



COMBATING THE SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS AND SEX TRAFFICKING

Across Asia, where an estimated 4.9 million people were living with HIV in 2007, an encouraging trend has emerged in which new infection rates have dropped by more than 30 percent between 2001 and 2007, according to UNAIDS. Cambodia is leading the region in HIV prevalence reduction, where targeted and ongoing prevention measures have effectively contained the epidemic's stubborn spread. However, with that success comes increased complacency in the continued response to the virus. In addition, lack of knowledge regarding the disease among emerging high-risk populations, coupled with a thriving sex tourism industry, threaten to undercut any gains that have been made in curbing the pandemic. This leaves the nation significantly vulnerable to new outbreaks.

Education is an essential tool in tackling the spread of the disease. Lack of awareness among the Cambodian people, especially in rural areas, opens the door for even greater numbers of people to be unwittingly exposed to the virus. Educating the Cambodian populace about the disease and how it is contracted, therefore, increases the chances it can be prevented and helps maintain progress made in stemming the tide of new infections.

Since 2002, Pact has taken a strategic approach in responding to the HIV/AIDS epidemic with a program that centers on prevention, care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS and their families. Particular outreach efforts are made to society's most-at-risk populations, such as entertainment workers, injecting drug users, and men who have sex with men—groups that are often marginalized and have only recently been incorporated into prevention strategies.

Pact's overall program on HIV/AIDS focuses on building capacity among people living with the disease to serve as envoys who can capitalize on their own personal experiences

to spur behavioral and attitude changes regarding the disease. These envoys also direct high-impact awareness raising campaigns that include broad distribution of up-to-date educational materials, as well as assist in securing the future for children of people living with HIV/AIDS through pioneering outreach activities.

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS

Through a network of provincial partners, Pact supports training for people living with HIV/AIDS, enabling them to develop skills in advocacy and public speaking in order to better educate communities about the disease, with a focus on prevention measures. These trained educators share their experiences at monthly public forums attended by an average of 200 participants and designed to reach a cross-section of society—from farmers to commune and district chiefs—who have had limited or no exposure to the disease. As a result, HIV-positive people are provided the opportunity to interact with friends and neighbors, helping to demystify the disease and break down barriers of stigma and discrimination while promoting safer sexual and drug use behavior that will reduce the risk of contracting the virus.

In addition, Pact recognizes that information is power, and that providing up to date and accessible information about HIV/AIDS gives Cambodian citizens the opportunity to make informed decisions. Pact supports 70 HIV/AIDS organizations representing more than 20,000 HIV-positive people. These organizations produce current, relevant materials in a variety of formats. Together they have distributed more than 415,000 posters, pamphlets, booklets and other educational material designed to provide basic facts and figures about HIV/AIDS and to reduce stigma.



STRENGTHENING ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Pact believes that in order to improve the lives of people impacted by HIV/AIDS, supporting and strengthening their families must be a paramount goal. In Cambodia, more than 77,000 children under age 15 have been orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS. Many cannot afford to go to school as a result of the disease's financial toll on the family and all face an uncertain future.

Pact's program promotes ongoing educational opportunities for these orphans and children by supporting community-based fundraising on their behalf. In addition, Pact helps secure the future for these children through the use of a "living will." These unique inheritance documents—the first time such records have been used in Cambodia—are created by HIV-positive parents with assistance and guidance by Pact's partners to ensure children retain rights to their parents' livestock and land. So far, nearly 600 people living with HIV have prepared these "living wills" and an additional 1,073 people living with HIV have developed future plans for their children.

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

In Cambodia, low literacy and high rates of poverty remain the twin drivers behind sex trafficking. When a family is poor, especially in rural and isolated outposts, they are forced to make desperate decisions to survive. Some families sell their daughters to trafficking brokers who promise good jobs but then force girls into sex labor. In some cases, young women themselves enter the sex trade to help their families.

Empowering women to become financially stable, therefore, is a critical tool in alleviating poverty and reducing the number of women who turn to sex trafficking as a viable way to make a living. Since 2006, Pact has implemented its globally recognized and award-winning literacy and microloan program, WORTH, to prevent trafficking of Cambodian women by providing opportunities for rural women to earn an income and improve their education.

As women feel financially stable and gain confidence, they not only shun trafficking but are able to take control of their lives in ways that promote participation in civic affairs. WORTH women often become empowered to engage in their local Commune Council meetings, and in a few cases, WORTH women have been elected to serve as Commune Councilors, allowing them an official forum in which they can raise important issues such as health and hygiene, trafficking and domestic violence.

Through WORTH, rural women are brought together to learn how to save collectively through an informal women's group which also serves as a critical support base where women can swap stories of their daily struggles. Through a series of three books published and provided by Pact, the women have an opportunity to advance basic literacy skills while also becoming business literate. Eventually, many of them form village banks where they pool their savings in a system that allows them to earn interest and take small loans to expand existing businesses or start new ones.

So far, 144 women's groups have formed in four districts. The program's successes are a testament to the women's innate desire and will to improve their lives leveraged by opportunities to realize their goals. Collectively, the participants have saved more than \$53,180. More than 1,500 members have taken loans totaling \$38,856 to operate their small businesses—ventures that range from raising pigs and cultivating organic lettuce to opening a village beauty salon.

The program's positive impact and reach go beyond the women who participate in it. Armed with these positive experiences, WORTH women have also piloted a sweeping awareness-raising campaign in the form of 320 monthly mobile workshops in which they travel to rural areas to speak at public forums. The women share their personal experiences and success stories in coping with human trafficking, domestic violence and a host of health care issues.

Beyond moral support, Pact's program also includes a computer literacy training component to shore up capacity among nongovernmental organizations that work with women at risk for trafficking and sex work. Pact believes that improving computer literacy for these NGOs is critical in strengthening their ability to assist vulnerable women.

Through community Internet centers, NGO staff receive training in basic computer skills, such as searching the Internet, basic word processing, and database and spreadsheet fundamentals. As a result, their organizations are strengthened to more effectively address the needs of at risk women as well as ensure their projects are successful and sustainable.

PACT CAMBODIA

Phnom Penh Center, Building A, 3rd floor, Corner Sihanouk (274) and Sothearos (3) Blvd. Sangkat Tonle Bassac, Khan Chamkar Morn, Phnom Penh | P.O. Box 149, Kingdom of Cambodia | Tel: (855-23) 217 855 | Fax: (855-23) 217 856 | www.pactcambodia.org