



International Coalition of
SITES of CONSCIENCE

SITE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: A Toolkit on Oral History, Forum Theater and Dialogue



About The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience

The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC) is a global network of museums, historic sites and grassroots initiatives dedicated to building a more just and peaceful future through engaging communities in remembering struggles for human rights and addressing their modern repercussions. Founded in 1999, the ICSC now includes more than 250 Sites of Conscience members in 65 countries. The ICSC supports these members through seven regional networks that encourage collaboration and international exchange of knowledge and best practices.

Learn more at www.sitesofconscience.org.

Cover photo:

A youth project participant explains the oral history she collected to other students.

Unless otherwise noted, all photos were taken by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience.

Designed by Lori J. Dawson

HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT:

In this toolkit, you will find details about how the project “Promoting Historical Dialogue about SGBV during the KR regime” was implemented at the community-level and the main aspects considered as good practices that you may consider using in other contexts. The toolkit is not meant to be followed exactly, but rather to be a source of ideas and guidance from this experience. Flexibility is key to adapt the strategies to your particular context.

This toolkit also aims to provide an idea of how conflict transformation and memorialization methods can be combined to feed into, and reinforce, each other. Ultimately, this toolkit should provide an example of how gendered issues can be addressed to deal with the past and build the present and the future.

If you have any further questions on the project, please contact us at the following addresses: info@kdei-karuna.org or director@kdei-karuna.org

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Students and actors during the Forum Theater performance.

I: INTRODUCTION

Description of the Project:

Cambodia is undergoing rapid economic and cultural development. Yet, the country is still in the process of coming to terms with the past and is still reconciling forty years after the fall of the Khmer Rouge (KR) regime. In between 1975 and 1979, nearly two million Cambodians (a quarter of the population at that time) perished because of execution, starvation, forced labor, forced displacement or torture. Deriving from a radical Maoist and Marxist-Leninist doctrine, the KR wanted to transform Cambodia into a rural, classless, and equalitarian society. They purged all those considered as enemies within their own ranks and throughout the country, particularly intellectuals and educated people who were considered dangerous to the regime. They also implemented radical social transformations, destroying the way people made sense of their own existence through their relationships to others and through the spiritual world.¹ The family, the core social unit in Cambodia's society, was broken down and replaced by a controlled communal life in which individuals had no freedom.

In 2007, a hybrid tribunal began to investigate and try "senior leaders of Democratic Kampuchea and those who were most responsible for crimes committed between 17 April 1975 and 6 January 1979."² More than three decades after the end of the KR regime, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) has been the first serious step in a transitional justice process for Cambodia. The ECCC's retributive justice efforts have largely been complemented by the work of non-governmental organizations and civil society in the field of restorative justice.

ECCC and Victim Participation

The ECCC is the first internationalized court, dealing with mass atrocities, to provide a space and role to survivors by accepting applications of those who have directly suffered physical, psychological, and material harm from the crimes investigated to participate. When accepted by the Court as Civil Parties, victims have the right to participate in the trials, confront the accused, and address direct questions to them. The Civil Parties are also entitled to ask the Court for collective and moral reparations for the harm suffered. As of 2017, 64 Civil Parties were accepted in Case 001, and 3,688 in Cases 002/01 and 002/02. More than 800 have applied for Cases 003 and 004.

Despite the significant outreach activities by civil society and the ECCC, many Cambodians have limited knowledge of the tribunal's existence or proceedings; and, they have very few opportunities to confront and talk about the KR past within their communities or within their families.

The project "Promoting Historical Dialogue about Sexual and Gender-Based Violence during the Khmer Rouge Regime at a Local Historical Site in Siem Reap Province" (hereafter "Promoting Historical Dialogue about SGBV during the KR") was developed by Kdei Karuna (KdK) as an answer to the need to bring transitional justice initiatives closer to the rural communities and address their issues associated with how history and justice have affected and continue to affect their lives.

Many survivors have not shared their experiences of SGBV during the KR, even with their closest family members or peers. This includes cases of forced marriage. By not sharing their experiences, survivors have closed off a central source of support for recovery and healing.

This has led to long-lasting adverse effects on social cohesion within families and communities. KdK's project endeavored to contribute to the public acknowledgement of forced marriage as a gender-based crime, to contribute to a more accurate and comprehensive record of the KR period, and to open up conversation about gender inequality today.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) Under the Khmer Rouge (KR)

SGBV under the KR was long considered to be irrelevant or incidental to the KR atrocities because of beliefs that: there were no SGBV crimes because the KR prohibited "immoral offenses," that there are therefore no survivors of SGBV, and that the culture in Cambodia prevents victims from speaking about these crimes. It was only in 2008 that the first research was done to challenge these perceptions. Forms of SGBV included: rape, forced marriage and forced consummation of the marriage, survival sex, sexual slavery, and other forms of sexual violence.

Survivors' experiences of SGBV remained absent from public memory and societal reconciliation efforts for a long time. Many survivors continue to suffer from discrimination and stigmatization in their communities. Moreover, there has been limited recognition of the intergenerational consequences of forced marriages and their impact on gender norms today. Cambodia ranks at high levels in the Asia-Pacific region regarding the prevalence of SGBV, particularly SGBV against women.

What are forced marriages?

To achieve their goal of an autonomous and independent Cambodia, the KR orchestrated forced marriages. People were forced to marry in order to serve the purpose of the revolution; the KR wanted to increase the population by 20 million. Men and women were matched together and often informed just before the "ceremony" that they had to marry the person the "Angkar" had assigned. Angkar is the name the KR gave to their leaders and the system. All traditional aspects of the wedding celebration were abolished and the ceremonies were held in the communal hall for up to several hundred couples at a time. Refusing to marry the person assigned carried the risk of being sent for re-education, torture, imprisonment, or death.

Goals of the Project:

The project, "Promoting Historical Dialogue about SGBV during the KR," was developed with the aim to promote truth-telling efforts of the survivors of forced marriage during the KR as a means of contributing to gender equality and sustainable peace today.

The specific objectives of the project were stated as follows:

1 – SGBV survivors and civil parties will be able to raise concerns/voices to stakeholders through an interactive experience called "Forum Theater."

