



Humanity in Focus

Overseas Projects Department Report 2008

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I. Background

About us

Humanity in Focus (HIF)'s Overseas Projects Department works together with other HIF departments to empower underprivileged children from both rural and urban Cambodia to reach their fullest potentials. This is achieved through both hardware and campaign projects that focuses on education, health care, risk protection etc. Through adopting a human-rights approach to programs, we initiate and implement our overseas projects in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Our projects are initiated and run by young people in Hong Kong, as well as NGO partners in Cambodia such as Village Focus International (VFI). We look forward to carrying out longer term projects in Cambodia and other developing regions in the near future, thus contributing to the sustainable development of these regions.

About this trip

The Overseas Projects Department Trip 2008 took place from 7th to 25th June, 2008 in Cambodia. The main goals of the trip were 1) to monitor and follow-up on existing overseas projects of HIF, 2) to initiate and implement two new projects and campaigns in rural Cambodia and 3) to strengthen partnerships with local NGOs and explore new connections and projects initiatives.

About this report

The Overseas Project Department Report 2008 serves as a review and evaluation of both completed and ongoing projects of our department in the year 2007 to 2008, while looking forward to possibilities and plans in the coming years.

The first section of the report reviews and evaluates two ongoing projects, the Water-tank project in Tngor Village and Ortres Village School in Sihanoukville. The second part introduces two important initiatives of HIF this year; the BIKE to School Campaign and Mosquito Nets Campaign. The third section discusses about two potential projects for the year 2009 and beyond that we are planning and negotiating at the moment, particularly the Bamboo Shoot



Slum-school project in Battambang. Finally, brief descriptions about our visits and exchange meetings with local NGOs and international organizations are given.



II. Ongoing Projects- Follow-up and Maintenance

i) Water Tank Project in Tngor Village

Background

The water tank in the public school of Tngor Village was built by HIF in Nov 2006 to provide clean drinking water for the students and local villagers. Volunteers from our partner NGO Village Focus International (Battambang Fellowship) have provided continuous assistance in the monitoring and maintenance of this project.

Follow-up and Maintenance

The water tank was closed down temporarily in summer 2007 due to damages in the pipelines for water collection (HIF Inspection Team Report 2007). The problem was fixed and it was concluded that the water tank could collect rain water from the rooftop once again.

Another problem observed during the OPD's team visit in 2007 was the lack of education of the children and local villagers on how to efficiently use rain-water collected from the water tank. This year, HIF has put up posters around the school and village to educate villagers on the importance of cherishing clean drinking-water and closing of taps after use. Activities were also included in the hygiene classes of the HIF summer camp at Tngor Public School to educate students about the proper use of drinking water and the water tank.



HIF designed posters regarding proper use of the water tank and rain water to be put up around Tngor public school and the village.

Recommendations

Although the pipelines of the water-tank was fixed this year, usage of the water-tank among villagers remained low as water seemed to run out very soon after a rainy day. It was observed that there may be a leakage problem at the bottom of one of the water-tanks, leading to the gradual loss of rain-water whenever it is filled-up. It is recommended that the bottom of the tanks be mended immediately.

To reduce the dependency of local villagers on our volunteers and to encourage more frequent monitoring and maintenance of the project, it is highly recommended to increase the public school teachers' involvement in the project.



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II. Ongoing Projects - Follow-up and Maintenance

ii) Ortres Village School in Sihanoukville

Background

In 2006, HIF funded the construction of a non-formal village school, Ortres Village School, in Burnt Bridge Village, Sihanoukville, providing opportunities for the village children to receive education. Unfortunately, the school had to stop running in April 2007 due to land grabbing problems.

Follow-up and Maintenance

On 20 April, 2007, military forces paid the village a surprise visit, firing gunshots in the air and burned down the village. They evicted the villagers by force without providing them time to take their belongings. They arrested 13 innocent men and sent them to prison, leaving behind 105 homeless families which no longer had the ability to earn a living. It is believed that it was a collaboration between businessmen and the military to occupy the land, a prime location by Otres beach, Sihanoukville, with the intention of developing it into a profitable tourist area filled with beach resorts.

When HIF visited the village in the summer of 2007, the villagers were living in refugee tents provided by local NGOs alongside the road where the burnt village used to be. The village school that HIF built was turned into a play area for children in the daytime and shelter for families at night.

