



Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund



2024 Annual Report

Observations on the Achievements of the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund

In 2024, the Sombath Memorial Fund received 101 applications from Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Lao, Vietnam, and China. Through a rigorous selection process, the SMF Committee finally selected 15 awardees.

The results of the work of these 15 awardees have been impressive. These 15 young individuals and organizations have used the small grants they received to improve education and support community empowerment in their local schools and communities. Though the grants are small, they have had a large impact mostly due to the dedication and commitment of these individuals and groups who believe that they can, through their creative efforts, resolve the many challenges they face, whether in their schools or communities and lift the lives of the people up.

The awardees' work has truly continued the legacy and lifework of Sombath Somphone, who has always believed that sustainable change and development must come from within and through the work of people from their own areas.



I hope the readers of the Report will be as touched as I am on how committed individuals and local organizations can through their own efforts and with small support transform their own lives and their own communities in a meaningful and dignified manner one step at a time.

Ng Shui Meng,

Founder of the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund
5 February 2025



About the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund

Sombath's greatest passion was to give opportunities to children and young people, especially those who lack opportunities and who want to improve themselves to work for the greater benefit of society in a holistic, sustainable, and balanced way with nature and the environment. The Fund's ultimate goal is to develop the greater wellbeing (happiness) of the self and society as a whole.

Sombath was highly influenced by the ideas of Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa regarding Socially Engaged Buddhism, and by the work of the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM) and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). The Fund is managed by the Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation (SNF), a Thai non-profit foundation, under which INEB operates.

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Executive Summary

We are delighted to present the 2024 report of the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund, which continues to support transformative education and community development initiatives across the Mekong Sub-Region, encompassing Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. 2024 was the second year that the SSMF awarded funds for a total of \$39,740 USD, which enabled the implementation of 15 impactful projects aimed at fostering positive change and resilience in marginalized communities. These initiatives directly benefited 6,489 individuals while reaching an additional 256,092 people indirectly, demonstrating the far-reaching influence of these grassroots programs.

The projects supported by SSMF 2024 address critical regional challenges, such as educational inequity, environmental sustainability, vocational training for disadvantaged youth, and community health. From creating safe learning environments in conflict-affected areas of Myanmar to introducing innovative agricultural techniques in Cambodia, the funded initiatives reflect the spirit of Sombath Somphone's enduring commitment to social justice and sustainable development.

**Please note that due to security concerns, detailed information about the projects are not included in this report.*

The success of SSMF 2024 was made possible through the continued generosity of the Sombath Somphone family and CCFD-Terre Solidaire, whose steadfast support has fueled these transformative efforts. Despite receiving a record-breaking 101 proposals, only 15 projects could be funded in 2024, underscoring both the growing demand for educational and humanitarian initiatives in the region and the need for increased funding to expand the fund's impact. The selection process prioritised projects that demonstrated a strong potential for community empowerment, scalability, and alignment with Sombath Somphone's legacy of engaged activism by the steering committee members.

Fund Objectives

- ▶ **Education** - To provide full or partial scholarships, especially to marginalized children and young people seeking to complete their education in schools or colleges.
- ▶ **To support organizations providing education or humanitarian relief** to at risk children and families.
- ▶ **Community Projects** - To provide small grants to active young adults (up to 35 years of age) to initiate start-up work or activities for youth in community education or development.

Project Target Areas

The target area of the recipients was from countries in the Mekong Sub-Region: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and the South China Region.

Target Groups

- ✓ Marginalized children
- ✓ Active and socially engaged young adults
- ✓ At-risk children and families in need of emergency support and/or humanitarian assistance

The announcement raised much interest as 61 applications were received. Please note that no applications were received from the southern China region.