2 – Community members and high school students will increase their knowledge about KR history, especially KR-SGBV history via participation in Forum Theater within their communities.

In order to achieve these objectives, KdK used a combined set of strategies. High school students were selected and trained to interview survivors of SGBV and then asked to write oral histories. These records were used to develop a Forum Theater performance, reflecting

the community's past and present issues. At the end of the project, the performance was presented in a public truth-telling event combined with an intergenerational dialogue. The project took place in Siem Reap Province at Phnom Trungbat. This was a crime site during the KR period; a local memorial has been erected there.

Ultimately, the project sought to enable local community members to turn a historical crime site into a meaningful place of memorialization, according to their specific needs, and to enable people to add their voices to the historical record of atrocities committed by the KR. The combination of the strategies used by KdK focused on encouraging and enabling the participants to become active agents within their communities. As such, the project wanted to explore the history while, at the same time, developing a vision for a positive future and the steps to move toward this future.

Primary Audiences:

In accordance with KdK's core participatory approach, the project was developed with and for the community around the chosen local site in Siem Reap Province. Survivors, youth and community members were the primary audiences of the project.

Survivors: The project targeted survivors of SGBV from the KR regime in the villages around the local site of Phnom Trungbat in Siem Reap Province. KdK sought to include both men and women survivors in order to acknowledge the diversity of experiences. As a result, two men and nine women, all victims to the forced marriage initiative during the KR, took part in the project.

Youth: KdK targeted school students, ages 14-15. This age limit took into consideration the students maturity and capacity to understand the KR history and, particularly, the issue of SGBV. The students who participated in the project were not deeply knowledgeable about the topics when they began participating. Most of them had heard some stories from the KR time from their grandparents or their parents. Not all of them had studied the topic at school, as KR history is largely taught in Grade 12. Even with some knowledge, the issue of SGBV during the KR period is rarely known by younger generations. A gender balance was observed in the selection of the sixteen students who participated in the project. Of the sixteen student participants, twelve also collected oral histories.

Community members in rural areas: KdK developed its projects in rural areas where people often lack access to information and have not fully benefited from reconciliation and memorialization initiatives. Overall, the project aimed to highlight the historical site of Phnom Trungbat as a meaningful place of memorialization and as a place of education for the community. The results of the project were presented to the extended community of neighboring villages, including young people. In the final truth-telling event there were 156 participants, including 117 youth.

Duration:

The project was implemented from February 2017 to January 2018.



Students and actors during the Forum Theater performance.

II: SITE BACKGROUND

Kdei Karuna:

Kdei Karuna (KdK) is a politically-neutral, peace-building, non-governmental organization aimed at contributing to sustainable peace efforts in Cambodia. Through an expertise in dialogue facilitation and sustained engagement with communities, KdK encourages locally-driven approaches to address conflict, encourage mutual understanding, and promote healing. KdK is located in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The name comes from a Sanskrit word used in both Hinduism and Buddhism that means “compassionate action aimed to heal.”

KdK began working in Cambodia in 2005 as a branch of the Boston-based International Center for Conciliation (ICfC). Recognizing the unmet needs of Cambodians, especially those living in rural areas who continue to deal with historical wounds, the organization began implementing projects using ICfC’s Historical Conciliation Methodology. Through a deeply reflective dialogue process, this method aims to produce empathy and understanding from hatred and anger, helping people move past painful memories. In 2010, the organization registered as a local non-governmental organization under the laws of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

VISION:

Kdei Karuna envisions an inclusive, peaceful society.

MISSION:

Kdei Karuna works to build a culture of peace based on diversity, equality, and dignity.

Since its inception, KdK has worked on participatory and sustained dialogue between former KR perpetrators and their victims as well as between various minority groups in Cambodia who often face discrimination. In recent years, KdK has implemented a series of survivor dialogues with youth to raise awareness about intergenerational cycles of violence, particularly in relation to gender discrimination.

Phnom Trungbat:

Phnom Trungbat – or Trungbat Mountain - is a historical site of crime from the KR period located in Kralanh District in Siem Reap Province. The KR used these hilly grounds as a killing field where people from neighboring cooperatives were brought to be executed. It is reported that between 1977 and 1979, human remains and rice husks were burnt in a furnace and then used as fertilizer to serve KR’s idea of a wholly agrarian, self-sufficient utopian society.

According to the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), an archive and research organization, the death toll of this killing site was between 35,000 and 36,000 individuals.

In the 1980s, after the fall of the regime, the local authorities and the community jointly excavated as many bones as they could and constructed a stupa - a small mountain-shaped construction used to keep relics - in order to more properly care for the bones of the victims. Other bones found are now kept in cubic-meter cement containers in the former prison office of Trungbat Mountain. As late as 2012, an unearthed mass grave was discovered at the southern base of the mountain. Phnom Trungbat is one of the 388 killing sites and 19,653 mass graves currently numbered in Cambodia by DC-Cam, and one of the eighty-one genocide memorials.

Through its projects, KdK targets communities that align with the following criteria:

1. A rural area where there is limited access to information or discussion on KR history
2. Former KR and victims live together in the community and have not yet re-built relationships
3. Detention or killing sites are not preserved or renovated
4. Local communities are willing to participate in and support KdK's intervention

KdK started to work in Phnom Trungbat with the neighboring villages in 2014. At the beginning, KdK started an assessment in the community and organized community dialogues to discuss people's needs related to dealing with their past history and to introduce the ECCC proceedings and its updates. KdK accompanied some community members, including survivors, local authorities and youth, to visit the court and another memorial site in Phnom Penh. In a second phase, KdK worked to empower local people and equip them with knowledge about conflict transformation that the community needed in KdK's assessment. Fifteen key actors from the community have been trained on conflict resolution, mediation, dialogue facilitation, mental health support, and local memory initiatives. Amongst them, four were elected to become KdK's Local Facilitators (LFs). LFs were mentored while they applied their newly acquired knowledge and skills in the community. As a result, and in consultation with community members, LFs and local authorities renovated the memorial site of Phnom Trungbat and collected the local site's story, disseminating it in the community and in schools. The project "Promoting Historical Dialogue about SGBV during the KR" started a third phase, developed after consultation with the community, during which they worked with villages around the site.

