

CAMBODIAN HBWs: LIVING AND LEARNING UNDER COVID 19

Aside from their family members losing jobs, COVID- 19 pandemic does impede the daily life and livelihood of home based workers (HBWs) from production to sales. This has led to loss of income, shortage of food, and indebtedness.

HBWs belonging to certain categories were able to benefit from the following government programs in the course of the pandemic:

- Cash transfers for those who hold IDs for the Poor (between \$30 and \$50 per month per family based on the size of the family and severity of poverty) for six months or beyond.
- Home Based Workers residing in the red zones of Phnom Penh capital also received assistance in kind from the government such as rice, canned fish, soy fish, instant noodles etc.
- Beginning February up to the end of March 2021, there were not many HBWs in Phnom Penh capital who received vaccination. But the government continues to have people, aged over 18 years old, vaccinated with AstraZeneca, Sinofam and Sinovac. (Homenet Cambodia continues to encourage HBWs to get vaccinated)

Nevertheless, there are a number of questions that still need responses: Do HBWs understand the meaning of social protection and why they need it? Do HBWs know where they can get the information about social protection? Even though HBWs are aware of IDs for the Poor, COVID money, and emergency relief aid, accessing those services still has barriers. Information on Social Protection seems not to reach the HBWs and others in poverty, or if it does, the awareness created is insufficient or not yet effective. The same may be said of awareness-raising regarding recognition of HBWs as a distinct sector of workers with rights. This has been going on at the level of sub-national authorities and through existing networks, but it is still a challenge. However, it seems that the village leaders whom the HNC team met considered and responded positively to the issues of Home Based Workers but the team needs to further work with them.

What have been done for HBWs in four cities amidst COVID – 19 pandemic? Social Assistance and Advocacy: HomeNet Cambodia provided food and protective personal equipment (PPEs) to HBWs in its areas of operation, as well as relevant training on prevention of COVID-19. This included sharing a video clip about COVID -19 via HNC Messenger Group, experiences on how to take care of the family positively, and how to avoid domestic violence.

In terms of advocacy, HNC joined efforts with Oxfam in Cambodia to provide inputs to a Draft Social Protection Law and continues to be part of Oxfam in Cambodia. Together with HBW group leaders, HNC advocated to sub-national authorities for HEFC, emergency relief aid, awareness raising, recognition of HBWs, and follow up.

Social Media: HNC created a Facebook page to promote the work of HBWs, using the link [https:// web.facebook.com/homenetcambodia](https://web.facebook.com/homenetcambodia). It promoted the use of electronic communication among HBWs using HNC messenger group or messages, email etc. It provided training to

create a Facebook page for each group in Battambang city. And it plans to reinforce the effective use of Facebook page and repeat the training for HBWs in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Poi Pet.

Organizational Strengthening: HNC strengthened the roles and responsibilities of HBW group leaders, particularly in networking, communication, raising issues and yearly planning activities for Siem Reap and Battambang cities.

Livelihood: HNC coordinated different groups of HBWs to fulfill a large order and make sure the production is finished on time for delivery. It assisted HBWs to design masks complying with AFTNOR France Standard. It assisted HBWs groups in Battambang to interpret a new design and specification of reed mat and had this woven for a French buyer. It presented different potential product designs of reed mat and brooms (made of palm fibers) for all HBWs in Battambang and Siem Reap. HBWs still use the same designs of products. Many other HBWs in Phnom Penh continue to make masks, bags, hair clips, hair bow and souvenirs etc. HNC also coordinated market access for HBWs ; e.g., participation in local trade fairs or bazaars.

Coming activities HNC plans to conduct training for HBW leaders on Social Protection and approach/methodology for advocacy/ influencing towards extension of social protection to HBWs. It will continue raising awareness towards recognition of HBWs as workers and join with Oxfam in Cambodia in advocacy work together with trade unions and other subsectors of the informal economy. HNC will continue strengthening and capacitating HBW leaders, improving design and marketing for livelihood improvement, training HBW groups in Facebook page creation and communication, and ensuring vaccination of HBWs, especially in Phnom Penh.

