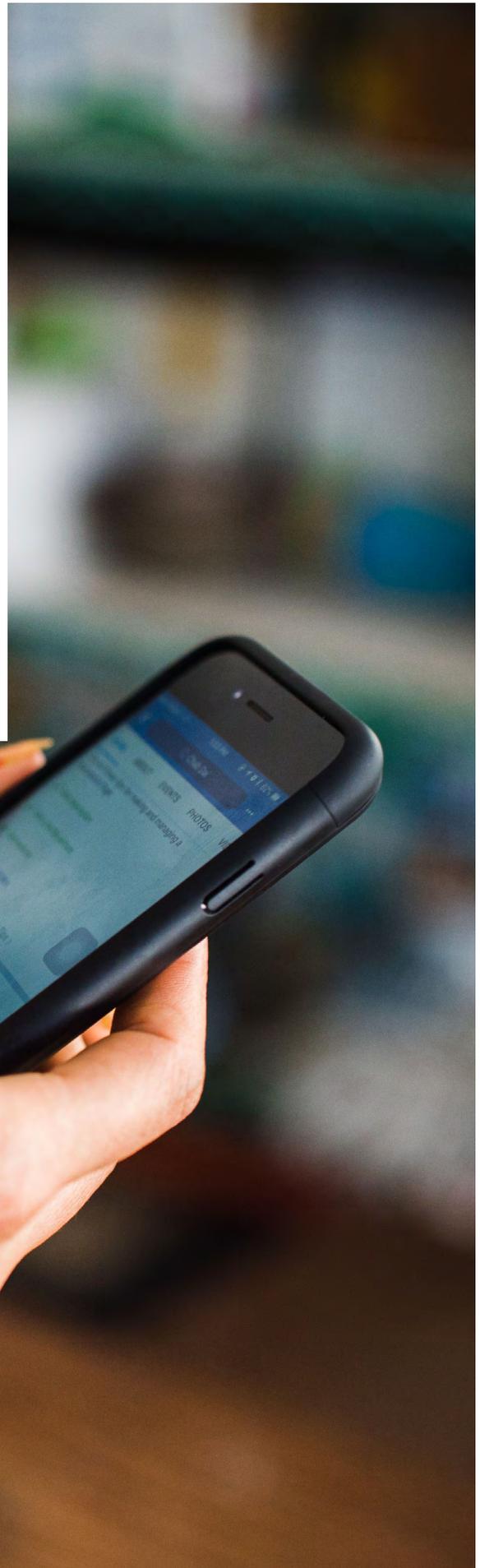




Using Facebook to support victims of human trafficking

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Using Facebook

Using Facebook to support Khmer victims of human trafficking

Over 2 billion people from across the world have signed up for Facebook. Today, it is a social media empire and its founder, Mark Zuckerberg, is worth \$56 billion. In its early years, Facebook sought to connect people and improve communication between friends virtually and almost instantly, now Facebook has greater visions like bringing the world closer together and giving people the power to build communities.

How is this social media platform connecting us to victims?

Since the internet's big boom in the late 80s and early 90s, it is easier to connect with one another. While Facebook reduces the distance between countries and people, the risk of online human trafficking and exploitation has increased tremendously. Traffickers can easily remain anonymous on the internet as they exploit children and adults. On the other hand, technology and social media are also tools to find and communicate with victims of human trafficking.

In August 2017, a video went viral in Cambodia of a woman (aged 28 years old) pleading for help. She worked as a maid in Saudi Arabia for 12 years without receiving any salary. Ros Vibol, Case Monitor at Chab Dai's Case Management Support Project, attempted to contact the victim after watching the video. He also contacted the Anti-Human Trafficking Police in Phnom Penh, who told him that a Labor Ministry official had taken on the case after seeing the same video. While this was not a Chab Dai case, it made Vibol curious about searching online, particularly on Facebook, for similar cases of human trafficking. In 2017, Vibol found four different videos on Facebook pertaining to exploitation, with one of them turning out to be false.

There was another case involving four victims who were all trafficked to China. One of the victims posted a Facebook video explaining that she lives in China, but she wanted to return to Cambodia as her husband continued to hit and rape her. As she was the only victim to have access to Facebook through a VPN, she also shared on behalf of the other victims, who were similarly trapped in forced marriages and unable to leave their husband's house. Unfortunately, Vibol lost contact with the woman.

We also came across another video, which was initially viewed by a young Khmer student studying in China. She contacted the Cambodian Consulate in Beijing, who then contacted Chab Dai. The video was of two Khmer women – one a victim of forced marriage and the other her neighbor – explaining that the victim was originally from Kompong Thom and that a broker had brought her to China for marriage. Because the victim had mental issues, the broker did not think he could sell her and eventually decided to leave her behind. Again, after much coordination between the Consulate and Chab Dai, we lost contact with both women.

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Difficulties with communication on social media.

Using Facebook as a tool to identify and communicate with victims of human trafficking is challenging as there is little information to go on and no guarantee of the person's identity (as anyone can open an account). It is also easy to lose contact with victims as communication is limited by internet availability, phone credit and traffickers who restrict access to a phone. Chinese husbands may even use a phone's GPS to track their wives and often have full control of apps and passwords. Vibol explains that sometimes he receives phone calls from Chinese husbands who are checking the numbers their wives have previously called.

Despite these challenges, Chab Dai will continue to pay close attention to videos and posts of potential human trafficking cases in order to help Khmer victims come back home.

Case Management Support Project
Nadia Jung



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Chab Dai has been building partnerships and competency within the anti-trafficking movement since 2005. Founded in Cambodia, Chab Dai means “joining hands” in Khmer and is an organization committed to working with diverse stakeholders to abolish all forms of abuse and exploitation.

To learn more, go to www.chabdai.org