

Date: 21st of March 2024

Name of the community: Village 5 (Phome Pram)

People Interviewed: Mao Thyda (Community Leader) and Soun Rotha (Community Facilitator)

Topics: Impact of UPWD on the community and future solutions

People present: Mao Thyda, Soun Rotha, Sina Kou and Paula Sierra

Sina Kou, Project Manager of UPWD and Paula Sierra, Volunteer at the organization, went to one of the member communities that the UPWD organization supports to interview the community manager and small business owner Mao Thyda. She is one of the women in the program whose business (a small supermarket) was affected by the pandemic and is trying to recover with the support from UPWD.



Soun Rotha and Mao Thyda at Mao's home/business, from left to right.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- What's the biggest personal change you have noticed since UPWD started working for your community?

Mao – *“Since me and my husband started attending the meetings and workshops against Domestic Violence at UPWD, I feel the situation at our house has been much better. We do not fight so much anymore and there is less aggressiveness in general.”*



Mao explains that before UPWD helped her family her husband was stricter with giving her money, since he has main control over the finances of the house. She tells us that in order for her husband to be able to work as a taxi driver she decided to buy a car for him, which implied going into a big debt. They had big arguments over this and for over two years she did not receive any money from him.

Since they attended the meetings about Domestic Violence and Gender Equality hosted by UPWD, the situation has improved. Now, Mao has power over the money she earns from the supermarket and spends it mainly on food for her four children. On average she earns \$20/day.

To the left, the community's supermarket (Mao's business)

- Has UPWD helped you with your business in any way?

Mao – *“Yes, for sure! Thanks to UPWD I now understand how to do the family's accounting, considering both, income and expenses. This way I am able to track the net earnings every month. They have also given me tips on how to manage my business more efficiently and I am part of a women's group for Commune Financing. We will receive a credit loan for a group of 18 small-business women owners which we will be giving back with no interests. This financial aid will serve of much help for improving my business.”*



- **What are the biggest issues at the community at the moment?**

Mao – “Some of the biggest problems that are still present in our community are gambling (mostly online), stealing, violence on the streets, drug abuse and children exploitation. Just a few weeks ago my neighbor got stabbed by a member of the community with a long knife (katana). 20% of the community member are drug addicts, including pregnant women, and people from neighboring communities come to ours to buy and use drugs. Moreover, the amount of kids that don’t go to school and are exploited to work in the streets begging for money is still too high. Each family has from 2 to 8 kids and the community consists of approximately 100 families, which make an average of 500 children in total. From these, only about 70% of the kids attend school every other day (4 days a week maximum). Parents use their kids to make money for drugs.”



Adults gambling with cards and kids on the streets.

- **What do you think could be some solutions to face the aforementioned problems?**

Soun – “We are currently dealing with drug abuse by filing a communal complaint to the police. Last week we had a community meeting about the drug problem and we got signatures from many members of the community to proceed with the idea. However, we have to address the district police, since the police within the community is corrupt and they are limited to taking the money from the dealers for themselves, and in return they allow them to keep selling. The complaint asks for the police to come to the community and get the thumbprints of all of the members so they can have a control of who is dealing with drugs

when they catch them. The idea is to spread fear against the members of the community in order to reduce drug trafficking.”

- **Have you noticed any changes from the meetings and counseling you conduct within the community?**

Soun – *“Yes. Since we started counseling community members we have noticed that domestic violence has decreased and that 50% of the kids are starting to go to school more often.”*

- **Which of the UPWD projects would you say have impacted the community the most?**

Mao – *“I would say that the solar panels project has been of great help. UPWD has installed street lights that work with solar energy and thanks to them the amount of stealing and street crime has been reduced. In addition, UPWD has allowed us to improve the construction of our house. Thanks to their financial help we were able to change the wooden structure of our home for bricks. We feel safer now.”*



Street lights that work from solar panels to increase safety at the community

After talking to Mao and Soun we can conclude that there is still a lot of work to be done in these communities, specially towards solving drug, gambling and violence issues. However, UPWD is continuously trying to figure out new ways to make an impact. We were glad to find out by what we heard from the community that the change for the better is, slowly but surely, becoming a reality.