIVIDUAL IMPACT OF FAMILY STRENGTHENING



Source: Social Impact Assessment: Country Snapshot-Philippines. SOS Children’s Villages International, 2021.



A training workshop conducted for community members under the family strengthening programme of SOS Children’s Villages Philippines

Even a pandemic
can bring
blessings



Renato, now the proud owner of his own Pedicab, which helps him sustain his family



Renato and his wife looked up at each other from the Rolls of Rattan, which was their small handicraft business. They both understood what the other was worried about. Their five children were growing up fast, but the money was not growing. It was impossible to feed cloth and educate these healthy, strong, growing youngsters. The couple knew some sacrificial decisions had to be made. So she flew away to work in Saudi Arabia taking the pain of parting just so she could send a monthly wage back home. He rented a Pedicab⁶ and began to earn too. They even managed to purchase a residential plot with her hard earnings which came every month. Things were manageable financially but only just. The pain of staying apart having no cost attached.

Then, COVID-19 struck. She could no longer send any money home. Everything came to a standstill. It seemed like fate was playing a joke on them. But, Renato was determined to have the last laugh. He looked around him and realized that suddenly, in the stillness of lockdowns, mobile services of all sorts had shot into demand. He quickly converted his Pedicab into a motorbike and started his small vegetables and fruit business selling to the neighbourhoods. He was an instant hit. People were so grateful to have their provisions brought to their doorsteps. The business started to boom.

⁴ A Pedicab is a cycle which offers passenger hire services

At this point, the family came to the attention of the family strengthening programme of SOS Children's Villages Philippines. They saw that this father was struggling to raise his five children single-handedly and offered to register Renato and his family under the programme. With this, the children received subsistence for their daily food which immediately released a huge load off Renato. Secondly, they offered him livelihood support, from which he managed to convert the rent of his Pedicab to a purchase agreement. *"It is my very own vehicle now"* he beams, as he proudly rides it about as a very popular vendor of fruits, vegetables and fish. That's not all. At night when Renato speaks on the phone with his wife, his voice is excited. *"They are also teaching us lots of things about how to raise our children, and today I learnt about communicating with them effectively..."* their voices trail off. Even COVID has had a silver lining.

Family strengthening in Sri Lanka:

Empowering communities with skills and knowledge

Tsunami devastated much of the coastal area from the northeast to southwest of Sri Lanka and caused severe damages to the people and properties in 2004. As a preliminary effort to support the children and families that became most vulnerable by this catastrophe, SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka arranged to provide dry rations, vegetables, drinking water and clothes to the affected families who were housed in relief camps.



Self-employment training has enabled mothers to contribute to their family income and the wellbeing of their children, while gaining greater self-confidence and self-worth.

A social survey conducted in Gandara in Matara District followed this preliminary effort. In addition to this, a need assessment had been conducted after which SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka together with SOS Children's Villages International decided to support the most affected families by establishing a permanent Social Centre at Gandara. The community in and around Gandara consists of families living on fishing and manual labour. Currently the family strengthening programme at Gandara serves 390 children from 209 families.

The package of services provided to the programme participants by the Social Centre in Gandara consist of a mid-day meal for the children, extra coaching classes, and pack of milk for infants, school stationery and uniforms, periodic medical assistance, counselling, awareness programmes and self-employment training. The following programmes are also conducted at present:

- **Extra coaching classes:** There has been a significant improvement in educational performances of the children at National Examinations such as G.C.E (Ordinary Level) and G.C.E (Advanced Level). For the first time in 2012, a child secured admission to the university and this number was increased to three in 2013. Similarly, there was a 70 per cent pass rate at the G.C.E (O/L) examination

whereas 60 per cent pass rate at the year 5 scholarship examination in 2013.

- **Kindergarten:** The kindergarten at Gandara has been identified as one of the best early childhood education centres in the southern province. This kindergarten was selected to practice the 5-S concept⁷ by the Primary Education Department of the Southern Provincial Council.
- **Computer lessons for children:** The Social Centre-Gandara conducts computer lessons for the children since 2013 in a space allocated for this purpose where ten children can take computer lesson at a time. The Social Centre has a partnership with Informal education unit of the local government to teach computer literacy for 20 children in two batches. This computer teaching programme which runs for eight months covers basics of computer applications.
- **ICT4D:** The introduction of ICT4D programme at Gandara made a huge impact on the enthusiasm of the beneficiary mothers to learn new things. Since the commencement of ICT4D programme at Gandara, the participant mothers learnt to use simple software, communicate via electronic mails and use internet to learn various topics of their interest.

⁷ 5S is defined as a methodology that results in a workplace that is clean, uncluttered, safe, and well organized to help reduce waste and optimize productivity. It's designed to help build a quality work environment, both physically and mentally.