History of KdK's Involvement with the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience:

KdK has been a member of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (the Coalition) since 2013 with the purpose of strengthening its network and voice and exchanging knowledge and expertise with regional and international members of the Coalition. Through Coalition membership, KdK has benefited from Coalition workshops, updates from members, and networking about best practice models. KdK was able to participate in two international conferences organized by the Coalition: "Youth Engagement in Transformative Justice" that took place in Cambodia, and "Women's Rights, SGBV and Women Participation in Dealing with the Past," which was held in Sri Lanka.



Training of the students who participated in the project.



Phnom Trungbat memorial after 2015 renovation with images that show the history of the site.



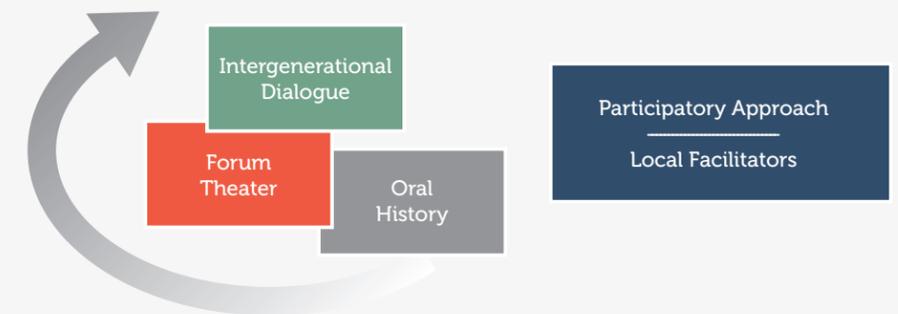
A survivor of SGBV during the KR explains her experience to young people during the truth-telling event as part of the intergenerational dialogue.

III: METHODOLOGY

The core element of all of the methodologies used by KdK is participation. This stems from our past affiliation with the ICfC and the methodology of Historical Conciliation. KdK targets people in rural areas, through a participatory approach, relying on creative and interactive strategies. For the project “Promoting Historical Dialogue about SGBV during the KR,” the approaches used included: oral history, Forum Theater, and intergenerational dialogue. We believe that a combination of approaches is effective in addressing the harms of the past and reflecting on the present and future.

Creative Strategies:

Creative and interactive strategies have the power to engage a wide range of participants from different backgrounds. They are particularly suited to engage young people. All of these tools can create a forum for people to give voice to their stories, thus taking part in the process of healing. In this section, KdK will introduce the key aspects of its participatory approach.



Participatory Approach and Local Facilitators:

Local Facilitators (LFs) are volunteer members of the community who were trained by KdK on conflict resolution, non-violent communication, dialogue facilitation, and mental health support. LFs support and facilitate the implementation of the project at the local level.

Working with trained LFs is instrumental as they have the local knowledge that enables them to work effectively in the project’s villages. They can make use of local resources and knowledge and they can ensure that the objectives are jointly set and not externally imposed. As a result, KdK and LFs can ensure that the community is the primary actor rather than an external institution or organization. This strategy, in turn, strengthens the ownership and the sustainability of the project inside of the community because it guarantees that target groups are consulted and involved during every stage of the project, including involvement in the planning, adjusting, and evaluating.

This strategy also resonates in the specific context of the atrocities committed in Cambodia where community spaces were transformed into crime sites by the KR. It also works well in rural areas that are often remote and not easily accessible. KdK invested in the LFs for the long-term, which then contributed to making the project more cost-efficient as the permanent, local presence of LFs allowed the project staff to save travel costs and time. For the project “Promoting Historical Dialogue about SGBV during the KR,” KdK was able to continue supporting three LFs over several years.

Oral History:

Creative and interactive strategies have the power to engage a wide range of participants from different backgrounds. They are particularly suited to engage young people. All of these tools can create a forum for people to give voice to their stories, thus taking part in the process of healing. In this section, KdK will introduce the key aspects of its participatory approach.

Additional Details About Oral History:

“Oral history refers both to a method of recording and preserving oral testimony and to the product of that process. It begins with an audio or video recording of a first person account made by an interviewer with an interviewee (also referred to as a narrator), both of whom have the conscious intention of creating a permanent record to contribute to an understanding of the past. A document, the oral history, results from this process and is preserved and made available in different formats to other users, researchers, and the public. A critical approach to the oral testimony and interpretations are necessary in the use of oral history. The Oral History Association, based in the United States, encourages individuals and institutions involved with the creation and preservation of oral histories to uphold certain principles, professional and technical standards, and obligations. In addition, the World Health Organization (WHO) outlines specialized training for all members of the story collection team when working with sexual violence survivors to ensure their privacy and well-being as part of the oral history process.”³

KdK uses oral history on a variety of topics in order to capture and document the diversity of experiences under the KR regime and to contribute to the creation of a pluralistic historical record where historical narratives have been used to compete against each other in the political arena. Collecting oral histories is also well-adapted to approach delicate topics, such as SGBV, because the strategy requires the creation of an atmosphere of trust between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Integrating a process of oral history collection into the project also enables everyone to more critically identify and understand the specific issues of the chosen project location. In addition, by having young students collect oral histories of survivors in their communities, KdK contributed to the development of a local historical record, owned by the community, and increased students' understanding of what happened in the past.



Survivors and students discuss about experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime during the intergenerational dialogue after the Forum Theater.

Forum Theater:

Forum Theater is a type of theater created by Augusto Boal as part of what he calls “theater of the oppressed.” In the theater process, the audience members can interrupt a performance in which a character is being oppressed. The audience can suggest different actions in order for the actors to positively influence the outcome of the play.

