

Women's Resource Center (WRC)

Interview with PISEY KHIM (MANAGING DIRECTOR) and SALLY JANE DOUGLAS (SUPPORT OFFICER/ADVISOR) held by SONJA BARWITZKI (Heinrich Böll Foundation)

Operating since 2010, the Women's Resource Center (WRC) is a drop-in center for women, which offers counselling support, informal-educational workshops on different topics like woman's health, parenting, legal aid and the finance course "riel change". The organization consists of 5 people of which 4 are Khmer.

Many women experience violence or other major problems during their relationship. Coming to the WRC is the first step towards relief where they can find understanding and a secure environment to speak about their experiences for the first time, which is no common occurrence in the Khmer culture. The still very prevalent Code of Conduct of Cambodian women (Chbab Srey) states - for example – that women have to be patient at any time, because a good wife is always patient and obeys her husband. Unfortunately women misunderstand this message, which is communicated from one generation to the next, as an advice to be patient in all situations, this might be even during an act of violence. They often wrongly believe that they are beaten because they have not been enough of a "good wife". In the workshops of WRC harmed women can learn about their rights and possibilities, how to respond to these situations and develop a sense of self-worth.

The workshops provided are intentionally small courses for 10 – 12 people and take place over a time of 8 weeks. Courses take place each week and take two hours, so that the women are able to integrate them into their daily life and duties. The courses are personalized as much as possible regarding topics like family planning or the impacts of violence on families and children. The workshops are offered completely cost free for the participants.

To get to know the Women's Resource Center better Sonja Barwitzki from Heinrich-Boell-Foundation asked them a few questions:

What are your projects about?

We have four different courses: In the Parenting Course the negative impact of violence is explained to both men and women. In return positive discipline, the impact of boundaries between children and parents and rules are being introduced as alternatives.

The Health Workshop is especially designed for women. It covers the topics family planning and woman's health and tries to be as personalized as possible to adapt to the individual situation of each client.

We also provide assistance to access to justice. During the legal aid workshop both men and women learn about topics like family law; marriage, birth & death registration; domestic violence and gender equality. The differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships together with the gender roles are being explained. WRC is trying to contribute to a change in the clients thinking, trying to make them question unhealthy structures themselves rather than telling what is right or wrong.

Since this year we offer a course on promoting financial literacy. Here the clients can learn about money, its management, how to set saving goals and especially how to reach them with a step plan. Furthermore the workshop is encouraging life skills and healthy habits in dealing with money and in general.

How would you describe women's situation?

Women in urban areas have only limited access to information. The situation is even worse in the country side, where there is no access provided. This leads to a circle where young women copy unhealthy structures from their families or neighbors. As the girls never learn to stand up for themselves and be strong, they believe what they are told: That the parents and later the husband will look after them. Girls and women are therefore trapped in a very controlling and oppressive system. But as they have never experienced any other, they do not question their own situation. WRC aims to provide information about parenting, education and possibilities to those young women and therefore open people's perspectives and give options which they might not have considered.

What is your vision for the situation of women in Cambodia?

Women's Resource Center is aiming for a status quo where every woman has a choice and the strengths to make own decisions in her life. WRC wants to bring empowerment to underprivileged women, help them to build their life skills and give them access to education and information. Every woman should have the power to choose.

What do you love about your work and what is frustrating you?

"We love working with the staff and especially the women who come to our center. Watching them grow and learn and be an inspiration for other women is a wonderful process. We are very grateful of supporting more and

more women and see how they develop confidence. Because every little thing changes something in the end and probably we are not going to see the change we aim for in this generation but giving what we can into each generation might be the crucial difference for the next generation someday.”

“Sometimes the funding is difficult as we are a small organisation, but once it is there we can serve the women with all our possibilities. Also transportation for the women is often very difficult to realize. Another frustrating point is when we see men walking out of their responsibility. This happens so often, but still it is a very individual problem where we need to find a solution within the given societal and cultural frame. It is so distinct but still so repetitive in the same time.”



Phisey Khim and Sally Douglas



The WRC Team