Daughter looks on with pride as her mother learns to work on the computer

- **Capacity building – awareness and counselling programme:** Awareness programmes on child rights, child protection, parenting, finance management and self-employment have been conducted since 2006 for the children and caregivers in order to improve individual, family and community wellbeing and to assure a safe and caring home environment for the children. Individual, family and group counselling sessions too have been conducted by the Social Centre, with a view to assist the programme participants since there was an imperative need for counselling in the community to find solutions for their family conflicts, issues related to domestic violence, teenage complications and prevention from alcohol addiction and so forth.
- **Self-employment projects:** The Social Centre at Gandara has another partnership with the Department of Small Scale Industries and Businesses Development in the provincial government through which the participant mothers are given a practical training in making coir products such rugs, brooms, cleaning brushes, table mats, etc. These products are sold in the local community as well as to a business entity that exports similar products to India. Such income generating ventures are supportive for the participant mothers to earn a fair amount of income for the family in addition to the earnings of the breadwinner.



TEXT2CHANGE

Through short text messages, big changes can happen. Text2Change is a mobile enabled SMS QuickLearn Programme that empowers women, prepares youth for employment opportunities and provides understanding of gender and development. This digital learning model was initiated to reach parents living in remote areas who are part of our family strengthening programmes in Sri Lanka. Among other things, mothers have learned about domestic violence, and girls and families are rejecting underage marriage. The project has since expanded to other countries in Asia and now also focuses on education and youth employability topics.

A group of mothers from SOS Children's Villages family strengthening programme in Gandara, reading the short text messages they have received through the Text2Change programme, which helps them learn something that adds value to their lives everyday

9

Our achievements

in Asia

Current no of family
strengthening programmes

95

Current no of
participant families*

26092

Current no of
children and youth*

48697

Current no of total
beneficiaries (direct
and indirect)

95575

No of self-reliant families
(2010-2020)*

20633

(Data as on December 31, 2020).

*Excludes the family strengthening programme in Japan and South Korea.

Providing hope and strength to grandparents

Grandparents across Asia are very often seen playing an active and crucial role in child care. When grandparents assume the role of primary caregiver, their deep commitment to care may not always be matched with their levels of energy and capacity to do so. Our family strengthening programme identifies all gaps and needs, and facilitates training for grandparents targeting their specific needs. From interior Cambodia comes one of many delightful stories, of how family strengthening changed the life of a grandmother and her smart young girl who was unwanted and abandoned.

I'm Nearly* from Cambodia and am 16 years-old. I'm now in Grade 9. When I was still very young my parents divorced, and before I even knew anything they had each remarried. Neither wanted me. So they both left me with my grandmother and left with their new partners without any trace or contact. I was abandoned, but my grandmother took care of me.

My grandmother and I live in a small house three kilometres away from my school, and I have been going to school on my bicycle. But I was never very motivated as there was so much difficulty in my life. I had no money to pay for extra classes, or uniforms or other materials. It was all so hard that I just couldn't keep going. I wanted to give up. I just wanted to drop out of school for good.

But then I got introduced to SOS Children's Villages Cambodia. That's when it all changed so dramatically. They had a programme called family strengthening through which they provided me with study materials and school uniforms every year. I was also invited to join for lunch at our community centre which was



Nearly going to school on her bicycle

so helpful. This was a huge relief for my grandmother who had struggled alone daily, to provide for me. They also supported me with remedial classes including English and computer courses to catch up on what I had missed. Even if she wanted to my grandmother couldn't have helped me in this area. So she was thrilled when I got this.

I was so very happy with all this for the first time someone seemed to care about my development and seemed to believe in me. This helped me to believe in myself and I started to want to go to school! I wanted to do well! I spend hours reading English and practicing math and I soon became one of the best students in class. Soon I was even able to help other students with English and every one including my teachers started to praise me. The more I taught English the more I seemed to improve! My life has changed so much!

In the future, I'm sure I want to be an English teacher and help all the children in my community. I want to learn even more and look for a good job. My grandmother is so happy and always admires and encourages me now to study harder to reach my goal in the future. I think they have also helped her to help me!

* Name has been changed to protect the privacy of the child.



Pramila with her mother, confident of a brighter future for her family



Empowerment through education

Premila comes from an underprivileged family in India. Her father was working as an auto rickshaw driver and mother as a domestic maid. It was when her father lost his livelihood that Premila's world came crashing down. Her father's auto rickshaw was stolen and any efforts in trying to locate it were proven futile. The father was left helpless, unable to fend for his family. Premila's mother's meagre income from working as a domestic maid was not enough to make ends meet. The family had to struggle to find their daily meals and education became the least of their priorities. Premila felt that she had to let go of her dream of graduating from college. Just when she thought that all was lost, a coworker from the family strengthening programme of SOS Children's Villages India stepped in to intervene.