Project Timeline for SSMF 2024

- **Application Launching (1 February 2024):** The application launched on the 1st of February 2024, and gave two months for the applicants to prepare the applications.
- **Application Deadline (31 March 2024):** The application process concluded with 101 submissions from diverse organizations and communities across the Mekong region.
- **April 2024 (Announcement of Successful Applicants):** After a rigorous evaluation process, 15 outstanding projects were selected by the steering committee members for funding based on their innovative approaches, community engagement strategies, and sustainability potential.
- **May–October 2024 (Project Implementation Period):** Over six months, grantees carried out their projects, delivering educational resources, conducting training sessions, and implementing community development activities. Continuous monitoring from INEB ensured that projects stayed on track and achieved their goals. However, most of the grantees spent more than six months to implement their project.
- **15 December 2024 (Grantee Event & Public Recognition):** Grantees showcased their project achievements at a celebratory event featuring presentations and interactive discussions. The outcomes were also posted on both the Sombath Somphone and International Network of Engaged Buddhists websites, highlighting the inspiring work done across the region.

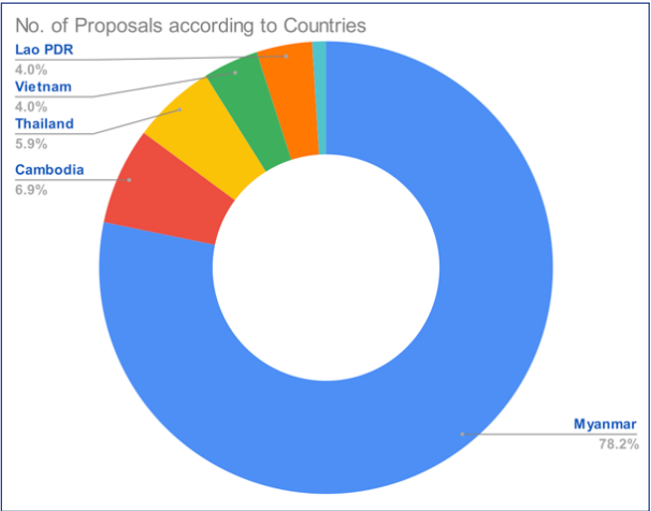
● **30 December 2024 (Deadline for Project Reports):**

Grantees submitted comprehensive reports detailing their project outcomes, challenges encountered, and lessons learned.

Summary of Proposals Received:

The announcement raised much interest as 101 applications were received. Please note that no applications were awarded from the southern China region.

Country	No. of Proposals	Percentage
Myanmar	79	78%
Cambodia	7	7%
Thailand	6	6%
Vietnam	4	4%
Laos PDR	4	4%
China	1	1%
Total	101	100%



The selection process for successful applications under the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund (SSMF) 2024 involved a thorough and collaborative evaluation by the seven-member steering committee. Each member carefully reviewed and voted on proposals based on key criteria aligned with the fund’s objectives. These criteria included how effectively the proposed projects addressed pressing community needs, whether they represented diverse countries within the Mekong Region and the clarity of identified target groups. Additionally, priority was given to projects requesting \$3,000 USD or less to ensure a broader distribution of resources across impactful initiatives.

The committee’s decisions were guided by a commitment to supporting grassroots projects that foster positive change, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable communities. By upholding transparent

and equitable selection standards, the steering committee ensured that the chosen 15 projects would deliver meaningful results. The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) played a vital role in administering the fund, coordinating the review process, and ensuring smooth fund management for the selected grantees.

The five projects implemented in Myanmar under the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund 2024 exemplify resilience, creativity, and transformative change amidst profound adversity. These grassroots efforts beautifully harnessed community strengths to inspire hope and empowerment, even in conflict-affected and marginalized regions.

The “Youth Leaves for Community Development” project revitalized cultural heritage while fostering economic resilience. By equipping youth with artistic craftsmanship and entrepreneurial skills, participants not only gained self-confidence but also emerged as community leaders, bonded by shared challenges and aspirations. Equally impactful was the “Goat Farming for Sustainable Food Security” initiative, which introduced a sustainable livestock system, turning a simple solution into a source of nourishment and economic stability for vulnerable communities.

In the education sector, the “Professional Learning Community” (PLC) project bridged regional divides by connecting teachers across conflict zones, inspiring inclusive and engaging learning environments for thousands of students. Meanwhile, the “Promoting Inclusive Community Resilience” project courageously challenged entrenched gender norms, fostering transformative journeys such as that of one young woman who became a leader advocating for gender equality. The “Vocational Education and Training (VET) Program” provided practical skills and leadership opportunities for displaced youth, empowering participants to launch entrepreneurial ventures and rebuild their communities.

