



Siem Reap Citizens for Health, Educational, and Social Issues



Citoyen(ne)s de Siem Reap pour la Santé, de l'Éducation et les Questions Sociales



SiRCHESI outreach workers, staff and Canadian students



SiRCHESI's NEWSLETTER: MAR. 2007

Siem Reap, Cambodia, adjacent to the Angkor Wat temples, attracted over 1,700,000 visitors in 2006; tourism is this provincial capital's leading industry.

SiRCHESI (Siem Reap Citizens for Health, Educational and Social Issues) is a non-profit, non-religious, non-political and non-governmental organization (NGO) formed in Cambodia in 2000. It finances its activities independently through grants (e.g., Elton John AIDS Foundation, M.A.C. AIDS Fund) and donations. SiRCHESI has brought together concerned citizens, business persons, and community health and medical workers, while forging links to research and practice expertise and resources. Our multi-sectorial approach to community health-promotion primarily targets health risks such as HIV/AIDS and alcohol abuse, and since 2002, SiRCHESI has provided innovative, proactive and effective workshops and outreach programs. In 2006, we opened a small school to help create new careers in the healthier workplaces of large hotels. Our programs also must focus on gender equity, literacy and education, improving workplace health and safety, improving economic security and welfare, and prevention of the sexual exploitation and trafficking of young women and men, boys and girls. A Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach guides SiRCHESI's creation and monitoring of new health promotion projects. SiRCHESI helps strengthen local infrastructure, through its "hybrid model of capacity building". Our NGO staff wear two hats, retaining their public service positions, with flex-time scheduling.

Dr. Sarath Kros is SiRCHESI's part-time NGO Program Director and supervises 8 part-time staff, a network of 17 peer-educator outreach workers, as well as student interns, visiting researchers and volunteers. He also heads the Siem Reap Provincial AIDS Office (PAO), is Secretary of the Provincial AIDS Committee (PAC), and Deputy Director of the Provincial Health Department. He thus ensures effective co-ordination and co-operation among government and NGO programs. (See the website: www.angkorwatngo.com). SiRCHESI staff creating new workshops on the weekend can utilize and disseminate these programs further during their week-day jobs in the public service.

HOW SiRCHESI SUPPORTERS' CONTRIBUTIONS IMPACT UPON LOCAL HEALTH PROJECTS

Cambodia is one of the 20 poorest countries in the world, devastated by warfare and a population loss estimated at 25% during the genocide of 1975-9. Siem Reap, amidst a growing tourist boom, still cannot provide the basics for its citizens. Literacy rates for women are estimated at less than 30% in the province; our interview data suggests the average woman has less than 2 years of schooling, and this later impacts job possibilities. Many resources for the health system must be provided by NGOs such as SiRCHESI, Doctors without Borders (MSF), ESTHER, CARITAS, foundation-supported Angkor Childrens' Hospital and Khanta Bhopa III Hospital. Every outside funding source – foundations, international agencies, donor countries, and individual donations-- is critical. Recently, the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has taken an important role in providing needed anti-retroviral therapy. NGOs also deal with education, human rights, gender and micro-economic development issues. Like SiRCHESI, many coordinate their activities with government ministries (Women's Affairs, Tourism, Health), National AIDS Authority (NAA) and NCHADS (National Centre for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology and STIs).

WHY IS THE HEALTH CRISIS STILL SO DEADLY?

Siem Reap welcomes throngs of cultural tourists, but also arriving are traffickers of women and children, sexual tourists, paedophiles, and men who come to be "cured of HIV/AIDS by sleeping with young virgins". These groups all increase HIV/AIDS and STI rates in the community. When impoverished or under-paid local women exchange sex for money, infections are "bridged" to local men earning income from tourism, then to wives, partners and newborns. Siem Reap's HIV/AIDS prevalence rates have been (1995-2003) the highest in Cambodia, which, in turn, has had the highest rates in South-East Asia, particularly for young persons (15-19 years). In Siem Reap, an estimated 7-10,000 persons are living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHAs); in 2004, only about 100 adults and 9 children were receiving daily the life-saving anti-retroviral therapy (ARVT) medications from NGOs MSF and ESTHER, and 2 private hospitals. By 2006, about 1000 persons were being treated with ARVT. SiRCHESI has prodded global/international corporations profitably doing business in Cambodia to provide fair wages, health education, safe work places and ARVT for their HIV+ employees (e.g., the

