

Action Update- April 15

Empowering Families in Rural Cambodia



As the COVID-19 vaccine offers great hope, the economic impact of the pandemic continues to have devastating effects worldwide. Week of Compassion is committed to supporting global partners as they provide relief and create opportunities that will help communities recover. Since early 2020, COVID-19 has caused economic hardship for many families, particularly across Southeast Asia. In Cambodia, our partners work

with families to improve their lives and livelihoods.

Akk Oan, 47, lives with his wife and four children in Ang Village in Battambang province. With no farmland or even a home garden plot, they rely solely on his income from daily wage labor for their food and shelter. Before COVID-19, Oan's two teenage children migrated to work in Thailand, sending money home to help. Even though three family members work as wage laborers, they are so low-paid that there is often not enough for the family to eat. Oan admitted that sometimes he has worked a whole day without any food. COVID-19 restrictions brought his older children home, and losing their wages means even more hardship for the family.

Many households in the region find themselves in a similar situation: prior to the pandemic, they received income from relatives working in Thailand. Since Thailand began COVID-19 mitigations and closed its borders in March 2020, more than 120,000 Cambodian migrant workers have returned home. The humanitarian emergency created by these returns and the loss of income persists, with growing concerns of socio-economic vulnerability for these workers and their families.

Week of Compassion partners in the region were already working with vulnerable families in Battambang Province. As the crisis grew and the economic impact of the pandemic began to worsen, the province emerged as one of those hardest hit by the impact of the virus. **Fortunately, with their long-standing relationships, and with COVID-19 precautions**

in place, our partners were able to act quickly to meet urgent needs.

Food shortages emerged as one of the most pressing, critical needs, as did an increase in health concerns. Week of Compassion supported an emergency appeal that helps our partners provide immediate relief for those who need it most in the midst of compound challenges. These funds help provide food assistance and conditional cash grants for livelihood support to those affected not only by the ongoing pandemic but also by drought and floods that have recently impacted the area.

“One thing that COVID taught us was the relevance and strength of working with, and in communities,” says Josephine Oguta, Vice President of Development and Humanitarian Assistance for Church World Service. “Just having that on the ground presence--we saw the fruits of that capacity.” Unlike many services and organizations that have had to cease operations during the pandemic, CWS programs worldwide have continued operating at 90-95% capacity, thanks to their strong local presence in communities.

Still, challenges remain. With travel restrictions still in place, there are fewer staff available to distribute aid; transporting goods takes longer; and some of the most vulnerable, like the elderly, have limited access and mobility to seek aid. With so many workers having moved back home, household sizes have shifted as well. Each home now needs more resources to feed the whole family. Families that used to have stable income are at risk of slipping back into abject poverty. Oguta says, “we’ve been in Cambodia for 40 years. What we’ve done in past five to ten could disappear overnight.”

Because of the ongoing uncertainty and instability caused by the pandemic, a commitment to global development programs is more important than ever. Week of Compassion partners have adapted existing programs during this season, both to prevent the loss of past progress and to address needs brought to the forefront by the current crisis.

The goal is not just to give food assistance--these are hard-working communities capable of meeting their own needs. They just need to be empowered through capacity-building programs, such as agricultural support for farmers, or credit access for women to improve their livelihood. “Week of Compassion’s partnership and support really helped us and was timely,” says Oguta. With our help, families were able to meet some of their needs without having to go into debt. “Now they have food, and resources for other things.”

After learning about Oan and his family, our partners wanted to help them provide for their needs. Oan mentioned that it would help a lot if he did not need to walk around to others’ farms and fields--which he continues to do now that it is rice harvesting time--to try to find day labor. When he heard that he could receive a piglet, as well as support to raise it properly, he joined others to learn the basic best practices of pig raising.

Oan said “I am so very grateful for the piglet! With my low pay as a daily wage laborer, I could never afford to buy one. Now, while I continue to harvest others’ rice for a bit of money to keep the family going, I will raise the piglet. In time, I plan to breed her, and this will yield money to buy rice and other food for my family. My idea is to save money to buy more pigs. I hope to expand my newfound business so in the future I will no longer work as a wage laborer. I can’t thank you enough for such support!”

Week of Compassion Responses since March 23



Tennessee, Winter
Storm Relief



Texas, Winter
Storm Relief



South Carolina,
COVID-19 Relief



Puerto Rico, Long-term
Hurricane Recovery

For an interactive map of responses, [visit our website](#).

Week of Compassion is the relief, refugee and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.

Donate

(317) 713-2442 ~ info@weekofcompassion.org ~ www.weekofcompassion.org

[Download PDF](#)

View this and other [recent stories on our website](#)

// CONNECT WITH US //