In Vietnam, the MER Project in A Luoi District empowered marginalized children by fostering creativity, confidence, and cultural pride. The “I Am a Tour Guide” activity exemplified this impact as children confidently presented in English about their local Anor Waterfall. Similarly, the Environmental Awareness and Education project in Huong Tho Village inspired a community-wide embrace of sustainability through hands-on activities like recycling and tree planting, cultivating a lasting sense of environmental stewardship.

Thailand’s three projects highlighted inclusive, transformative community initiatives. Youth Pride 2024 created a safe and dynamic space for LGBTQI+ youth to advocate for their rights and showcase creative talents. The “Serm Rang Rian” project tackled

educational challenges faced by migrant and stateless children, fostering creativity, academic growth, and emotional resilience through community-centric activities. The educational support for Hannarong Rakjongjarean embodied the enduring power of education, equipping him with vocational skills while symbolizing hope and perseverance amidst personal adversity.

In Laos, the projects showcased inspiring outcomes in education, cultural preservation, and community empowerment. The “Income Generation Through Traditional Weaving Skills” initiative empowered women and students, fostering financial independence while preserving traditional craftsmanship. The “Youth Edutainment Creative for Society” (YES) project addressed mental health challenges through music, creating a platform for empathy and dialogue. Meanwhile, the “Strengthening Youth Capacity for Community Needs Analysis” project empowered young leaders to identify and address local development challenges, resulting in community-driven initiatives and strengthened collaboration with village authorities.

Cambodia’s two projects showcased innovative approaches to youth empowerment and sustainable urban agriculture. The “Empowering Cambodian Youth

Through Filmmaking” initiative nurtured creative talents, culminating in two impactful short films, *Missing* and *Parasomnia*, that resonated with audiences and highlighted the transformative power of storytelling. The “One-House One-Garden (O2)” project integrated green innovation with community engagement, fostering sustainable urban agriculture and green entrepreneurship while promoting environmental stewardship.

In conclusion, the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund 2024 not only supported impactful initiatives but also transformed communities, empowered individuals, and inspired hope. Through creative solutions, inclusive practices, and grassroots resilience, these projects have left an indelible mark on countless lives, demonstrating the profound potential of community-driven development. The fund remains deeply committed to empowering marginalized communities and fostering grassroots innovation. As we move forward, we will continue to prioritize impactful projects that uplift communities and honour the legacy of Sombath Somphone, promoting education, equity, and resilience throughout the Mekong Sub-Region.



2024 Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund

Summary Overview by Country and Project

In 2024, the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund awarded 15 proposals to organizations in 5 countries: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. These organizations have received a total of 39,740 USD to conduct activities that benefited 262,581 persons by projects implemented through local organizations.

5 Countries	15 Projects	Beneficiaries	Target Group	Funds Awarded USD
Cambodia	Empowering Cambodian Youth Through Filmmaking: Sunflower Film Alliance	Total = 151,009 Direct Beneficiaries: 9 trainees (6 Female, 3 male) Indirect Beneficiaries: approximately 151,000 persons through physical screenings and online outreach campaigns.	Marginalized youths from Cambodia who are interested in filmmaking	3,000
	One-House One-Garden Project (O2 Project)	Total = 617 Direct Beneficiaries: 317 50households 100university students 67 women Indirect Beneficiaries: 300 persons including farmers, CSOs staffs and business representatives.	University students, women, farmers community in Phnom Penh	2,995
Laos	Income Generation Through Traditional Weaving Skills	Total = 50 Direct Beneficiaries: 10 women including 4 student, 6 mothers with young children. Indirect Beneficiaries: 40 family members	Young women and students in Rural and urban areas who are facing financial difficulties.	2,003
	Youth Edutainment Creative for Society in Vientiane Capital (YES)	Total = 307 Direct Beneficiaries: 67 (7 youth volunteers, 60 direct participants at the outreach event) Indirect Beneficiaries: 240 persons from outreach event	Youth musicians and people who are facing mental health issue	3,000
	Strengthening Youth Capacity for Community Needs Analysis in Xiengkhouang	Total = 825 Direct Beneficiaries: 25 including 3 males and 17 females Indirect Beneficiaries: approximately 800 from the community from proposed development projects	Youth from five villages: Phonxai Village, Khong Village, Nong Village, Sailoum Village, and Si Village	2,995
Myanmar	Youth Leaves for Community Development	Total = 195 Direct Beneficiaries: 45 individuals (10 men, 30 women, 5 others - LGBTQ+). Indirect Beneficiaries: Approximately 150 individuals, including families and friends.	Youth in Southern Shan State, Myanmar	3,000