KdK used Forum Theater as a way to represent and transform conflicts. The plays created by KdK were designed to bring a story to a culminating point of conflict. When this peak was reached, the scene was frozen and then opened to the audience for discussion. As the interventions came from the audience, Forum Theater was an effective tool to promote social change inside the community. People from the community could raise their own ideas and alternatives to the conflict situation and no solution was imposed upon them: “Forum Theater actors don’t deliver messages, but ask questions.”⁴

Forum theater created a visible link between the past history and present-day issues. Used in this way, it allowed for acknowledging the stories of the survivors. Additionally, it addressed a current matter in order to make the audience aware of it and encouraged them to find solutions to present-day problems. For example, regarding gender, KdK often brings into perspective SGBV during the KR and domestic violence in today’s society. This correlation is made to encourage people’s reflection and bring new thoughts to the discussion.

Forum theater is very much community-based, facilitating an inclusive participation of different community members. Furthermore, using Forum Theater for the topic of SGBV is an effective tool to support the community and to break the silence on such violations. As a matter of fact, Forum Theater is a powerful way to bring out the unspoken problems of a group or community.

Choosing the Actors

Forum theater can be used with external professional actors or amateur actors coming from the community. KdK chooses to work with amateurs from the community in accordance with its participatory approach for the following reasons:

- The community can better identify with its own issues.
- Engaging the community in the play can bring a better feeling of achievement and satisfaction. The community may feel more empowered.
- Some matters are less easy to discuss or show when people from outside are involved.
- Amateurs from the community may enhance the audience’s identification and empathy and help reduce the gap between actors and audience.
- It strengthens sustainability as people develop their own solutions.

Intergenerational Dialogue:

The dialogue practiced by KdK was set up between two groups from different generations, namely the one that lived through the KR regime and the one born after. Through intergenerational dialogue, KdK wanted to work on the relationship of survivors and youth in order to build reconciliation and understanding between people.

Intergenerational dialogue brought survivors and young people together in order to raise the younger generation's understanding of the past. KdK used dialogue with the following purposes:

- To create empathy between survivors and young people
- To offer a platform for survivors to disclose their experiences
- To continue opening up the discussion and to enable more voices to be heard
- To heighten young people's knowledge and understanding of KR history

The ultimate objective of the use of intergenerational dialogue on SGBV was to open up a space that would otherwise not exist in order to discuss issues. This tool was also one of the most effective ways for young people to explore and gain knowledge of the KR history from survivors within a context where history is often disputed and where there is not a lot of dialogue at the societal level. The intergenerational dimension of dialogue was particularly important in the Cambodian context because, many times, young people cannot reconcile what happened during the KR regime. The atrocities were so extreme that they cannot imagine it really happened.

Why Talk About History?⁵

Forum theater can be used with external professional actors or amateur actors coming from the community. KdK chooses to work with amateurs from the community in accordance with its participatory approach for the following reasons:

- [...] Small shifts in narratives that are widely divergent can raise the level of future cooperation and reduce the likelihood of returning to the prior state of violent conflict or lack of communication. It is dignifying to be heard with an open mind.
- Even minor symbolic gestures of acknowledgement have the potential to make a difference in changing both private and public discourse about the conflict and the "other" involved.
- Discussing history can give a more nuanced perspective to an individual's sense of identity and ultimately transform the way he or she sees him/herself. It can lead to a change of hearts and minds and can be a transformative moment in people's lives and environs.
- Deeper understanding of the complexity of history also helps prevent violence and ultimately saves lives.
- The realization of the weakness of "historical truths" that contribute to myths of "ancient hatred" or a "yoke of thousands of years long suffering," or similar myths, contributes to opening spaces for less antagonistic, more productive relationships. It allows for a realization that identities are multiple and not necessarily exclusive. It can also inspire people to realize that memories and feelings are often shared across ethnic, religious, and cultural boundaries. Sharing historical accounts leads to realization of the universality of human experiences.



KdK staff member speaks with survivors during the initial assessment.



Blessing ceremony by monks in front of the stupa containing the bones of the victims before the start of the Public Truth-Telling event

IV: PRACTICE



1. Selection, Assessment and Training of the Participants:

The project "Promoting Historical Dialogue about SGBV during the KR" started with the LFs' assessment in the villages neighboring Phnom Trungbat regarding whether there were cases of SGBV in the community. Once this assessment resulted in the identification of survivors, mostly victims of forced marriage, KdK project staff made the first field visit.

SELECTION AND CONSENT:

KdK individually met the survivors identified by the LFs to hear their stories and explain what the project was about. In a subsequent individual meeting, KdK introduced the process and the implications of the project and asked if the person was interested in participating. Lastly, KdK met with all of the participating survivors who accepted, explaining more details. This preparatory phase with survivors was very important because they needed to be aware of what their participation in the project entailed. They also needed to be ready to be asked questions, talk about their lives, and understand the process of the exchange with younger students.

In parallel, KdK used school networks in order to find students who were motivated to participate in the project. Usually, KdK requested the necessary authorization to visit classrooms and then directly presented the project to the students. When it was not possible to do so because of challenging administrative processes then KdK delivered information through teachers.

Survivors and students joined the project on a voluntary basis. This was an essential component of the participatory approach. In order to form pairs between the students and the survivors for the process of story collection, KdK took into account the following criteria:

- Students good at providing support and showing empathy were matched with survivors who were quiet and showed higher symptoms of trauma.
- The most talkative students were matched with less talkative survivors and vice-versa.
- The distance between the students' homes and the survivors' homes was also taken into account.

KdK gave a consent form to the students for them to have the survivor being interviewed sign. It happened sometimes that survivors were not comfortable with signing a written document. In this case, KdK asked the students to renew a verbal consent and agreement with the survivors.

Which set of skills is necessary to work with people who suffered trauma?

The team who implemented the project needed to receive some training about how to engage with people who have experienced trauma and needed to be able to transfer some of this knowledge to the students who were also going to interact with the survivors.

Amongst many, the following items are of utmost importance according to their experience:

- Have a basic understanding of the concept of trauma.
- Have listening skills and be able to show empathy.
- Be aware of speaking and how some words can affect people.
- Make the exchange a dialogic learning atmosphere rather than an interview session.
- First and foremost, be attentive to the survivors' needs: we work with survivors to improve their situation, not to focus on the project's objective in abstract. It is important to keep this in mind throughout the project implementation.
- Manage the expectations of survivors and balance their needs, the clearly stated and understood objectives of the project, and ways in which the organization can or cannot support them.
- Develop a "do no harm" approach and identify potential risks or unintended negative impacts the project could have on people who experienced trauma.
- Be aware of the potential risk of re-traumatization of the survivors in the process of telling and possibly re-living their stories. In this situation, the project team has to be ready to refer to further professional help (psychological or medical support services). Accompaniment throughout the process of the activities and the creation of trustful relationships will help reduce the risk.