Abiding by the SOS guidelines and drawing guidance from SOS expertise, the family strengthening team worked closely with Premila's parents to create a development plan to enhance the family's income and children's wellbeing. The team persuaded the parents to allow Premila to continue with college and to send her three younger brothers back to school. Her mother was trained in traditional embroidery so that an alternative income could be augmented.

Fast forward five years today, Premila has completed her B.Sc. in Computer Science and works full-time with a leading charity. Her contribution to the family income is helping her brothers attend school and the family lives with greater dignity. With newfound hope, Premila is determined to free the family from the clutches of poverty.




A training programme on child rights and protection conducted for community members by SOS Children's Villages Laos

Training parents on child rights and protection

Living within one's family and community, though most appropriate and greatly beneficial to children, can sometimes also entail specific dangers to some children. Risks of a systemic and structural nature sadly prevail in some socio-cultural contexts. These are often dangers that are not spoken of or addressed because they are embedded in culture and tradition which are considered sacred and therefore go unchallenged.

The family strengthening programme recognizes its role in raising a voice and addressing such dangers in order that children's rights may be upheld and children in these risky environments may live safely and happily with caregivers who are knowledgeable enough to protect them. In this manner the programme also addresses the quality aspect of care. The goals of strengthening a family go way beyond just strengthening their economic capacities to enhance the level of knowledge and the depth of the understanding the entire family has on crucial issues such as child rights, safety and protection. This we have seen is pivotal in ensuring that children grow up protected from even systemic dangers and abuses. Consider the story of Kabila.



My name is Kabila* and I live in a village outside the main city of Katmandu. There are six members in my family including father, mother, and five siblings. We belong to a traditional family and we live in a small house. Our economic condition is weak. My father is a casual worker who earns a daily wage, which is often very meagre and uncertain. He sustains our family by the earnings received from it.

As girls in our community are not encouraged to study at an earlier age, we were admitted in the government school late. While my brothers go to school, my sisters and I could not go to school like other children till much later as it was not considered important. This was the reason I was in Grade 4 at the age of 15. But I was very keen to go to school regularly and study well.

Our community has had a practice of getting their girls married at an earlier age. Having a similar mindset, my family was also not different from others. Proposals

* Name has been changed to protect the privacy of the child.

came to my family for my marriage while I was 15. My parents had almost fixed my marriage, but everything changed so positively for me when SOS Children's Villages Nepal started working in my community for the welfare of the children. Under their family strengthening programme, they helped us form a child club in our community. They also carried out various activities and programmes related to child rights and protection in our community. Awareness on child marriage and its devastating impacts on children's health, wellbeing and education was also conducted.

My parents also attended various trainings and orientation programmes. This was the turning point. These programs opened their eyes! My parents began to think about my future in a new way. They immediately cancelled all plans for an early marriage. SOS staff visited regularly and spoke openly on how early marriage can affect girls like me and then affect the community as well. My family has also become aware that child marriage is a crime.

If SOS Children's Villages had not started these children's clubs and meetings for parents, I would have been married at 15 and definitely lost my chance of living a healthy life and completing my education. I hate to even think about that. They have done a great service to our community.



SOS Children's Villages Nepal supported the local child club in Gorkha to enhance their skills so that they could raise awareness about prevailing issues in the community including child marriage through performing street drama

The future of family strengthening

STATE RECOGNITION OF FAMILY STRENGTHENING

It is both our aspiration to see and our commitment to advocate for more governments across Asia to recognize family strengthening as a legitimate and more appropriate option of child care which needs to be supported both in policy and practice. We therefore leverage and strengthen partnerships with government and other counterparts to integrate collaborative interventions.

REACHING THE HARD-TO-REACH

We have the ambition to reach those unreachable, particularly isolated and deprived geographic locations in Asia and those that for various socio-political reasons are marginalized and cut off from mainstream life of the developing world.

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FSP COMMUNITIES AS POWERFUL INFLUENCERS

We want to see our current family strengthening participant communities working powerfully as agents of change and reach adjoining communities to create a larger impact. We have seen that this is possible.

ADAPTATION IN A WORLD OF CHANGE

In the future, we see ourselves retaining and affirming our dynamic character of adaptability. We have seen with the advent of COVID-19 that adaptation is the key to survival and we intend to keep adapting the family strengthening model to stay relevant to the local needs and contexts across Asia. This will necessarily involve strengthening the work of disaster preparedness among participant families and communities including a stronger response to COVID realities.

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Livelihood support for poultry farming provided by the family strengthening programme of SOS Children's Villages Thailand



A learning activity conducted for children in the community under the family strengthening programme of SOS Children's Villages Indonesia



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