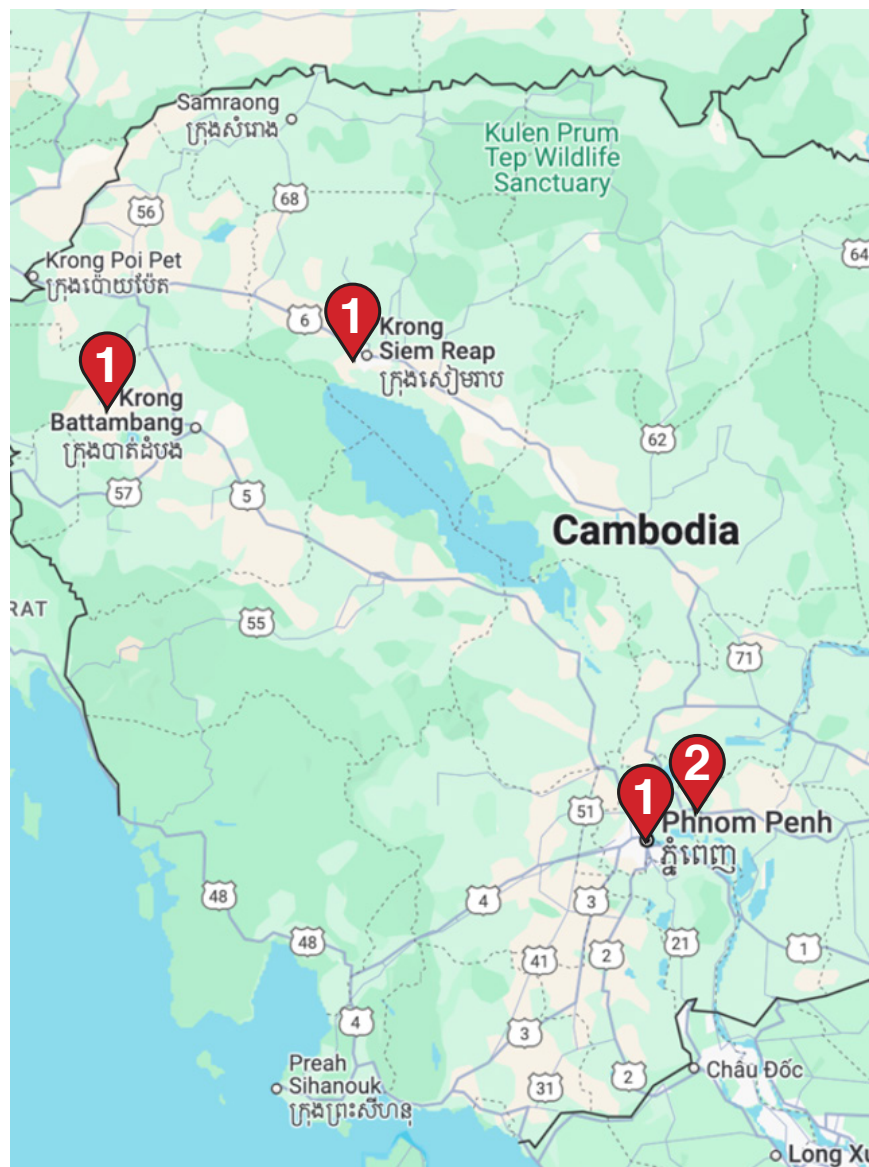
5 Countries	15 Projects	Beneficiaries	Target Group	Funds Awarded USD
Myanmar	Teacher Education Academy: Professional Learning Community (PLC)	Total = 101,183 Direct Beneficiaries: 1,183 participants, including: 819 in-service teachers (78% female, 22% male). 249 pre-service teachers and volunteers. Indirect Beneficiaries: Estimated impact on 100,000 students and educators through YouTube, and Facebook.	Pre-service and in-service teachers around the country and mostly in Sagaing Region, Central Myanmar	3,000
	Promoting Inclusive Community Resilience	Total = 820 Direct Beneficiaries: 320 individuals (140 males, 180 females). Indirect Beneficiaries: Over 500 individuals, including families, neighbouring communities, and local advocacy groups.	Marginalized youth aged 12-35 in two Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Kachin State, Myanmar	2,950
	Goat Farming for Sustainable Food Security	Total = 5,489 Direct Beneficiaries: 4,092 individuals (1,204 households; 2,525 males, 2,964 females, 2,108 children). Indirect Beneficiaries: 1,397 individuals, including neighbouring communities and additional IDPs.	Internally Displaced Person and Vulnerable Communities in Magway Region, Central Myanmar.	2,994
	Vocational Education and Training (VET) Program	Total = 260 Direct Beneficiaries: 60 adolescents (30 per batch) from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, including Kayah, Kayaw, Kayan, and Kawyaw ethnic groups. Indirect Beneficiaries: Over 200 individuals, including families and communities benefiting from the participants' skills.	Adolescents and young adults in Karenni State, Myanmar	3,000
Thailand	Youth Pride 2024 – Empowering LGBTIQN+ Youth	Total = 400 Direct Beneficiaries: 150 LGBTIQN+ youth aged 15–35, including transmasculine, ethnic minorities, sex workers, and migrants. Indirect Beneficiaries: 250 individuals, including community leaders, allies, and supporters attending the event.	LGBTIQN+ youth	3,000