TRAINING OF THE STUDENTS:

High school students needed to be prepared before starting the process of interviewing survivors and collecting their stories. Therefore, two three-day trainings took place at the beginning of the project. The training time was determined by the students according to their school schedule. This preparation aimed at both giving students more background on the history and the tools to undertake the story collection.

In its trainings, KdK included topics such as KR history, basic understanding of the psychological impact of KR crimes on survivors, dialogue techniques, interview techniques, active listening, critical thinking, and creative documenting methods. One of the objectives was also to prepare the students to feel able to deal with the possible emotional reactions from survivors when telling their stories (crying, for example, or pausing and staying silent).

KdK provided students with guiding questions before they started the interviews. These questions were classified in three categories: before, during and after the KR regime. Guiding questions also addressed the topic of gender and what it means in survivors' lives today. Students were not bound by these questions and could be flexible depending on their approach and the process of dialogue with the survivor.

2. Interviews and Story Collection:

Over a pre-defined period of time, students were left in autonomy to conduct several interviews with survivors in order to collect their stories. For the first meeting, students were accompanied by LFs. If necessary, and depending on how confident the students felt, LFs could accompany them for a second visit.

The students were given three months for the story collection. The length of each interview depended on the time provided by the survivors. It could be up to two hours per interview session. Depending on the information gathered, students met with survivors between two to six times. The schedule was flexible and negotiated between students and survivors. Usually, students went to meet survivors in their homes in order to facilitate the creation of a good and trustful atmosphere. However, they could decide together on different arrangements.

During the phase of the story collection, the LFs and KdK stayed in touch with the students in order to monitor the process of their work and to support them if they met any difficulty. Mentoring the students was really important in order to make sure they could find solutions to challenges they faced. Usually, KdK planned at least one follow-up visit at the project site. Otherwise, they used regular monitoring phone calls with both students and survivors. The students were also encouraged to help each other to work on their stories; for example helping each other with note-taking, writing and proof-reading.

In case any difficulty arose over the course of story collecting, KdK and/or LFs could intervene to mediate

and find direct solutions. For instance, for the implementation of this project, some students found it hard to get through some questions and to find the right language to talk with survivors. There was one case where one student did not use language politely enough for the interviewee. This was reported to the staff by both the student



Memorial of Phnom Trungbat before 2015 renovation



Phnom Trungbat memorial during an exhibition on the history of the site

and the survivor. KdK staff intervened and consulted with the two parties. LFs were also involved.

From experience, KdK recognized that the younger the students were, the more accompaniment from the project team they needed. It is helpful to be flexible in the process of collecting stories to respond to any challenge that may arise. For example, this project had to overcome the challenge that students did not feel confident in interviewing the survivors. As a result, KdK advised students to do the interviews in pairs so that they would feel more secure. Coupled with the regular follow-up from the team, it made them progressively build a stronger ability to connect with survivors.

Once the students completed the documentation of the survivors' stories, the students needed to present it or read it to the survivor before finalization. This is a key principle of oral history collection.

3. Development of the Storyline for Forum Theater:

Since the assessment, the project team collected ideas to develop the storyline for the Forum Theater performance. For the scope of the project "Promoting Historical Dialogue about SGBV during KR," an important element was to highlight the survivors' stories and examples of the impacts on their lives. At the same time as the oral history collection, KdK started to develop the storyline and held meetings with both students and survivors to present some ideas. They were encouraged to give feedback enriched with the insights they received through the story collection process. The feedback sessions centered on conversations (rather than writing). Afterward, KdK adjusted the story and presented the new version in a following meeting for rehearsal. All aspects of the story had to be agreed to by the participants, recognizing that it represented their past and present realities.

The project team needed to use a conflict-sensitive approach when developing the storyline to ensure they did not have an undesired impact that would heighten the existing divisions or stigma in the community. The involvement of LFs, students, and survivors was very important regarding this aspect. With the oral histories collected by the students, KdK created a book with several copies left for display and consultation at the local memorial of Phnom Trungbat. Some copies were also left with the youth so that they could share with fellow students or with their own communities.

4. Rehearsal:

After the development of the storyline, students and survivors met for rehearsal and were joined by LFs and supervised by KdK staff. The rehearsal sessions also helped to review the storyline. For the project "Promoting Historical Dialogue about SGBV during the KR," only students were willing and comfortable to participate in the Forum Theater performance. With other projects, some survivors were also willing.

KdK and LFs met with the students for two rehearsal sessions. Depending on the group of performers, more sessions may be necessary. During the rehearsal sessions, we used acting and voice exercises with the participants to introduce them to Forum Theater and improvisation. KdK spent time with participants to discuss the characteristics of the different characters. Then they agreed amongst themselves about who would play which role.



Part of the Forum Theater Performance

The actors were not given a text to learn by heart. Ideally, the storyline should be developed in a fifteen to twenty-minute Forum Theater scene. As the storyline had already been developed with participants, we discussed the problems identified, and how we could make these problems clearer. From these ideas and common vision of what should be represented through the play, participants used their own words to perform. As a result, and from the rehearsals, they developed a group dynamic; they learned to function together and adapt to the input provided by the rest of the group. If possible, it might also help to video tape the rehearsal to gain perspective on what would be necessary to adapt.

Because of the nature of the topics addressed, namely past conflict and SGBV, a guiding principle throughout the preparation of the performers was their ability to feel and manage empathy. This was important because they presented the play to an audience where people experienced such situations, so they needed to convey that they are able to “understand” to a certain extent. Forum Theater is never a role play. Participants need to be prepared for emotions that can emerge from the rehearsals. After each rehearsal and performance, the supervising team needed to acknowledge the actors, be supportive, and lead some exercise to shake out their feelings. This is to prevent the risk of vicarious trauma for the performers.