This year, HIF returned to the village and found that there were no improvements in the villagers' living conditions. Families continued to live in refugee tents, with each tent housing 2-3 families. The tents could only provide a minimal amount of shelter as they get stuffy during the hot days and would flood when it rained. The village school now housed 4 families, totaling 17 people. The 13 men arrested during the raid were not released until May this year. Though this informal school cannot continue to operate its primary function of educating children, it does help the villagers by providing them with much needed shelter.

During home visits, we realized that the families were having a hard life. Having lost their homes, they do not and cannot have any plans or hope for



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their future and have no idea what is going to happen to them. The land grabbing incident has deeply affected the lives of the villagers, both in the short term and in the long term.

Fortunately, a local NGO called M'lop Tapang has been working with the villagers to make their lives a bit easier. They have been supplying medical and educational support to the village children. A mobile library in the form of a van comes to visit the village on weekends, offering an opportunity for the village children to read the varying literature in the van as well as play games with the toys that are also supplied.

During our village visit, we met a mother and her sick baby. The baby was ill from a fever but the family had no money to bring her to the clinic. The mother was very desperate and couldn't stop crying. As it was the weekend, nurses from NGOs that were helping out with the village families would only be back after 2 days. We wanted to take the child to the clinic but it seemed impossible. The situation seemed to be hopeless. Fortunately, we received a call from a local NGO granting us permission to take the child to a private clinic. We found out that the child had fallen sick because of malnutrition – the mother had no money to buy milk powder and the mother could not breastfeed her child as she herself was also malnourished. The NGO could only pay for the clinical fees and so we supplied the child with 2 cans of milk powder as well as offering for any other fees that the mother would need to pay.

It was one small gesture, but taking the opportunity to help out this mother and child was an achievement for HIF in aiding those in poverty in Cambodia, albeit leaving us with a bittersweet sentiment as we left the campsite that lingers with an uncertain future.

Recommendations

It is recommended that HIF keeps close monitor of the land grabbing situation and the conditions of the homeless people in the Ortres Village. It is hope that the villagers will be relocated by the government soon and the village school built by HIF could be return to its original usage. On the other hand, mini campaigns would be initiated to raise the awareness of Hong Kong tourists regarding the impacts of tourism and foreign investment on the lives of the



local people, for example, problems of land grabbing in Cambodia.



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III. New Projects in 2008

i) BIKE to School Campaign (Tngor and Kondul Strung Village)

Background

In view of the low school attendance rate and high drop-out rate in primary education in Cambodia, HIF initiated the BIKE to School Campaign in two villages (Tngor and Kondul Strung Village) in the Battambang province this year to encourage school attendance and promote the importance of education to parents and the society.

28 bicycles were given out to students from poorer backgrounds or remote families. The importance of education was emphasized to all villagers. To ensure fairness, helping those most in need and minimal disruption to the local community, a detailed process was carried out before the distribution of bicycles: 1) Meeting with the Parents Association and village chief, voting by villagers, 2) Household visits and interviews with parents and teacher, 3) Village meeting and distribution of bicycles.

Project Description

1) Meeting with the Parents Association and village chief

In each village, a meeting was held with the representatives of the Parents Association of the public school and the village chief. The purpose of the BIKE to School Campaign was communicated by HIF volunteers to obtain the support of the village representatives for the project and to decide on a list of potential beneficiaries. Two criteria were used in the selection of potential beneficiaries: 1) Students who come from a poorer family background and 2) students whose homes were remote from the public school.

2) Household visits and interviews with parents and teachers

As we obtained a list of potential beneficiaries from the Parents Association, we visited the families house by house to assess the degree of needs of each family and student. During the household interviews, HIF volunteers gained knowledge of the actual distance as well as roads condition from each family to the public school, as well as understanding the degree of motivation of each family had in sending their children to school, and their willingness to support them to continue their education in the secondary level. The children's



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motivation to learn and past school attendance records were also taken into account during the interviews with the class teachers.

The household visits had not only enabled us to screen out students who were in real need for a bicycle to travel to and forth school, it also provided us with the actual experiences of walking two hours through muddy paths under the 40 degrees sun in order to reach the school. Not only had we realized the strong determination of these students to learn and to escape from the poverty cycle of their parents, the value of our BIKE to School Campaign was also recognized once again as we received the genuine appreciations from these families visited.



Village children accompanying HIF volunteers to walk hours of muddy road each day to conduct household visits.