5 Countries	15 Projects	Beneficiaries	Target Group	Funds Awarded USD
Thailand	Serm Rang Rian – Education Support for Migrant and Stateless Children	Total = 360 Direct Beneficiaries: 90 children Indirect Beneficiaries: approximately 270 persons from the children's families	Stateless and migrant children in Muslim and Shan migrant community in Chiang Mai.	3,000
	Educational Support for Mr. Hannarong Rakjongjarean	Total = 6 Direct Beneficiaries: 1 Indirect Beneficiaries: 5	Mr. Hannarong, the second son of Pholachi Rakjongjarean “Billy”, Karen Human Rights Defender.	2,401
Vietnam	MER Project – Bringing Joy and Opportunities to Children in A Luoi	Total = 300 Direct Beneficiaries: 60 students Indirect Beneficiaries: 60 households (approximately 240 persons)	Students aged 5-10 years in the mountainous A Luoi District, Vietnam	650
	Environmental Awareness and Education for Disadvantaged Children	Total = 760 Direct Beneficiaries: 60 children Indirect Beneficiaries: 700	Disadvantaged children in Huong Tho Village, Hue City, Vietnam	1,752
Sub-Total				39,740
INEB Admin Cost 10%				3,974
TOTAL	15 Projects	Total beneficiaries = 262,581 Direct Beneficiaries = 6,489 Indirect Beneficiaries = 256,092		43,714



CAMBODIA

SSMF 2024 Project Areas



1 Empowering Cambodian Youth Through Filmmaking: Sunflower Film Alliance (Batch Seven)

2 One-House One-Garden Project (O2 Project)







Project Area

- Phnom Penh (10 locations, including Legend Cinema Olympia, Fable Cinema, and Bophana Center)
- Siem Reap (The Bean Embassy Cafe and Legend Cinema Siem Reap)
- Battambang (SafeSpace/Chumnor Art Festival and Bossbha's House)

Activities

- Conducted an intensive short filmmaking training program for nine trainees aged 18–40.
- Delivered training in six core areas: producing, scriptwriting, directing, assistant directing, shooting, and editing.
- Formed two production teams:
 - Color Film: Produced *Missing*, a detective thriller.
 - White Birds: Produced *Parasomnia*, a fantasy thriller.
- Organized practical exercises, including screenplay finalization, filming, and editing.
- Held internal screenings for feedback and improvements.
- Premiered completed films at the Chaktomuk Short Film Festival (CSFF) and conducted outreach campaigns in Siem Reap and Battambang.

