Women’s Resource Center – COVID19 – Response Proposal for SE Asia Foundation

Background

Women’s Resource Center (WRC) believes that providing women with access to information and knowledge is the most effective method of self-empowerment. Since 2010, we have endeavoured to change the climate of silence and inaction in Siem Reap and the surrounding communities. First and foremost, we are a drop-in center where local women can safely ask questions regarding any aspect of their own life and their child’s life. Our trained staff use support services techniques and counselling skills to assist these women to best approach their unique situation. Through our education workshops like women’s health, women’s rights and gender, positive parenting, and financial literacy, we’re able to help women gain the skills and confidence they need to change their lives for the better.

This year COVID-19 is spreading at an unprecedented rate all around the globe. The Cambodian economy is hugely reliant on tourism – especially in our city, Siem Reap, which is home to Angkor Wat. In late January, mid high season, tourists began to cancel or cut short their trips and many people lost their jobs. In March schools, gyms, karaoke bars, restaurants and hotels closed – some due to government lock down guidelines, most due to lack of customers. Many of these businesses are hoping to reopen, but a huge percentage will close permanently. Many people are now unemployed and do not know when they will work again. Young adults who work in the city and send a percentage of their income home to support the wider family are now unemployed have returned home and are reliant on their families – creating a double blow. COVID numbers in Cambodia have been relatively low – however the economic impact has been huge.

How has COVID19 affected the beneficiaries of WRC? And how are we supporting them?

We have been working closely with our community to better understand their current needs and see how we can support them deeply at this time. We have surveyed 100 families and understand that 99% of them are living in fear of both contracting COVID19 and hunger. The main issues are lack of employment, poverty, hunger, understanding hygiene and how to
prevent COVID19 spreading – and being able to afford hygiene supplies. Many are also suffering from acute stress and mental health issues. In addition, due to the extra pressures at home (especially with schools closed) there is a rise in domestic abuse towards women and children.

We have conducted counselling over the phone with more than 100 beneficiaries and checked in with 107 families to see if they need anything from us. We have been able to meet some people face to face to give out emergency supplies and have used these opportunities to share information on safe practices to prevent the spread of the virus. These sessions have had limited numbers with people staying 2 meters apart, we have checked temperatures and ensured hand washing and mask wearing has taken place.

We have given out 115 emergency supply packages to families and shared information on staying safe at the current time with them. Each parcel costs $25 and contains rice, fish/soy sauce, vegetables, canned goods and soap and lasts an average sized family around a week.

With the SE Asia fund we were able to piloting ways to work with families in order for them to be self-sufficient including farming – plants and animals raising to 50 families from selected target communities.

The women and families we work with have been delighted with the support we have been able to provide them due to generous donations from supporters such yourselves. We want to share our deep thanks from the WRC team, but more importantly they had this to say

‘Thanks to donors for your generosity, these emergency packages help us during this hard time. You save us lives!’ – Bopha

“We lost the jobs and income. Your kind support feed our children. Thanks for thinking of us during this challenging time! Wishing you all the best of luck!!” – Sophea

**What we learned?**

What we learned so far is that the COVID 19 pandemic is still a much concern as now found new cases raised in Cambodia right now. Moreover the majority of people still loss of jobs in the tourism and hospitality industries is much more critical right now.

We note that crisis such as the COVID19 pandemic disproportionately affect women and girls and can set back gains on gender equality. This is due to gender norms and pre-existing inequalities. Many women are employed in the informal sector in Cambodia, which means they are unable to claim sick pay and have few (if any) protections from job losses. The closure of schools also means that the burden of unpaid care responsibilities and home schooling usually falls to the women in the family.

In addition, girls and women tend to have more limited access to the internet – which impinges on distance learning. We also see that Gender Based Violence and Domestic Violence (which usually affect women and children more) rise with increased tension and food / economic
security worries. There is also an increased risk of sexual exploitation or abuse for those in precarious situations, plus an increased risk of women’s sexual and reproductive health rights being compromised as people are unable to access certain services. As women tend to be the careers in the family their risk of contracting COVID19 is higher. In addition, the State of Emergency called in Cambodia could impact on movement and freedom of speech. Finally, food security could also be an issue with women more likely to suffer. All these issues may affect the women and families we work with and set back our mission.

What we do next plan?

WRC are continuing to work hard to work with our community in order to support their needs at this time and for as long as it takes until we see the economy pick up and people back in work again. We will be providing emergency support and helping villagers grow their own food for themselves is a much higher priority. WRC will keep provide COVID education and working with people to become more self-sustainable. We will also be sharing life skills education, self-care practice and opportunities to help women and their families be ready and mobile as the economy starts to open up again.

Our request for your support

Through the lesson learned during this pandemic food security, livestock, keeping safe, distancing learning hygiene and self-care practice remain important for the community people, so WRC would need you to support some project below:
HOME GARDENING and ANIMAL RAISING PROJECT:

**Goals:** The overall goal is to promote healthy and sustainable livelihoods for community people in our targeted area and increase the family food production during and after Covid 19 pandemic.

**Objectives:**

- To promote home gardens in the community
- To utilization of local materials and resources for securing home and gardens
- To provide training and education understanding on home gardening
- To reduce their expenses on buying food from market

**Target beneficiaries:** 50 families

**Budget:**

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**Total** 2500USD