Parents and families gathering to listen to HIF volunteers explain about the importance of education and share about their own concerns

3) Village meeting and distribution of bicycles

In the end, 28 bicycles were given out to primary school students in Tngor and Kondul Strung Village. In the village meetings, the importance of education was once again emphasized by HIF volunteers by stressing that the bicycles were given to students whose families have shown high motivation in sending them to school, and to encourage continuous attendance of the students in primary and secondary schools. The selection criteria of beneficiaries and details of the process were explained to villagers as well.



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A young girl in Kondul Strung Village who just received her bicycle from HIF

Conclusion and Recommendations

The BIKE to School Campaign in Tngor and Kondul Strung Village was the first project of such nature conducted by HIF in Cambodia. The campaign has received very warm and positive responses from villagers during the household visits and village meetings. Village Focus International volunteer Ridan Sun has commented on the project - "While the bicycles may only last for several years for the students, the encouragement given to these children for their efforts to attend school has induced positive changes in their mindsets that may last a life-time!" This reinforces the essence of the BIKE to School Campaign: while the bicycles provide immediate support to the students and families to encourage school attendance, the campaign hopes to spread the message among villagers, that education is valued and rewarded in the society, which in turns empowers these young students to eventually aid their families breaking from the poverty cycle.

It is recommended that projects of similar nature can be extended to other villages and conducted in larger scales in the coming future. Nonetheless, the detailed procedures of meeting with village chief, Parents Association, household visits and village meetings should always be taken into account when carrying out such campaigns.



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IV. Looking Ahead: Potential Projects and Partners

i) Bamboo Shoot Slum-school Project in Battambang (Village Focus International)

Background

In line with HIF's belief that education is key to empowerment of the local community, Village Focus International (VFI) has started operating a non-formal school in the slum area of Battambang, where it once was a busy train terminal.

Living in desperately poor conditions, the slum dwellers struggle everyday in order to just to survive, let alone being able to provide their next generation with adequate education. With the increasing disparity between the rich and the poor, it is now even more difficult for the slum children to compete with others and escape from the cycle of poverty.

Planned and operated by a group of trained Cambodian volunteers, the Bamboo Shoot Project aims to break such a cycle for these slum children by providing them with free and non-formal classes. The students are provided with different kinds of training and activities such as language and mathematics courses, hygiene education, NGOs visits and vocational skill trainings. A combination of such classes will help ensure the slum children see a well rounded development, thus aiding them to grow up as self esteemed individuals.

It is immensely beneficial for those who are currently unable to attend to schools due to their financial situations, where they can be provided with a modest amount of education in hopes of being able to attend school one day. It also helps prevent the slum children from falling too far behind from their peers in the city, at the same time closing the disparity between them.

Project Descriptions

HIF is currently discussing with VFI the possibility to support the Bamboo Shoot Slum-school Project and expand its current scope to benefit more at-risk children living in the Battambang railroad slums. With a budget of approximately US\$4,000-5,000 annually, the slum school is able to provide



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Khmer and English classes, as well as weekend recreational activities to approximately 50 slum children.

While most of the children attending the Bamboo Shoot School also receive basic education in neighbouring public schools, the informal curriculum at Bamboo Shoot aims at equipping them with life-skills such as risk education, vocational training, and free English classes--- which are essential to their survival in the urban slums, however are lacking in the official curriculum at public schools. For many slum children who prefer to earn a living by scavenging in the nearby trash mountain instead of attending public schools, the Bamboo Shoot School also provides an alternative of education to them by offering a less strict and more welcoming learning environment. The Bamboo Shoot School is also open to other urban children living outside the slum areas. This measure hopes to promote better understanding among urban and slum children and avoid the stigmatizing effect often associated with children living in slum areas.

Looking ahead, HIF is exploring the opportunity to work in collaboration with VFI to strengthen the curriculum as well as extend the scope of services at Bamboo Shoot Slum-school. The content of the risk education classes is hoped to be enriched to include education against drug-abuse, trafficking, sexual violence and other urban risks. The dancing classes will be continued every weekend in order to provide healthy recreational activities to the children and provide them with chances to perform and enhance their psychological well-being. Further promotion and performance opportunities for the dancing team in Bamboo Shoot will be explored.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Bamboo Shoot Slum-school Project closely aligns with HIF core values and the OPD current directions in Cambodia. Through providing education and recreation in the slum areas, the project serves to empower underprivileged urban children to break the poverty cycle, at the same time promoting their social and psychological well-being. HIF's involvement in this project is also considered important to ensure the continuity of the project and to benefit more children at risk in the Battambang slum areas. Nevertheless, the feasibility and details of the projects will be further explored, depending on the coming



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arrangements of the Battambang Fellowship team in VFI, and whether HIF is able to secure a stable fund for this project in the long run.