Total Beneficiaries

- **Direct Beneficiaries:**
 - 9 trainees (6 female, 3 male)
- **Indirect Beneficiaries:**
 - 151,000 individuals reached through physical screenings and online outreach campaigns.
 - 1,000 households and approximately 200 children engaged in screenings and community activities.

CAMBODIA

Empowering Cambodian Youth Through Filmmaking: Sunflower Film Alliance (Batch Seven)

Project Overview

This project addressed the lack of professional filmmaking opportunities in Cambodia by equipping nine young trainees with skills in short film production. Training sessions covered technical and creative aspects of filmmaking, such as scriptwriting, directing, and editing.

The trainees formed two teams, Color Film and White Birds, and produced two short films: *Missing* and *Parasomnia*. The films were showcased at the Cambodian Short Film Festival and provincial outreach campaigns in Siem Reap and Battambang, reaching diverse audiences and raising awareness about local storytelling.

Despite logistical and budgetary challenges, the project successfully empowered young filmmakers, enhanced collaboration with local film organizations, and contributed to Cambodia's growing film industry.

Lessons Learned or Successes

- Flexibility in production was essential. Adjustments to scripts and production plans, such as shifting the protagonist's occupation in *Parasomnia*, effectively addressed financial and logistical constraints.
- Collaborative problem-solving strengthened bonds among trainees. Overcoming challenges like replacing actors in *Missing* due to last-minute cancellations fostered teamwork and improved project outcomes.
- Internal screenings and mentor feedback significantly enhanced the final films, highlighting the importance of iterative improvement during production.
- Trainees gained hands-on experience in budgeting, location scouting, and time management, preparing them for future careers in the film industry.
- Exposure through screenings increased public appreciation for Cambodian short films and storytelling, inspiring both audiences and aspiring filmmakers.

Challenges

Recruiting actors and crew members posed challenges, with last-minute cancellations requiring swift replacements. Collaboration with The Acting Art Academy helped resolve these issues. Budget constraints, particularly for costumes and shooting locations, necessitated changes to scripts and production plans.

The project faced time management challenges due to the tight six-month timeline, which required balancing training, production, and outreach activities. Attracting audiences to screenings proved difficult due to the small film community in Cambodia and limited marketing resources. However, boosting online posts and leveraging partnerships helped expand outreach.

Feedback

The project demonstrated the transformative potential of filmmaking in empowering youth and promoting local narratives. By providing technical and creative training, the program equipped young filmmakers with the tools to tell Cambodian stories through a medium that resonates with diverse audiences. The films produced not only showcased the trainees' skills but also highlighted the value of storytelling as a cultural and educational tool.

The project's collaborative nature strengthened ties between trainees, mentors, and local organizations, fostering a sense of community within Cambodia's growing film industry. The outreach campaigns in provincial areas expanded access to creative storytelling, inspiring local audiences to explore film as a medium for cultural expression.

Recognition of the film *Missing* at the Cambodia National Short Film Festival underscored the program's success in nurturing talent and delivering impactful content. The project contributed to building a generation of skilled filmmakers capable of advancing Cambodia's creative industries while promoting cultural pride and storytelling traditions.



Project Area

Phnom Penh, Cambodia – including multiple districts and educational institutions.

Activities

- Grow Pre-Product in O2 Project (GPP): Cultivated a variety of crops
- Cycle Training on Green & Innovation House Skills
- O2 Annual Event & Reflection Meeting at the Royal University of Agriculture

Total Beneficiaries

- **Direct Beneficiaries:**
 - 50 households
 - 100 university students
 - 67 women
- **Indirect Beneficiaries:** 260 to 300 people, including farmers, CSOs staff, and business representatives.

CAMBODIA

One-House One-Garden

Project Overview

The One-House One-Garden (O2) project aimed to promote sustainable urban agriculture and community-based green initiatives in Phnom Penh. By integrating innovative farming practices, capacity-building workshops, and strategic partnerships, the project empowered local communities to engage in green entrepreneurship and environmental conservation. The development of Thnal Farm as a model farm provided a research and training hub for students, researchers, and community members interested in sustainable agriculture.