beer promotion women for international beer brands have had an HIV+ prevalence rate varying about 20.5% (1995-2003). In Sept., 2006, SiRCHESI authors challenged one beer company, Heineken, to do more for its Cambodian beersellers, in a note to the *Lancet* (van Merode, T., Kros, S., Dy, B.C. & Lubek, I. (2006). Antiretrovirals for employees of large companies in Cambodia. *the Lancet*, 368, Sept. 23, p. 1065.) By January, 2007, the Global Fund's contributions to Cambodia would permit universal access to ARVT, if certain medical and social criteria were met. SiRCHESI continues to prod beer companies to provide a "fair" or "living" wage to their sellers (\$110US monthly) to eliminate risk-taking.

RECENT SIRCHESI ACTIVITIES (2006-7):

Since 2001, SiRCHESI has built an active outreach program for groups at risk for HIV/AIDS. To this, beginning in 2005, we added alcohol over-use. Four HIV+ risk groups are bi-annually surveyed (N=560), and by 2003 we had developed workshops and followup for married women and men, beer promoters, and for other NGOs. Our peer educator outreach continued to increase its health promotion activities reaching 880 persons in 2002, 1848 in 2003, 2678 in 2004, 3460 in 2005 and 4164 in 2006. We have targeted 6000 for 2007.

In 2004, SiRCHESI staff began providing **street-proofing/micro-economic empowerment** workshops for young souvenir vendors at Angkor Wat, at risk from sexual predators. Hospital-reported HIV+ rates(2004) in Siem Reap for infants, children and adolescents varied between 1.6% to 23%, depending on sampling.

We are grateful to the Elton John AIDS Foundation and M.A.C. AIDS Fund whose generous support launched our programs and provide community momentum. Other SiRCHESI fund-raising sources included Rotary International/M.A.C. AIDS matching funds; talks to Universities, international conferences, and community service groups; a benefit concert by Toronto Khmer Band White Tiger; a 2006 fundraising evening at Hugh's Room(Toronto) including folk singers Marie-Lynn Hammond, Connie Kaldor, Gwen Swick, Caitlin Hanford, the Khmer Folk Group of Toronto, an excerpt from Charles Kiselyak's film of sex-trafficking in Cambodia ("Virgin Harvest") and guest speaker Mu Sochua, former Minister of Women's Affairs. Presentations were also made to members of Khmer communities in Australia and New Zealand. We also re-sell "fair-trade" souvenirs from the Angkor Wat young vendors.

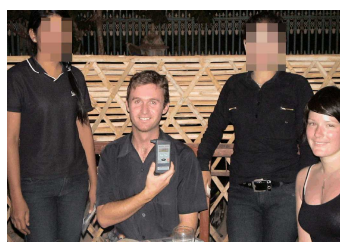
Unofficial statistics on voluntary HIV testing (VCCT) indicate **reduced HIV prevalence rates** for various risk groups in the community, including married/pregnant women, sex workers and beer-sellers, during 2005 and 2006. Despite such optimistic indications, we continue our prevention activities in this constantly expanding community, alongside other NGOs' "continuum of care" activities (ARVT therapy, home-based care, stigma reduction, counseling, etc.).