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IV. Looking Ahead: Potential Projects and Partners

ii) Fair Trade Products made by women victims of abuse (Ptea Teuk Dong Cambodia)

Background

Ptea Teuk Dong Cambodia (PTD Cambodia) is a local NGO that serves street families and women victims of abuse by providing them with shelter and vocational training. At the time of HIF's visit, the NGO was serving 15 girl-victims of rape or sexual abuse at its residence and vocational training centre. Under the safe shelter of the centre, these girls gradually recovered from their traumatic experiences. They are learning weaving and sewing skills that help make traditional handcrafts for sale at PTD Cambodia's shop.

Potential Partnership

In rural Cambodia where problems of gender inequality and family violence are prevalent, young girls are especially vulnerable to sexual violence and abuses. PTD Cambodia serves as an essential shelter in Battambang to protect these victimised women from further abuses while empowering them with alternative skills to make a living in the society. Nevertheless, it was observed that PTD Cambodia was not running in its full capacity due to limited funding and lack of local or overseas connections. The 10 shelter homes for street families were left unused during the time of the visit and there were no means to sell the handcraft made by the women victims at local or overseas markets.

In order to promote awareness regarding gender equality and educate the public against sexual violence in developing countries, HIF has bought a small amount of handcrafts made by the women victims in PTD Cambodia. The products will be sold at the upcoming post-trip events of the Young Global Citizenship Program 2008 to serve both public awareness and fund-raising purposes.

Coming in line with the recent fair trade movements in Hong Kong, HIF is looking forward to further explore the partnership with PTD Cambodia in order to bring handcrafts made by the girl victims to sell in fair trade shops or fair trade events in Hong Kong. The products include a variety of handbags, purses, decorations and traditional Cambodian handcrafts. Tailor-made



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designs and products are also available at PTD given the actual models or pictures of the products.



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V. Exchange and meetings with local NGOS

Background

During the Overseas Projects Department team's visit to Cambodia in June 2008, a series of exchange visits and meetings have been arranged with local NGOs as well as international governmental organizations. The purposes of the visits were to obtain deeper understanding of the poverty problems and social environment in urban and rural Cambodia, as well as to learn from other organizations' experiences and projects regarding development and public awareness work. Potential projects and partnership opportunities were also explored when the projects aligns with the core values and current project directions of HIF. Details of the visits to the six organizations are outlined below:

i) Ptea Teuk Dong Cambodia

As mentioned earlier (Potential Projects and Partnerships), Ptea Teuk Dong Cambodia is a local NGO that serves street families and women victims of abuse by providing them with shelter and vocational training. During the visit, OPD representatives had the chance to interview two girl victims of rape staying at the organization shelter.

One of them, aged 19, was a mother of a two-year old boy (who also stayed at the centre). The baby was a product of rape that occurred when she was living in the villages two years ago. Traumatized by the experience, the young girl started dressing up as a boy and had very short hair to protect herself. As her son reminded her of the unfortunate incident, she took care of the baby with ambivalent feelings and thus the baby had not learnt how to talk or interact with others.

The other girl, aged 14, was a victim of multiple rape incidents one year ago. She suffered from psychological illnesses and had intense fear of unknown men ever since the incident. She was then gradually recovering from the trauma under the safe shelter in PTD and was learning some life skills such as sewing.

The visit to PTD Cambodia revealed the significance and prevalence of sexual



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violence problems and gender inequality in rural Cambodia, although it is believed that what we saw and what PTD was doing was just the tip of the iceberg. It is recognized that the protection and vocational training provided by PTD to these young victims were essential and beneficial. Furthermore, it is important to conduct education campaigns in villages to educate young girls regarding the risk of sexual violence and to protect vulnerable individuals. HIF will continue to explore the opportunities of how to provide support to PTD and these girl victims, such as selling their products in fair trade shops in Hong Kong.

ii) Village Focus Cambodia

Village Focus Cambodia is our partner NGO in Cambodia, and also the Cambodian branch of Village focus International (VFI), which believes that investing in vulnerable local communities can bring about positive social changes to their respective countries. They work with the local leaders in different aspects, such as leadership training, education, health care, natural resources management, empowerment and legal protection.

