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SUCCESS STORY: CAMBODIA

Buddhist Monks Provide HIV/AIDS Care

USAID trains monks to provide home-based care, reducing social barriers



Buddhism for Development

A monk provides home-based care to a young woman and her child through Buddhism for Development.

Training these caring, compassionate monks in practical health care and community development skills brings about a positive response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Cambodian society.

PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS in Cambodia are often considered to have brought shame to themselves and to their families. Discrimination makes it difficult for them to obtain adequate health care and support services, and many people with HIV even refuse the visits of village home-care teams because they fear what the neighbors might say. In recent years, Buddhist monks have begun to break down these barriers of stigma and discrimination by helping people living with HIV/AIDS meet their basic needs. In doing so, the monks are also practicing the *dharma*, or the teachings of Buddha, of which service to the community is an important component.

With funding from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief through USAID, one group is helping to bridge the gap between the religious and secular communities. In an effort to fight the HIV/AIDS epidemic through faith-based initiatives, the International HIV/AIDS Alliance provides assistance to the Khmer HIV/AIDS NGO Alliance, which finances Buddhism for Development.

Buddhism for Development provides home-based care to people living with HIV/AIDS and services to children who have lost parents to AIDS. Buddhism for Development also operates a six-week "Peace Development School" in which monks learn about health care and HIV/AIDS, and about community participation, vocational-building efforts, and agricultural extension methods.

Monks are held in the highest regard in Cambodia. Most, however, have little formal education, and only rudimentary knowledge of how to provide health care, how to discuss HIV/AIDS, or how to encourage a community to strive for sustainable agricultural and economic development. Of the more than 1,100 monks who have gone through the Peace Development School so far, many have returned to their home villages and have established HIV/AIDS associations that now carry out HIV-prevention services and home-based care. Many of these monks have also established centers to provide direct care for children who have been affected by HIV/AIDS. They have also worked to find ways to keep children in school.

Buddhism for Development's primary project offers home-based palliative care and psychosocial support to persons living with HIV/AIDS in three communities in Battambang Province. It also sponsors self-help groups that incorporate Buddhist teaching, meditation, and prayer as a stress-relieving strategy.

Training these caring, compassionate monks in practical health care and community development skills is a logical way to use existing cultural and religious structures to bring about a positive response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Cambodian society.

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