

Cambodian Women's Crisis Center

Evaluation Report (March 2008 - March 2009)

Submitted by: Hayden Brooks

Summary

This evaluation was undertaken to examine both the results and challenges of projects initiated by the Cambodian Women’s Crisis Center (CWCC) that were documented in monthly reports by each of CWCC primary service programs from March 2008 until March 2009. Drawing from the recommendations made in a previous evaluation of CWCC activities by Mr. Jeffrey Weaner, this evaluation examines how well CWCC has been able to address both community needs and organizational needs and what challenges continue to hamper progress.

Resources

Research was undertaken using primary source documents and interviews with staff in order to understand how well the Monitoring Program, Community Organization Program and the Legal Program are each able to function towards reaching program objectives. Other relevant documents including magazines and periodicals produced by the organization as well as external evaluation reports were reviewed. If there was a need for clarification, both Say Vathany, Executive Director of CWCC, and Moung Meareday, were accessible and generous with their time.

Overview of Program Services

The Monitoring Program

The Monitoring Program seeks to “provide appropriate intervention, monitoring and direct services to victims of gender based abuse including domestic violence, rape and trafficking.” Dealing directly with female victims of violence, the Monitoring program is for many women seeking help the first experience they have with the organization. Staff document and investigate acts of violence committed against women (domestic violence, trafficking, and rape). Services of the program include: media monitoring for reported

cases of violence against women; general interviews with victims; consultation of victims' rights and the law; safe shelter and time away from community; physical examinations by doctors and specialists; investigation of crime scene; collection of evidence and necessary documents; assistance in finding legal representation; assistance and participation at official legal hearing; assistance in court ordered subpoenas to victims and involved parties; monitoring progress of court cases.

The involvement of monitoring activities is not limited to the staff of the program but includes the participation of a victim's family and relatives; local authorities, the police; various state Ministries; Cambodian embassies within the region; and other non-governmental organizations operating within Cambodia. The relationships that CWCC has built and maintains with both the Cambodian government and non-governmental organizations are valued by all involved. This network is crucial to the organization's success in carrying out the outlined goals of "creating opportunities for women to have equality and justice." From March 2008 until March 2009, the three largest groups of referrals to the Monitoring Program came from police/local authorities (49), non-governmental organizations (51) and the community-based CWCC network (38).

For the evaluated time period, the Monitoring Program found both successes and setbacks in its activities. Clients were helped by staff in developing self-reliant attitudes to seek carefully considered solutions on their own. Former clients of CWCC were involved in assisting new clients that sought help for understanding the law as well as developing the ability to problem solve and make decisions for themselves. Staff reported a noticeable increase in the speed of courts to render decisions in cases involving new penal codes. Strong cooperation with police from the Ministry of the Interior continued, while police at the local level had a fair understanding of the law and their responsibilities towards applying it. Expensive fees for filing official charges and expensive legal fees were two primary obstacles within the court system for poor clients. Additionally, issues involving a client's lack of proper documentation (wedding certificates, birth certificates, identification, etc.) and missing agreed upon appointments added to setbacks.

The Community Organizing Program

The focus of the Community Organizing Program (CO) is to develop a strong social awareness to the issues of domestic violence, rape, trafficking and women's rights within communities across the country. This program finds its strength with community based volunteers who are accessible to their own communities and maintain relationships with CWCC as well. With a focus on understanding the law, personal rights and developing support networks within communities, the program attempts to involve both men and women, young and old. The CWCC's community outreach extends training programs to the law enforcement officials. These training courses help police understand their role and responsibilities when intervening in issues involving domestic violence, rape or human trafficking.

The CO program also made efforts to involve the community through mass media outlets, including radio and television programs, to raise awareness of issues involving violence against women.

From March 2008 until April 2009, the Community Organizing Program focused on engaging government ministries and non-governmental organizations in efforts to educate and build consensus around the issues of violence against women. Training programs were offered, organized and administered to police throughout the year; regular participation in local and national forums dealing with human trafficking; training manuals were updated and revised for the training programs; communications with the Ministry of Justice regarding the development of a court for minors; participation in television interviews that discussed how to stop human trafficking; participation in radio programs that dealt with issues concerning women's rights; and the strengthening of ties with leaders and authorities at the provincial level.

Although CWCC continued to do much to promote women's rights and address the issues of violence against women, it was clear from the monthly reports that lack of funds was an issue. Requests from the staff included larger, brighter rooms for official

meetings; new computer equipment; and more space to be allocated for parking employee motorbikes. Such requests dealing with infrastructure should be a high priority for an organization like CWCC that remains continually active providing services to the community. One comment from the May 2008 report explained, “Regular problems with computer slow things down.” Even if program staff can function adequately in their duties, with the workload placed upon the program itself, problems involving computers, or more parking spaces, should be addressed promptly.