Young vendors role-playing with SiRCHESI staff



THE DOUBLE THREAT OF ALCOHOL AND AIDS

We first began educating "beer promotion women" in 2002 about HIV/AIDS prevention and on Aug. 5, 2005, we launched, with help from CARE, an **alcohol awareness workshop** for 27 beer sellers. (See the SiRCHESI websites www.fairtradebeer.com, www.beergirls.org, and www.ethicalbeer.com). These women sell international brands of beer and alcohol but, according to our surveys, are chronically under-paid by 50%. To meet family economic obligations, some accept propositions to exchange sex for money after work, from clients with whom they are often forced to drink. Their **HIV prevalence rates averaged 20.5%** (1995-2003); they consume unsafe quantities of alcohol on the job, **drinking over 1.2 litres of beer nightly** (about 5 standard drinks). Our research shows this reduces condom use and thus increases the risks for HIV/AIDS, STIs, and other health problems (liver damage, cancers) in addition to the work safety issues (violence, road accidents, harassment, absenteeism, etc.). At our August, 2005 conference, a session on "AIDS and Alcohol" engaged local beer-garden and restaurant owners, beer distributors and beer promoters in discussions following presentations by CARE and SiRCHESI. Following research by Jillian Schuster in 2005 on workplace hazards to beer-servers in Cambodia (compared to Canadian counterparts), in 2006, Trisha Pagnutti (aided by Brett Dickson and our staff) took breathalyzer samples in Siem Reap restaurants. Men averaged BAC=.074 (.05 is considered impaired) while the women serving them the beer averaged 0.49! 68.5% of the men indicated they would drive a motorized vehicle home! (About 16% of Siem Reap Province hospital beds are filled with accident victims). We then ran alcohol education and AIDS workshops for women servers and men drinkers.



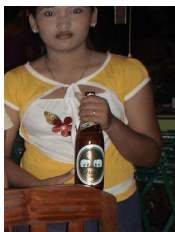


SIRCHESI and CARE Alcohol/AIDS Awareness Workshop, Aug. 5, 2005. Staff and beer-promoters role-playing and resisting, lectures, and pamphlets

HOW CAN WE MAKE IT SAFE FOR BEER PROMOTERS?

We have expanded these discussions and alcohol workshops in Siem Reap. In September, 2005, and then in Oct., 2006, presentations were made at the international headquarters of three major brewers selling in Cambodia: Heineken (Amsterdam), InBEV/Interbrew (Louvian), Carlsberg (Copenhagen). Executives were asked to take an even more vanguard role in the improvement of the lives of the women selling beer in Cambodia, beyond Heineken's efforts with a "Selling Beer Safely" educational program. Some press coverage occurred. In Oct., 2006, 6 brewers formed Beer Selling Industry Cambodia, and issued a Code of Conduct which promoted reduction of violence and cessation of drinking on the job, but made no mention of providing ARVT or fair wages. At least one ethical shareholders group will raise issues at an annual meeting in April, 2007. Discussions between union groups are currently going on with beer-sellers, following a visit by Sharan Burrows (ACTU president) to Cambodia in May, 2006.

SiRCHESI estimates that **\$150,000 is needed for each major international beer producer to eliminate these workplace health/safety risks for 200 beer promoters annually.** Each sells an estimated \$13,000-\$30,000 annually, receiving remuneration of \$660; offering the women a salary equivalent to 7.5% of the sale price of the beer would produce a "fair trade" deal, with income sufficient to eliminate the need for any second job creating risk. It could even cover the costs of ARVT medications, instead of leaving this up to the Global Fund and NGOs to cover.



Thida serving beer, Nov., 2006.

SIRCHESI's NEWEST PROGRAM: RE-TRAINING BEER SELLERS FOR SAFER CAREERS IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY: 2006-2008

In Nov., 2006, SiRCHESI launched its HOTEL APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING program to develop safer, secure career opportunities for women in the hotel industry. With the sponsorship of M.A.C. AIDS FUND and three partner hotels in the first cohort (Lin Ratanak Angkor, Sokha, and Angkor Howard), women at risk in entertainment industry jobs have been offered daily literacy and English language classes (with health and social/life skills added), and then on-the-job mentored apprenticeship training for 8 months, followed by a 16 month permanent contract. Fair wages are maintained throughout the 24 month period by this NGO-industry partnership. The 14 women now in cohort 1, will graduate from the SiRCHESI "school" in July, 2007; a second cohort will start in August.



Thida learning hotel kitchen skills, Dec., 2006. Above, Brett Dickson from Australia Volunteers International gives English lessons alongside SiRCHESI staff working with students at our new school. Apprentices at the hotels...

For further details, documentation is available at www.angkorwatngo.com, www.beergirls.org, www.fairtradebeer.com, and www.ethicalbeer.com.

We thank you in advance for your interest in our project and any support you can give through our websites.

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