

ZISVAW PROGRAM 2006-2008

Mekong Youth Net: Preventing Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region Development and Education Program for Daughters and Communities (DEPDC) US\$63,500

Project Update: November 2007 – March 2008

PROJECT SUMMARY

The project aims to decrease the instances of trafficking in the Mekong sub-region through interconnected grassroots prevention programs conceived, researched, and implemented by local youth leaders.

The Mekong Youth Net project will train female youth leaders to respond to the needs of their communities and gain public support by assimilating in community leadership roles, developing preventive education programs, and raising awareness about human trafficking, safe migration and the rights of women and children. The youth leaders will empower each other while developing a comprehensive network, throughout the Mekong sub-region, of DEPDC programs and partners to fight child labor exploitation and human trafficking.

Through the training of approximately 100 Mekong youth leaders and the opening of trafficking prevention mini-projects, DEPDC estimates that the Mekong Youth Net project will reach nearly 10,000 people in its first five years.

PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Project was designed to:

- Develop female youth into community leaders who can develop and build grassroots trafficking prevention programs.
- Implement community based structural development programs that focus on combating human trafficking in the Mekong sub-region.
- Raise community awareness of human trafficking, human and child rights, and the needs of children and women in the Mekong sub-region.
- Empower communities and organizations to effectively respond to the needs of their children.
- Build a network of interrelated anti-trafficking initiatives across the region to map trafficking patterns, share best practices, and create a unified regional anti-trafficking strategy.
- Implement effective, holistic rehabilitation programs for trafficking survivors in the region.
- Influence government policies on human trafficking and migration through regional networking with government organizations (GOs).

PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

During the time covered by this Update, 43 young women, graduates of the Mekong Youth Net (MYN) training program, returned to their host organizations in Burma, Cambodia, China (Yunnan province), Laos, and Thailand to work in the areas of education and social development and to fulfill their research objectives and mini-projects. While some of the graduated MYN leaders have completed a university education, others have completed only sixth grade; yet all learned that social responsibility begins with the individual and then extends to family and community.

MYN community leaders, ages 15-25, from all four MYN classes and from all six countries, attended the follow-up Youth Social Worker Empowerment and Skills Training in Udon Thai province, Thailand from 19-23 November 2007.

Goals of this continuing education included developing skills, tools and knowledge of social work practice in a diverse community and empowering youth social workers to actively affect social change.



DEPDC, in partnership with the Southeast Asia Law Enforcement Training and Consulting Associates (SEALETA), also provided workshop content on illegal drugs, human trafficking, child sexual abuse, pedophilia, the sex industry, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, multidisciplinary teamwork and how to effectively work with law enforcement, grant writing basics, and avoiding burnout.

DEPDC supplemented the workshop with training on personal development and project development: raising

consciousness for social change, characteristics of change-makers, media and communications, and skills practice in project development (visioning, planning, networking, collaboration, management, reporting).

Finally, the youth leaders conducted their own participatory planning session for the Mekong Youth Union, the next phase of the Mekong Youth Net project, by creating strategies and electing their representatives.

As a result of this additional training, youth leaders had increased confidence and professional proficiency in English, an increased ability to translate concepts learned at the MYN training year into digestible, culturally relevant education information about human trafficking and rights in countries of origin, an increased



understanding of international concepts such as human rights and gender equality and how to reconcile them with traditional values, and increased knowledge of trafficking, child sexual abuse, pedophilia, and illegal drugs.

Youth Leaders from Thailand and Myanmar also attended a training of trainers (TOT) session on teaching youth about child sexual abuse. Using toolkits designed for boys and girls, the youth leaders have taught informational sessions on child sexual abuse in schools and other community venues.

After returning to their home countries, MYN Leaders implemented the following projects:

- **Cambodia:** Children and Youth Participation Project. This project seeks to empower children, involve them in community development plans, raise awareness about child rights and the impacts of domestic violence on children, and provide opportunities for them to use their knowledge, experiences and skills to address children's issues in their communities.
- **Laos:** Youth will address behavioral problems and risk factors among teenagers in Huay Xai, Bokeo. Youth will also begin a project to promote education and quality of life development for children in Donkoi Village, Vientiane.
- **Myanmar:** Border Protection and Assistance Project for at-risk children in Tachilek. This project supported over 20 children with shelter, food, education, life development and vocational activities to keep them off the streets. Two youth leaders worked collaboratively with three host organizations that assisted with administration and were responsible for the youth in case of government interference. The two MYN youth are currently responsible for planning activities, responding to emergency situations in the nearby neighborhoods, and collecting information about high risk groups.
- **Thailand:** Knowledge and Life Skills Development Project for Children and Youth. This project will provide children and youth with knowledge on child and human rights, child labor, domestic violence, gender issues, and trafficking. A group of local youth leaders will be formed to do related educational activities in schools and communities. The Media for Public Awareness Project will develop toolkits and different forms of media to fill gaps in knowledge of rights and trafficking issues in Mae Sai and Chiang Rai province. The project will focus on ethnic minority groups and spread to areas where MYN youth are working.