5. Performance and Intergenerational Dialogue:

To present the result of the oral history collection and the Forum Theater performance, and to engage in dialogue, KdK invited members of the community and other young students to attend a half-day event at the local site. For our project, a “public truth-telling” event took place at the site of Phnom Trungbat in front of the stupa. The KdK team consisted of five project staff who supported the organization and the moderation of the Forum Theater performance, for a total of 156 participants including: twenty-eight survivors and villagers, eight local authorities, three LFs, and 117 high school students (including those who took part in the whole project).

KdK involved the actors in the preparation of this final event by asking them to invite their relatives, friends and classmates to the event. The desired outcome was to have a nice and comfortable atmosphere for the event. The event lasted the whole morning and ended with a lunch organized and prepared by the community.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR THEATER: NO NEED!

In our experience, Forum Theater is more effective when there is no barrier between the audience and the performers. A simple stage delimitation, a canvas, or directly using the ground puts the performers and the audience on the same level. The same is true for equipment. When there is equipment such as microphones or stage props, the audience does not easily dare to come on stage to participate.

FORUM THEATER MODERATION:

The performance started and, at the moment where the conflict was culminating, the joker⁶ interrupted and froze the actors. S/he started with general questions to the audience: “What did you observe in the play? What is going on? Are you happy with this end?” Then s/he invited the audience to think about what could be changed in the scene – or before in the play – to lead to a different outcome.

People from the audience would volunteer to come on stage and to embody one of the existing characters or a new one; then they would enact the change they suggest with the other actors. If no one volunteered to come on stage, the joker could combine questions and answers with the audience and then the actors would act out the proposed solution.

Someone from the audience could also come on stage to talk to the actors and tell them what to do. Depending on the input from the audience, the joker would sometimes suggest that the audience consider another character’s point of view. For example, KdK met situations where only women would come on stage to suggest different options for the female’s character being oppressed. Putting the question to the audience of what male characters could do may also lead to interesting contributions.

Guiding Questions for the Joker

1. What did you see in the play?
2. Did you observe or were you interested in anything specific?
3. How was the play?
4. Would you like the play to end like this?
5. How would you wish to end the play? Do you have any ideas or suggestions?
6. Do you want to come and act instead of our actor? And who do you want to play?
7. Is this the ending that you all wish for? Are there any other options?
8. In reality, is the problem easy to deal with like this or not?
9. Who else can be involved in these type of issues/problems?

It is advised to keep the joker’s part short and meaningful. There is no need to explain the story again. Many options have to be shown, but no judgment is made by the joker about which solutions are good ones. Options suggested by the audience are food for thought and the joker should not decide on a solution. In this stage, the joker should endeavor to be as inclusive as possible, and encourage participation from all components of the audience (youth, elders, men, women, etc.).

After input from the audience, the joker would resume the play when s/he felt that the energy was getting lower. As a conclusion, s/he could remind the audience that solutions are not easy and that one needs to be aware of the complexity of the reality.

Dealing with Potentially Difficult Moments

The joker, the supporting staff members and LFs need to stay very attentive to the audience during the performance. Survivors who attend the performance may be triggered by what they see and have flashbacks or a variety of emotions. Therefore, the organizing team needs to be able to sense participants’ reactions and assess how to deal with situations if they arise while paying attention not to disrupt potential emotions that are being expressed (see “*Working with people with trauma*” above).

After the performance, the audience can be accompanied to shake away emotions thanks to some grounding exercises. The joker can also encourage people to pay attention to each other in the community and suggest referrals to relevant individuals or services. LFs can be key people for this purpose. In the aftermath of the activities, they can observe what happens in the community and follow-up with some survivors, especially those who did not open up previously. Through its experience, KdK observed that women survivors tend to find an outlet for their feelings through crying while men tend to act as if they are inattentive, staying farther away from the stage.

INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE:

While the Forum Theater performance provides a good entry point to the issues addressed, intergenerational dialogue offers a space to continue and to deepen the discussion. As the play opened the wound of the past, there needed to be time afterwards for people to express themselves and continue to share, including for those who did not step on stage. This is particularly important for the survivors in attendance.

KdK set up the intergenerational dialogue as a discussion in small groups amongst the audience, with survivors, students, members of the community and a KdK or LF facilitator at each table. The facilitator supported a one hour or one and half hour discussion where survivors could share their experiences with the younger generation. The role of the facilitator was key to ensure that survivors did not get drowned in the past and to bring focus to the present situation and current issues or learnings for the youth.

The whole half-day event ended with a common lunch prepared and organized by the community.



Students during the training before they start to collect the oral histories



Students and Actors during the Forum Theater Performance

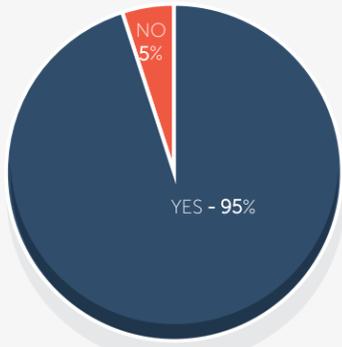
V: EVALUATION

What change did we hope to see through the implementation of the project? Our expected impact was that communities would enhance their awareness of the causes and consequences of SGBV during the KR period, in particular forced marriage, and its impacts on today's society and gender norms. For this purpose, KdK designed a pre- and post-test and compared the results before and after people attended the Forum Theater performance.

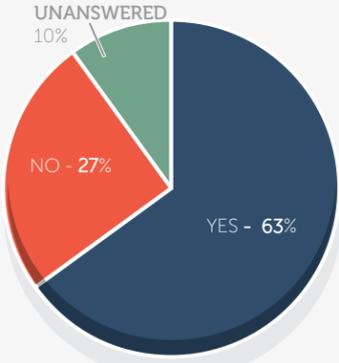
In the questionnaire distributed by KdK to the participants, there were some general survey questions and a pre-test to fill in before the performance started. These questions were developed by KdK to get an idea of the audience members' views and attitudes towards gender equality. At the end of the performance, the participants filled in the post-test, which consisted of the same questions as the pre-test. We combined the closed and open-ended questions in order to get a better sense of the participants' feedback.

