



STORIES of HOPE

BURMA

Buddhist Festival Teaches Life Lessons



During this Buddhist coming-of-age festival, monks and youth discuss the HIV/AIDS epidemic with support from PEPFAR.

“Few in Burma consider themselves to be at risk of HIV/AIDS infection. Monastery peer education programs help people of all ages gain a better understanding of how to avoid infection,” Dr. Hia Myo Kyaw said.



In 2005, an estimated 360,000 adults and children were living with HIV in Burma. The same year, the HIV prevalence rate among adults ages 15 to 49 was 1.3 percent. Initially, the country’s response to the epidemic was limited, and HIV spread relatively freely for more than a decade, leaving the country with one of the most serious epidemics in Asia.¹ Still today, many Burmese youth do not have adequate access to health education, including education about HIV/AIDS. As youth enter adulthood, they are confronted with life’s challenges. Those with little knowledge about HIV/AIDS do not understand how to prevent the spread of HIV or what care and treatment options are available to people living with HIV/AIDS.

With support from the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (Emergency Plan/PEPFAR), a Buddhist monastery is working to address this problem by promoting information sharing and open discussion about HIV/AIDS between parents, teachers, youth and people living with HIV/AIDS. The Buddhist coming-of-age ceremony, Shin Pyu, provides an opportunity to address challenges that youth will face as adults. One Buddhist abbot introduced a new tradition at the Shin Pyu festival – an open-air screening of a soap opera about HIV/AIDS. The characters in the film are migrant workers, like many of the villagers attending the festival. The film follows the characters as they learn about HIV/AIDS and join in the fight against the epidemic. At the festival, over 1,000 villagers of all ages viewed the drama.

With support from the Emergency Plan, the monastery has committed to screening the film series not only during the Shin Pyu festival, but also throughout the year. Traveling throughout Burma, these mobile film units have conducted 826 film screenings, reaching an estimated audience of 285,000.

¹ UNAIDS, Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic, 2006.

The U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

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