The project's annual event highlighted key achievements and fostered networking among green entrepreneurs, further solidifying the project's role in promoting environmental awareness and sustainable practices in Phnom Penh.

Lessons Learned or Successes

- **Empowering Local Communities:** The project demonstrated the importance of community-led initiatives in driving sustainable agricultural practices. The award-winning gardens served as inspiring examples of what can be achieved with local ingenuity and support.
- **Effective Capacity Building:** The training sessions were instrumental in equipping participants with essential green farming skills. Pre-test and post-test evaluations revealed a 36.6% improvement in participant knowledge.
- **Networking and Partnerships:** The annual event fostered valuable connections among stakeholders, including farmers, CSOs, and green entrepreneurs, enhancing knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Challenges

- **Licensing Issues:** Thnal Farm faced challenges due to the lack of a formal license. Efforts are underway to register the youth agriculture community with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries.
- **Funding Constraints:** Due to limited funding, the team to contribute personal resources to meet project goals.
- **Participant Engagement:** Recruiting youth members proved challenging. However, five new members (including three women) joined the project through targeted recruitment efforts.

Feedback

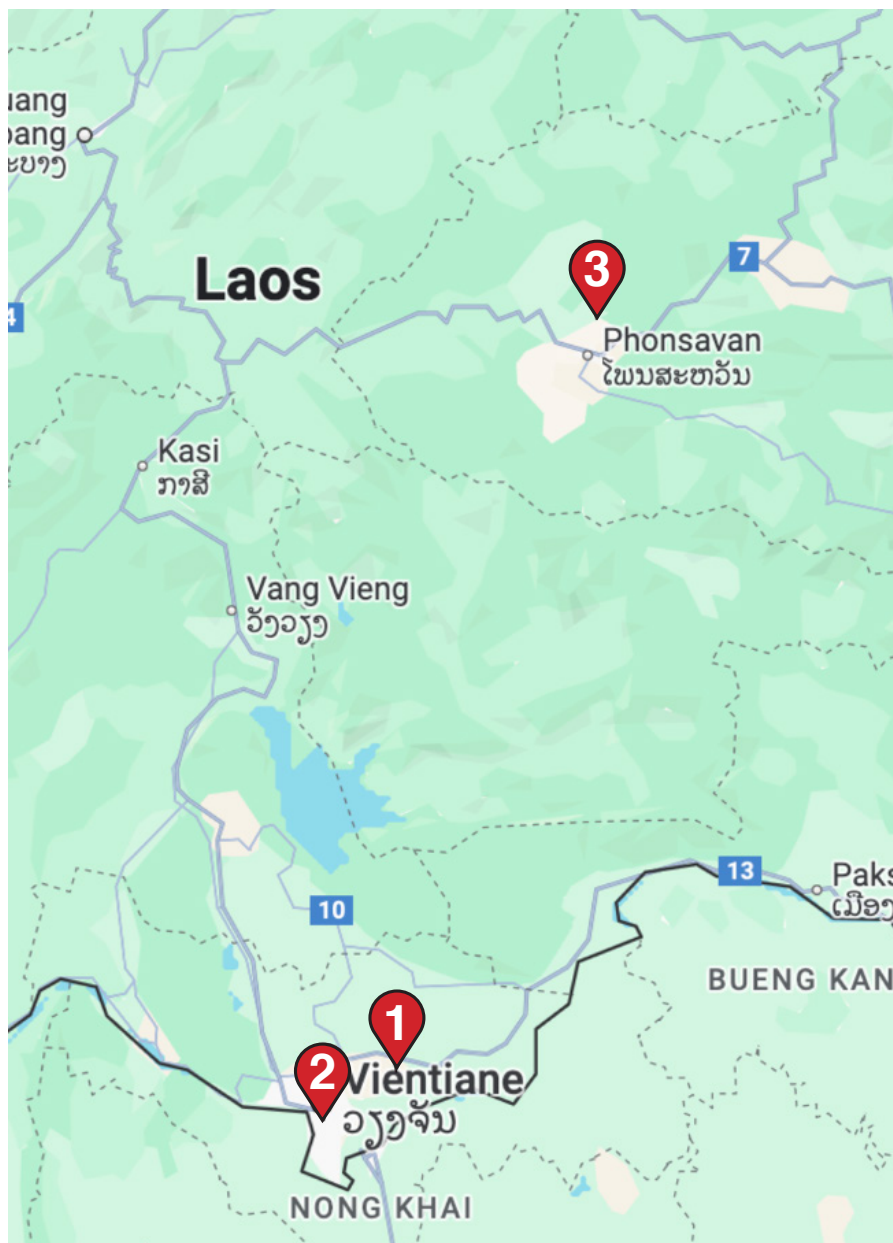
The project stood out for its comprehensive approach to green growth, combining technical training, community engagement, and advocacy. Participants gained valuable skills in agriculture and entrepreneurship, with many expressing a desire to continue their involvement in green initiatives.