On 24-26 March 2008, DEPDC organized a meeting for all MYN youth leaders and host organizations that included presentations from youth on their projects, research, and internship experiences with feedback from DEPDC and host organizations. The meeting also included a series of workshop sessions between youth and hosts about how to make MYN projects sustainable in the future through the Mekong Youth Union. This served as a continuation of the planning work performed by the youth at the Youth Social Worker Empowerment and Skills Training in November.

DEPDC's efforts to build capacities of local and regional youth involve active youth participation in Child Helpline awareness raising campaigns through Child Voice Radio (CVR) and connecting with local schools. This year, MYN leaders traveled to local government schools in small groups to give presentations on trafficking and child rights. MYN participants are also regular program directors on CVR, providing valuable language diversity. When MYN leaders are on campus, CVR is able to broadcast in 12 regional languages, thus spreading important information to ethnic minority communities who are often cut off from normal channels of news and information.

Additionally, DEPDC has produced several radio spots on human trafficking and advertisements for the Child Helpline in the major languages spoken in the Mae Sai area and neighboring Burma. MYN youth translated this information on both Child Helpline and CVR and it is now available in Thai, Tai Yai, Tai Leu, and English.

DEPDC's extensive networking activity through MYN has facilitated relationship building with foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), particularly in Laos. DEPDC has visited sub-region countries to follow up with MYN youth activities, strengthen ties with host organizations, and speak to government and NGO officials regarding the MYN.

FOUNDER OF DEPDC AWARDED THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN (USA) WALLENBERG MEDAL

In March 2008, Sompop Jantraka was recognized at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor with The Wallenberg Medal for his work in combating human trafficking. The medal was named for 1935 University of Michigan alumnus Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish citizen whose creativity and courage led to the freedom of tens of thousands of Jews fleeing Nazi persecution during World War II. Wallenberg was taken into Soviet custody in January 1945 and never returned home.

In the past, the University has presented the Medal to exemplary humanitarians including Elie Wiesel; His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, Fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet; Kailash Satyarthi, a fearless advocate for the abolition of child labor in India; Miep Gies, who used her attic to hide Anne Frank's family from the Nazis; and Paul Rusesabagina, who rescued hundreds of Rwandans during the 1994 genocide.

Sompop Jantraka has previously been recognized as an Ashoka Fellow, and with profiles as an Asia Hero in Time/Asia magazine and as a social entrepreneur in the American Public Television documentary series, The New Heroes.

Two of the youth from China are former trafficking victims and have very little formal education, making research and project development very challenging without support from a host organization. Recognizing this obstacle, DEPDC has asked the youth to assist DEPDC in administering a grant from the Asia Foundation for the Life Goes On project that has provided financial support for returned trafficking victims to start their own income generating projects. These grants were given to survivors from Xishuangbanna in Yunnan, China. The MYN Leaders, trafficking victims themselves, oversaw the grants at the local level and reported back to DEPDC. Grants assisted these survivors in activities such as vegetable gardening, raising chickens and pigs, and setting up a small shop to sell goods. This activity is a direct example of successful follow-up to prevent re-victimization and re-trafficking.

CHALLENGES

DEPDC has been actively advocating for the implementation of MYN as a prevention and protection strategy; however, this requires overcoming significant cultural and bureaucratic barriers. Youth who make their voices heard and advocate for participation can face resistance (or be ignored) in societies that do not traditionally value the opinions of children. DEPDC continues to follow-up on MYN activities and communicate with host organizations, government and NGO officials about youth participation and the MYN program.

In China, youth have had considerable difficulty. In meetings with DEPDC, local government has agreed to assist the youth; however, in practice they offer little support or encouragement, leaving the youth to navigate the complexities of the Chinese bureaucracy by themselves. Despite this challenge, youth have begun their research in anticipation of starting their projects.

In Myanmar, DEPDC continues to work with host organizations of MYN to promote development at the grassroots level. The actual implementation of measures for the universal respect and preservation of human rights by any level of the Burmese regime is beyond the scope of MYN, but the youth leaders continue to build bridges with local organizations and locally foster a culture of human rights in ethnic minority areas of Burma. MYN youth also assist DEPDC in repatriating trafficking victims by accompanying them home, following up with their families, and provided other assistance.

NEXT STEPS

While continuing capacity-building efforts throughout the Mekong sub-region, DEPDC also plans to place more focus on awareness campaigns in other countries through the Mekong Youth Net. Planned activities include the development of stickers and posters in various languages.

MYN will also increase its efforts to educate children and communities through radio. Currently youth from Laos and Cambodia host community radio programs in their home countries.

Activities in 2008 will continue to lay the groundwork for the sustainability of MYN through the MY by focusing on strong networking with host organizations, governments, and community groups and providing additional capacity building for youth leaders.

ZISVAW PROGRAM

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