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SiRCHESI
កម្មវិធីសម្រាប់សង្គមចក្ខុស្វយ័ត របស់ ខេត្តសៀមរាប
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 staff and Canadian student researchers



Dr. Sarath Kros and Tra Tim at Angkor Wat

SiRCHESI's NEWSLETTER: FALL 2005

Siem Reap, Cambodia, adjacent to the Angkor Wat temples, attracted over 1,000,000 visitors in 2004; tourism is this provincial capital's leading industry.

SiRCHESI (Siem Reap Citizens for Health, Education-al 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. Cosmetics AIDS Fund) and donations. SiRCHESI has brought together concerned citizens, business persons, and community health and medical workers, and forging links to experts and resources. A multi-sectorial Participatory Action Research (**PAR**) approach guides SiRCHESI's creation and monitoring of new health programs, helps strengthen local infra-structure and community health-promotion by focusing on gender equity, education, prevention of the trafficking of minors, and workplace welfare, health and safety. Since 2002, SiRCHESI has provided innovative, proactive and effective programs of HIV/AIDS prevention for women, men and young persons in Siem Reap. Dr. Sarath KROS supervises 8 part-time staff and a large network of volunteer peer-educators, student interns, and researchers. He heads the Siem Reap Provincial AIDS Office (PAO), is Secretary of the Provincial AIDS Committee(PAC), and thus ensures effective co-ordination and co-operation amongst government and NGO programs (SiRCHESI's website is www.angkorwatngo.com).

HOW YOUR SUPPORT CAN IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY HELP CAMBODIAN 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 tourist boom, still cannot provide the

basics for its citizens. Rather, many health services are provided by NGOs such as SiRCHESI, Doctors without Borders (MSF), ESTHER, CARITAS, and foundation-supported Angkor Childrens' Hospital and Khanta Bhopa III Hospital. Various NGOs target other health, 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).

ALL CONTRIBUTIONS IN 2005 ARE DOUBLED!

Donations during 2005 are **matched/doubled** by Rotary Club of Canada and M.A.C.AIDS Response Fund. Gifts for SiRCHESI's work in Cambodia can now be made instantly (in \$CDN) by **VISA** or **Master Card** at our 4 websites through a secure "**Donate NOW**" system or at University of Guelph's donor page. www.alumni.uoguelph.ca/cgi-bin/online_giving2004.pl

In the "**Other Funds**" box, please type in:

"HIV/AIDS Cambodia Fund".

As well, cheques can be made out to "University of Guelph", adding "**HIV/AIDS Charitable Donation/ Cambodia**" in the bottom left corner. Please mail to: Ms. Juanita Arnold, Manager, Financial Services, Alumni Affairs & Development, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON, N1H 2W1, Canada.

WHY IS THE HEALTH CRISIS SO DEADLY IN SIEM REAP?

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 underpaid 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 are the highest in Cambodia, which has 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 and a private children's hospital; a second private hospital began expanding a maternity program to prevent mother-child HIV transmission. SiRCHESI prods 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 are now 20% HIV+).



3 young vendors from Angkor Wat sell their SiRCHESI-produced t-shirts to National AIDS Authority (NAA) Secretary-General, H.E. Dr. Tia Phalla



Audience Discussion: Alcohol and AIDS 06/08/2005

RECENT SiRCHESI ACTIVITIES:

Since 2001, SiRCHESI has built an active outreach program for groups at risk for HIV/AIDS, to which this year we added alcohol over-use. Four HIV+ risk groups are bi-annually surveyed, and by 2003 we had developed workshops and followup for married women and men, beer promoters, and for other NGOs. In 2004, our peer educators reached over 2500 men and women with HIV/AIDS prevention training; in 2005 we will reach 4000, with 5000 targeted for 2006. 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. Cosmetics AIDS Fund whose generous support launched our programs and provided community momentum. Other SiRCHESI fund-raising activities have included talks presented to Universities, international conferences, and community service groups, a benefit concert, and presentations to members of the Khmer communities living outside Cambodia. We also re-sell souvenirs from the Angkor Wat young vendors.

Our **6th Annual Siem Reap Conference on HIV/AIDS**(Aug. 6-7, 2005) brought together over 100 representatives from NGOs (international and local), hospitals and community stakeholder groups to review the health promotion situation. Dr. Mee Lian Wong (National University of Singapore), summarized SiRCHESI's health behaviour study (2001-2004) for

4 risk groups, reporting reduced sexual risk-taking and increased preventative activities. **For the first 6 months of 2005**, voluntary HIV testing (VCCT) indicated **reduced HIV prevalence rates** for various risk groups in the community, including married and pregnant women, and direct and indirect sex workers.

Despite these optimistic indications, we must accelerate prevention activities in this continuously expanding community, alongside other "continuum of care" activities (ARVT therapy, home-based care, stigma reduction, counseling, etc.).

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 promoters**". (See 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 average 20%** (1995-2004); they consume unsafe quantities of alcohol on the job, **drinking 1.2 litres of beer nightly**. This may reduce condom use and increase 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 two NGO presentations.



"We're Beer Promoters and Health Promoters". SiRCHESI HIV/AIDS and Alcohol Awareness Workshop, Aug. 5, 2005. "More than 1 glass of beer (25cl) each day is harmful to women's health"





HOW CAN WE MAKE IT SAFE FOR BEER PROMOTERS?

We are expanding these discussions and alcohol workshops in Siem Reap, and elsewhere. In September, 2005, a presentation was made in Amsterdam at Heineken's International headquarters. Heineken executives were asked to take an even more vanguard role in the improvement of the lives of the women selling alcohol in Cambodia, beyond their current efforts with a "Selling Beer Safely" educational program. Short press releases appeared in the Netherlands and Belgium, and discussions continue with trade-unions, European regulatory officials, shareholders' groups, and NGOs concerned about workplace risks to women and ethical investing. A scheduled presentation to INBEV (Interbrew) executives in Belgium was cancelled by the company.

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; increases of 2.5%- 7.5% of the cost of a beer, a "fair trade" deal, would provide enough income to eliminate the need for any second job, and would cover ARVT medications.



SiRCHESI's PLANNED PROGRAMS:2005-2006

SiRCHESI's programs include:

- i) expanding our peer-education training program for married women, beer-promotion girls, and other groups of women, men and young persons at risk for HIV/AIDS with continuous community monitoring (560 clinical interviews per year) of responses to HIV/AIDS and its prevention and other health risks;
- ii) developing safer, secure career opportunities for women in the hotel industry, with a paid apprenticeship, literacy and language training program for women who are currently excluded;
- iii) programs for young persons confronted by sexual tourists, e.g., formation of the Angkor Wat Young Vendors Association to promote "polite" sales to tourists while avoiding personal risks.; assessment of risks to infants, children and adolescents
- iv) encouraging major international corporations doing business in Cambodia to contribute to the health and safety of their female workers by reducing workplace risks: by providing "fair wages" of \$110 monthly to remove economic pressures, health education about HIV/AIDS and alcohol misuse, free antiretroviral medications (ARVT) when needed, preventing alcohol consumption at work, etc.(see www.fairtradebeer.com)
- v) working with Cambodian legislators to change laws about entertainment industry workplace health/safety
- vi) developing alcohol awareness/harm reduction programs for women serving alcohol and drinkers
- vii) Communicating about these issues via websites 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 are able to give us at this time, which will count double!!!.**

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