On a procedural basis, recommendations were also made by staff to rotate, or change, the teachers who were involved with training programs in the provinces and the cities. By rotating teachers from place to place, they would have the opportunity to experience teaching in varying communities, enriching both their own experience and the experience of program participants. The need to develop a stronger relationship between CWCC and the Ministry of Women’s Affairs was also noted.

The Legal Assistance Program

The legal program’s primary function is “to increase awareness and legal representation of women survivors of violence, by informing them about their legal rights, judicial process, and options for ensuring perpetrators are held accountable for their actions and victims are protected.”

The services provided by the legal assistance program offers clients the opportunity to be informed of their legal rights, legal counseling and protection, as well as the opportunity to exercise those rights in a court of law if they so chose to. Only a very small number of CWCC clients have the personal means to hire their own legal representation. For most of the clients of CWCC, legal representation through the organization offers the rare chance to appear before a court and have their cases tried. If a verdict is rendered in favor of a CWCC client, lawyers also work to ensure the verdict is enforced. Clients who do not wish to pursue action through the court system have the option to have their lawyer conduct an out-of-court reconciliation.

From March 2008 until March 2009, CWCC lawyers handled cases of rape, sexual aggression, domestic violence and sexual trafficking, involving both minors (under 18) and adults. Cases involving minors dealt almost completely with incidents of rape, with occasional cases of trafficking as well. Legal services provided for adult clients dealt primarily with cases of domestic violence and divorce proceedings. Cases of rape and sexual trafficking followed second and third, respectfully, to issues of domestic violence.

Although the legal assistance program continued to provide numerous services to their clients that would otherwise be difficult to afford, the program faced obstacles of its own both from within as well as the larger legal sphere during the evaluation period. Monthly reports continually noted an urgent need to increase staff to assist with the work load. The program was staffed by only two lawyers that were responsible for a growing back caseload, a regularly growing new caseload and regular interaction and dealings with the courts. Also addressed were issues involving the need for space and privacy (new room for interviewing, quieter areas for consulting with clients), equipment (additional motorbike, a new camera) and procedure (clients changing addresses without notification).

The Cambodian court system also presented its own series of obstacles for CWCC lawyers and their clients to navigate. Monthly reports described the difficulty in dealing with officials who asked for money in exchange for expediency. Such demands for bribes and rampant corruption among officials in the courts often forced CWCC lawyers to work twice as hard for basic gains. In many situations, monetary demands are used as leverage for a case to be presented and heard in court. Cases that are excessively delayed over long periods of time can cause clients to lose interest in the judicial process as well as losses of evidence (names, involved parties).

Despite the drawbacks faced, however, the legal program of CWCC continued to assist and counsel victims in need to the best of their abilities.

Recommendations

In his evaluation of CWCC, Jeffrey Weaner analyzed reported program activities from 1 April 2006 until 31 March 2009 as documented in reports to UNIFEM. Through detailed interviews and analysis, Weaner detailed the role the CWCC continued to build with local communities, the Cambodian government and international community over the two year period he evaluated. Among his conclusions, Weaner noted the “strong community network” created by CWCC, the strength of the “human resources of the organization”, and the challenges facing CWCC “in terms of administrative systems and physical space which must be addressed.” These three conclusions still accurately describe CWCC at the end of March 2009. The organization continues its programs of education/training, monitoring and protection, and legal services with equal vigor although problems continue to slow the speed of progress.

As CWCC continues to develop and extend its reach of services in Cambodia, it will become essential to have a staff both large and well trained enough to meet the needs of clients. Hiring additional staff should address the nature of work involved along with the areas that need it most urgently. In certain circumstances female victims may feel uncomfortable detailing their experiences to a male staff worker. The need for additional, trained female staff in such cases is an invaluable resource. Equally important is identifying what areas of what programs of CWCC are most urgently in need of more staff. For example, the addition of a single person in the Legal Program would go along way towards redistributing the large caseload and better serving clients involved in legal system. Increases in staff can be made gradually, but what is important is that they are made.

Attention should also to be given to issues of physical space and capacity for CWCC. Whether for employee meetings, consultations with clients, personal workspaces, or the simple separation of public waiting areas from private work areas, understanding how these spaces can be best utilized will also contribute to the general order of business.

With growing needs for staff and space, measures should be considered that address both increases.

One factor that should be considered with any growth of the organization involves the retightened budgetary constraints due to the global economic crisis of 2008-2009. CWCC, like many other organizations, depends on funding from a variety of international sources to maintain its ability to provide services and build upon the base of the organization itself. As global markets slowly reestablish their balance, organizations dependent on budgetary aid may not have the ability to take on large staffs, new buildings, new equipment and other needed resources all at the same time. In such instances like this, it's important to maintain healthy, open communication between staff, employees, and supervisors in order to maintain operational stability and encourage an open dialogue about how to solve problems that are faced. While developing strategies to expand the coverage of quality services, attention should be give to needed changes that are feasible for CWCC to initiate.