Some significant results are presented below. They came from fifty-one questionnaires returned by the audience, which represents approximately 30% of the attendees.

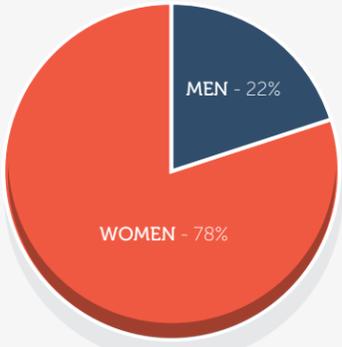
Significant Results From the Survey:



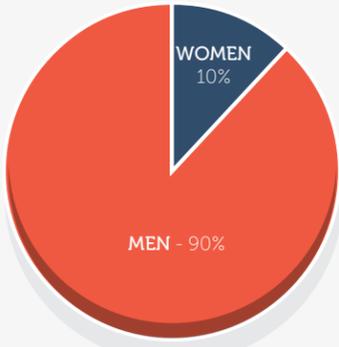
In your opinion, are there equal rights between men and women?



In your opinion, does society define equal rights between men and women?



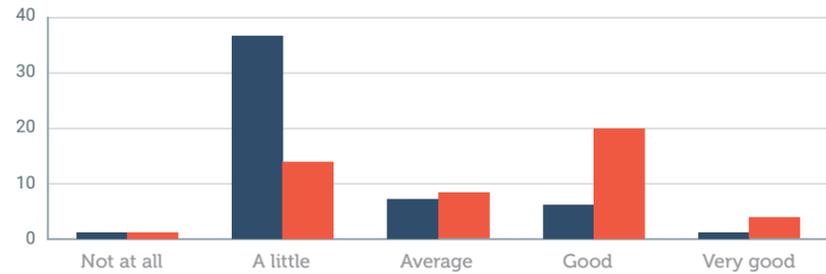
In society in general, between men and women, who face more problems?



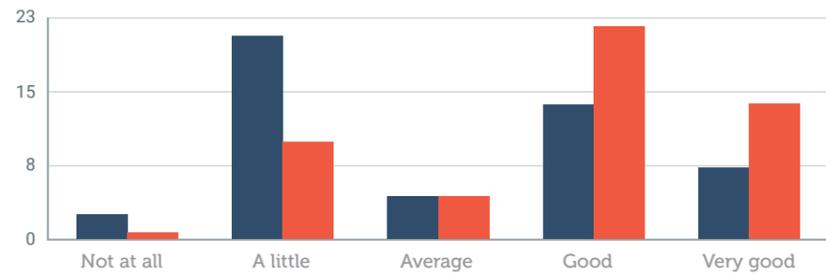
In your opinion, who creates more conflict?

Significant Results From the Pre- and Post-Tests:⁷

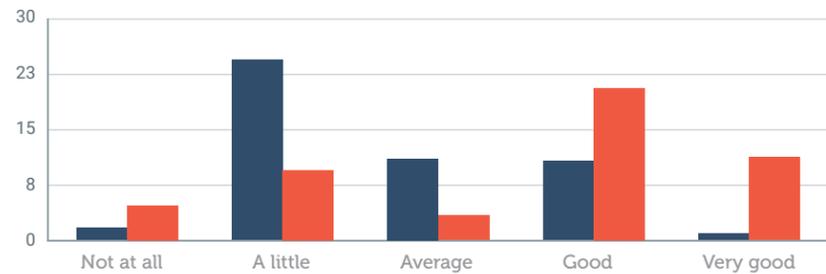
How much do you know about Khmer Rouge history?



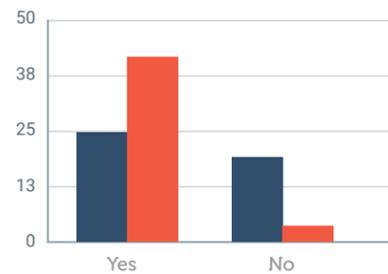
How much do you understand about survivors' experience?



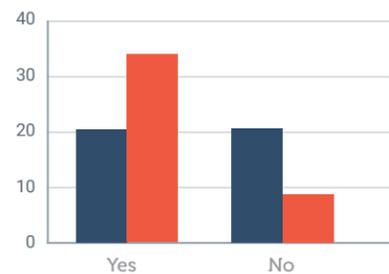
How much do you understand about "gender"?



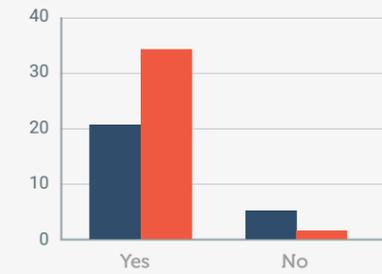
Have you ever heard about gender-based violence?



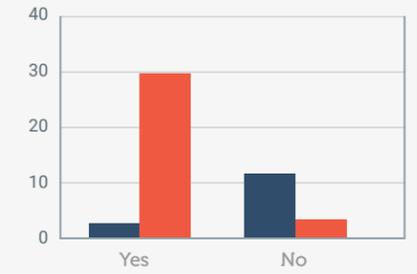
Have you ever discussed the topic of "forced marriage"?



