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ZISVAW PROGRAM 2008-2010

Ending Violence Against Women through Community Action (EVAWCA) in Cambodia

**UN Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women
administered by the United Nations Development Fund for women
(UNIFEM)
for Gender Development for Cambodia (GAD/C)
USA\$300,000**

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PROJECT SUMMARY

The EVAWCA in Cambodia project will work to change societal attitudes and behavior through education and counseling of perpetrators and potential perpetrators. The project will develop capacities of local authorities and relevant laws, monitor the implementation of these laws, and build legal skills of community-based core groups to advocate with public authorities for more effective interventions in cases of domestic violence. In addition to working to prevent violence, the project will also help survivors of violence come to terms with their experiences, seek justice and reintegrate themselves into society through expanded legal and social services.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

With a goal of ending violence against women in Cambodia, the project aims to achieve the following by the end of the project.

- Conduct a research study (by the end of the first half of year one) to reveal contemporary Khmer masculinity (in relation do domestic violence), its dynamics (in context of changing socio-economic phenomenon) and gender disaggregated data in order to design effective policy and program strategies and interventions, and educational and communication materials.
- At least 70% of local authorities and police in the target communes are taking action against reported cases of domestic violence.
- At least 90% of women in the target communes are aware of their rights and the laws that exist to protect them.
- An increase of at least 70% in the cases of women victims of violence who have access to the courts and social services in the target communes.

- At least 50% of men (perpetrators and potential perpetrators) in the target communes are transformed into non-violent and good male role models.

ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Increased availability of sex-disaggregated data on demographic, social and legal issues related to violence against women.

- Conducted a baseline survey of perceptions of violence against women in 33 households (154 women, 146 men) in the three target communes, confirming that legal awareness among men and women is extremely low, causing many women survivors of violence to seek redress only when they can no longer cope. When victims do ask for assistance, they are most likely to go to local public officials and police, but they do not always find adequate support.
- Hosted three conferences (one in each target commune) to disseminate survey findings, attended by a total of 121 participants (48 women, 73 men), including public officials (local, district and provincial levels), police officers, representatives from local civil society organizations and local residents
- After the presentation of the survey findings, higher public officials held local public officials and police accountable to take prompt and appropriate action to address violence against women.

Strengthened capacity of women from target communes to monitor the incidence of VAW and the implementation of VAW-related legislation and to hold local authorities accountable.

- Established three community-based women's Core Groups (CGs) (one in each commune) with eight members each, including commune councilors, village chiefs, community leaders and local residents. Trained members in advocacy skills and the Domestic Violence Law.
- CGs have organized 288 village meetings with the participation of 2,176 villagers (1,558 women, 618 men) to disseminate information on the Domestic Violence Law, Marriage and Family Law, Land Law and Law Against Infidelity.
- CGs also reached out to nearly 3,000 women in the target communes to disseminate information about these laws. Through these interactions, CGs identified 27 cases of violence against women and brought complaints to local authorities, which resolved 13 cases while the remaining 14 cases were referred to court for prosecution.

Engaged men from target communes to end violence against women.

- Established three community-based Men's Groups (CMGs) (one per commune) with eight members each, including commune councilors, village chiefs and local male role models. Trained members in gender and masculinities, methods for counseling men on violence against women and communication skills.
- CMGs have organized 34 village-level meetings with the participation of nearly 1,200 men, where they discussed gender in spousal relations, human rights of women and men's responsibility to prevent violence against women.
- CMGs also reached out to more than 1,000 men in the target communes. Through these interactions, CMGs provided counseling to 13 perpetrators of domestic violence.
- Organized a White Ribbon Campaign in the three target communes in collaboration with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, the

Cambodian Men's Network, the Gender and Development Network, local NGOs and other stakeholders. (Theme – “End Violence Against Women: Advance Women's Rights,” focusing on the enforcement of existing laws that address violence against women)

- Organized three public meetings (one per commune) with nearly 600 attendants, including local public officials, police, teachers, students and local residents. Speakers highlighted men's responsibility in ending VAW and the role and responsibility of local authorities to enforce existing laws; and called for strengthening cooperation between CGs, CMGs and local authorities to end violence against women.
- Door-to-door greetings were organized to reach out to communities and people in more remote locations. Nearly 2,000 households were visited in the three target communes and pledged their support to the campaign.
- Leaflets, posters, stickers, white ribbons and t-shirts were distributed, catering to the needs of the illiterate and low-educated people.

Local authorities and police from target communes enforce violence against women-related laws.

- Organized a training workshop on the Domestic Violence Law for 44 local authorities (commune councilors, village chiefs and police officers), addressing violence against women as a social issue, rather than a private one, and detailing the responsibilities of local authorities to enforce the existing law. Since then, local authorities have been collaborating with CGs and CMGs to address identified cases of violence against women.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Challenges

- **Timing and location of project activities** – National elections preoccupied local public officials, affecting project activities that relied on their engagement, while rainy and rice harvesting seasons prevented villagers from participating in meetings, thus also affecting project activities that relied on community mobilization and outreach.
- **Failure of councilors to properly lodge formal complaints** – Some councilors still see domestic violence as a family problem that should be resolved within the home. Changing perceptions on violence against women requires a longer-term, sustained strategy.
- **Bureaucracy and lack of documentation** – further hindered women's access to justice. Procedures must be simplified.

Lessons Learned

- Drawing on the good will of public officials to mobilize political support helps ensure their interest in the success of the groups and connections to the people involved.
- Participation of higher level officials in the conferences, where they made public commitments to ending violence against women, set the tone for their counterparts at lower levels of government.
- Involvement of commune councilors and village chiefs in local meetings resulted in higher numbers of local residents attending.

- Confirmed that men do provide positive role models for non-violent behavior and can work effectively with other men to transform gender norms in a cooperative manner, enthusiastically engaging in efforts to end violence against women.
- Effective arguments for changes in behaviors and attitudes stress that economic well being, family prosperity and harmony flourish in peaceful homes.
- Instead of seeking violence as the way to manhood, men can view exercising control and tolerance as the true marks of a man.
- Enlisting 10 ex-perpetrators to go door-to-door to meet people and remind them, based on their personal experiences, that violence against women is a crime was also a successful strategy.

NEXT STEPS

- Continue with current activities.
- Commission a research study on men, masculinity and domestic violence to explore traditional Khmer masculine identity (in relation to violence against women) and its dynamics (in the context of changing socio-economic phenomena) – the first research of its kind in Cambodia. Study will be available in both Khmer and English, will be disseminated among key stakeholders, including government ministries, and will provide recommendations for policy and legal reform, as well as information for targeted and appropriate educational and communication material.

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