One of their noted projects in Battambang is the Fellowship for Youth in Community Development (FYCD) .This project provides an opportunity for university students who are interested in community action to spend one year living with rural community leaders. The objectives are to share and develop skills related to community organizing and social change. The volunteers from Battambang Fellowship are all passionate young people that want to make their country a better place and improve the livelihood of their fellow countrymen.

The bonding between HIF and the Battambang Fellowship is very strong. Having established excellent terms with the villagers, they act as the bridge between us and them in the Young Global Citizenships Programme and helped with the monitoring and maintenance of the water tank project in the Tgnor Village.

We visited the headquarters of the Battambang Fellowship several times to discuss about the partnership opportunities. Taking into consideration of the value of HIF, the needs of the children and the support we can offer, we have



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decided to support the Bamboo Shoot Slum-school Project. (Refer to earlier chapter)

iii) M'lop Tapang

M'Lop means shade or protection in Khmer, and the Tapang tree is known as the “umbrella tree” due to its shape and sheltering function. M'lop Tapang was a local NGO in Sihanoukville that aims at protecting street children, with the ultimate goal of reintegrating them into their families and community. They offer street children with regular meals, shelter, medical care, education, counseling, and protection from all types of abuses. Though it only has 5 years of history, we could see the effectiveness of an NGO making the community a better place by leading all the street children to an easier life.

With the ultimate goal of reintegrating the street children into their families and community, M'Lop Tapang has set up vocational training centre for both boys and girls, slum schools, community centers and also a well-equipped main day centre where education and recreational activities are offered. We have visited all the centers during our stay there. Staying in the centers not only protects the children from potential risks, but also provides a learning opportunity for them. The children learn different kinds of skills there, such as cooking and sewing, vehicles maintenance, clothes-making and farming. With the support from the organization, many of them will attend formal schooling after a year of training.

M'Lop Tapang also has its own outreach social workers team for children protection. They work very closely with vulnerable children and families in the community, together combating sex predators and drug sellers. They also serve the families with urgent needs, such as the families of Sunburnt Village, which were the victims of land-grabbing.

Although M'Lop Tapang is a relatively more developed local NGO in Cambodia, it also has its limitation. There are a significant number of children with special needs among the street children in Sihanoukville, such as children with cerebral palsy, mental disability, physical disability and communications or language difficulties. These children do not receive proper medical or educational care like the special needs children in wealthier countries. Staff of



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the M'lop Tapang does not have a chance to receive formal training on taking care of the special needs children because of the lack of experts in that field in Cambodia. One of our members, Wendy, who has received educational psychology training in Hong Kong, reviewed a number of cases of children with special needs in the day center and gave consultation on their educational and emotional needs to the staffs at the centre.

It is suggested that Humanity in Focus may co-operate with M'lop Tapang for developmental projects and community services projects in the future.

iv) UNESCO, Education Department

In the last decade, UNESCO's Education Department has worked closely with the Ministry of Youth, Education and Sports of Cambodia to rebuild and strengthen the education system of the country. Important policies such as nine years of free and compulsory education have been implemented in Cambodia following the general guidelines of the United Nations and with the help of organizations such as UNESCO. During our stay in Cambodia, we had an exchanged meeting with the Education Director of UNESCO Cambodia, Ms. Sun Lei. The purpose of the meeting was to understand the general directions of UNESCO's Education Department in Cambodia, the work done and challenges met so far, as well as how grass-root organizations like HIF could contribute to the promotion of children's wellbeing in Cambodia. During the meeting, HIF volunteers also had the chance to present the problems observed regarding education in rural Cambodia, and we expressed our concerns regarding the apparent gap between macro policies and the actual school attendance rate and quality of education in the villages. Ms. Sun Lei has eagerly expressed her interest in joining us during our village visits next year to assess the conditions and progress of education development in the rural areas.



VI. Acknowledgements

We would like to express our deep appreciation to donors and supporters of Humanity in Focus who contributed to the continuous growing of our department and made all the above overseas projects possible. Their generous support and trust in us have contributed greatly to the actualization of the education and health care projects in Cambodia this year. We would like to thank you ahead for your continuous support, and we hope to bring you more good news from Cambodia in the year 2009. So let us work hand in hand to support the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of the children in developing regions!

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