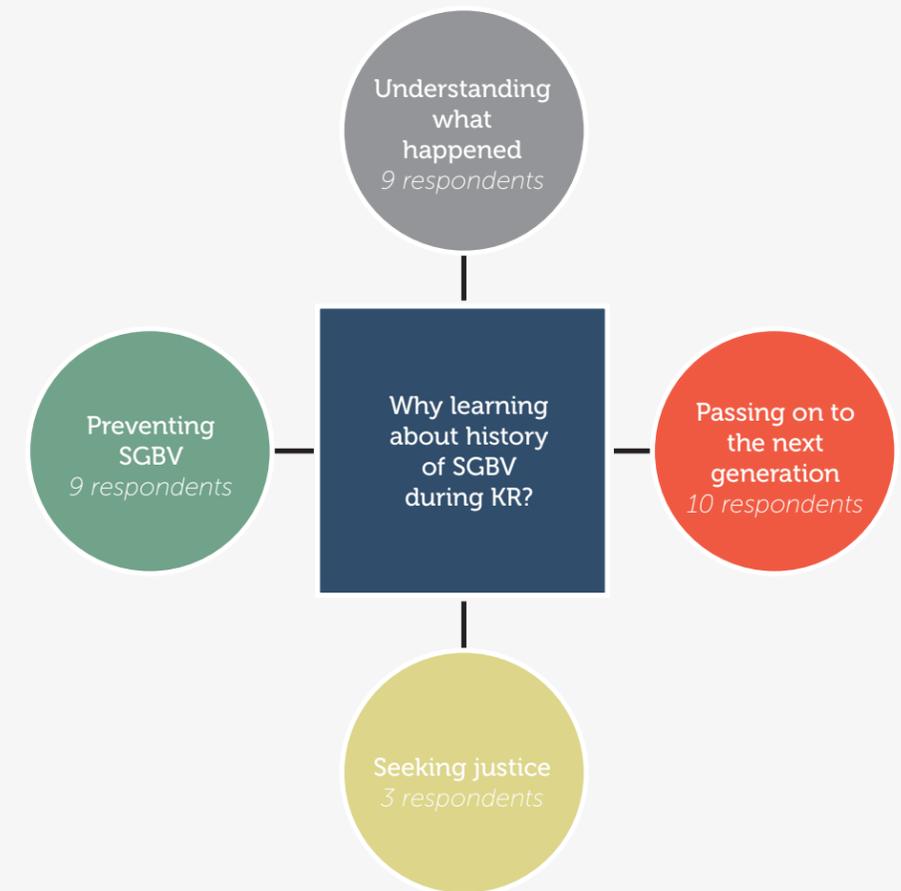
Have you ever heard about SGBV during the Khmer Rouge regime?



Do you know why the Khmer Rouge forced people to marry?



Interesting responses were obtained in the open-ended question from the pre- and post-test, "Why do we need to study the history of SGBV during the Khmer Rouge regime?" In the pre-test, only sixteen people provided an answer to this question while thirty-nine people answered in the post-test. Some clarity emerged in these answers, as represented below:





Training of the students who participated in the project

VI: LESSONS LEARNED

"I was very happy to join the Forum Theater and be selected to be an actress in the performance. Before I joined this project, I did not believe what happened during the Khmer Rouge regime. But after I performed through Forum Theater, I learned many things [...], especially about forced marriage. Moreover, I could build communication with my friends and elder people. In my opinion, this project changed the attitudes of people in the community as it [got them to think about] encouraging daughters to get higher education and also [enabling] their children choose their spouse." This impact, as expressed by Lum Makara, a student in Kralanh High School, Siem Reap Province, is what KdK aimed for - combining a set of creative methods to empower people to become active agents in their own lives and in their communities.

There is a diversity of ways to deal with the past and address painful memories at the community level, and dialogue and understanding can be used in this process through an inclusive and participatory approach. In the project "Promoting Historical Dialogue about SGBV during the KR," the Forum Theater enabled the students to gain more direct insight on history while the process of collecting oral histories provided them with the necessary background to better understand and contextualize what would come through the project process and out of the play. Overall, the complementary nature of the activities contributed to making the project have a deeper impact on the high school students who participated.

KdK tried to approach the topic of SGBV as the backdrop of such widespread atrocities that impacted everyone who lived through these times. Our best advice to implement such a project is careful preparation with participants and community members. In our view, it is essential that all initiatives, especially when we work with survivors, encompass in the project design some space for acknowledgment and empathy. In the combination of activities we chose, the closed and safe setting of the oral history collection process and the cathartic and transformative power of Forum Theater allowed for this.

As conscientious preparation is absolutely necessary, flexibility throughout the project implementation is key. The project framework should be adapted and adjusted to meet a variety of contexts and/or to enable participants to find solutions to a variety of challenges. In this regard, KdK would like to stress the necessary collaboration of young people in the process of questioning the past and people who lived through those atrocities. By nature, the life experience of youth does not always make them fully measure the degree of trauma experienced by the survivors and how to follow-up well with them. This implies an important monitoring work for the project team and LFs and a readiness for any situation that may arise.

We would like to close this toolkit with another quote from a community member, Mr. Vandin, a teacher in Kralanh High School: *"This project is very useful in my community because it helps the young generation to change their behavior and interest in learning about the Khmer Rouge History. It also encourages them to discuss KR history in public. Moreover, this project helps survivors to release their suffering and be more confident to share their experience with the young generation."*

Summary:

This toolkit explains how the strategies of oral history, Forum Theater, and intergenerational dialogue can be combined, through a participatory approach, in order to work on memorialization and conflict transformation at a local memorial site. It also details how to introduce the topics of gender and the connection between past and present.

Photos: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1w9Mr8-nfld4crrjWfMcvvZVii6Yfh7bv?usp=sharing>

Search Terms:

- Intergenerational Dialogue
- Forum Theater
- Oral History
- Youth
- Cambodia
- Memorialization
- Dealing with the Past
- Past and Present
- Gender
- Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
- Forced Marriage
- Trauma
- Survivors
- Participatory Approach
- Transitional Justice
- Khmer Rouge
- Community
- Local Facilitators

References

- ¹ Alexander Laban Hinton (2005). *Why did they kill? Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide*. University of California Press, Berkeley (p. 285)
- ² Democratic Kampuchea is the official name of the Khmer Rouge regime
- ³ From PhD. Theresa de Langis who trained KdK on Oral History.
- ⁴ "Using Forum Theater on Stop Gender-Based Violence", video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQQv8rFcNYg>
- ⁵ ICfC, Train the Trainers Guide – Mediating History, Making Peace: Manual for Trainers in Historical Conciliation (May 2010)
- ⁶ It is the terminology used by A. Boal to designate the neutral facilitator or moderator in Forum Theater.
- ⁷ The results presented do not show the number of people who did not answer to the question. Only data from people who answered to the given questions are entered.



Students during the Forum Theater Performance



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