The project fostered a sense of environmental responsibility among participants and community members, contributing to the broader goal of creating green cities in Cambodia.

In conclusion, the One-House One-Garden project has successfully laid the groundwork for sustainable urban agriculture and community engagement in Phnom Penh. With continued support and strategic improvements, the project holds the potential to expand its impact and inspire further green initiatives across Cambodia.

LAOS

SSMF 2024 Project Areas



1 Income Generation Through Traditional Weaving Skills

2 Youth Edutainment Creative for Society in Vientiane Capital (YES)

3 Strengthening Youth Capacity for Community Needs Analysis in Xiangkhouang





Project Area

Xiegda Village, Hadsaifong District,
Vientiane Capital, Laos

Activities

- Conducted weaving training for 10 beneficiaries, including 4 students and 6 mothers with young children, to enhance their weaving skills.
- Provided weaving equipment and materials to beneficiaries, enabling them to produce high-quality traditional woven products.
- Income Support: Facilitated the sale of weaving products, generating additional income for beneficiaries, helping them pay for school fees, daily subsistence, and family needs.
- Monitoring and Support: Conducted regular follow-ups with beneficiaries to ensure progress and provide coaching to improve the quality of the products.

Total Beneficiaries

- **Direct Beneficiaries:**
 - 10 individuals (100% women)
 - 4 Students (1 high school student, 3 university students)
 - 6 Mothers with young children
- **Indirect Beneficiaries:**
 - 40 family members (average of 4 family members per beneficiary)



LAOS

Income Generation Through Traditional Weaving Skills

Project Overview

The project aimed to improve the beneficiaries' ability to generate an income by developing traditional weaving skills. It specifically targeted young women and students in rural and urban areas, particularly those with limited financial opportunities. Over the course of the project, 10 individuals received training and equipment to produce woven products, which helped generate a total income of 34,600,000 LAK (approximately 1,600 USD). This income significantly supported the beneficiaries in paying for school fees, covering family expenses, and improving their overall livelihood. The project also focused on preserving and upgrading traditional weaving skills, which are vital to the local cultural heritage in Laos.

Lessons Learned or Successes

- **Skill Improvement:** Beneficiaries improved their weaving skills significantly. By November 2024, they were able to produce high-quality woven pieces, with no low-grade pieces compared to the start of the project.
- **Income Generation:** Beneficiaries gained additional income of 800,000 – 1,200,000 LAK per month, depending on their skills and time invested. This income was crucial in covering education expenses and contributing to family supports and general wellbeing.
- **Expansion of Impact:** The project leader successfully expanded the initiative, adding one more weaver by December 2024, increasing the overall impact of the project and the income generated.
- **Community Building:** A strong sense of collaboration developed among the weavers. They supported one another throughout the project, and this camaraderie boosted morale, leading to greater perseverance and continued participation.
- **Business Management:** The project leader enhanced their management skills, particularly in team and time management, and grew the social business from 0 to 11 weavers within 6 months.

Challenges

- **Migration of Potential Beneficiaries:** Due to the ongoing economic crisis in Laos, many young people migrated abroad for work, leading to a lower-than-expected number of participants. This reduced the project's impact in terms of the number of beneficiaries.
- **Geographical Dispersal of Beneficiaries:** The beneficiaries lived in different regions, which posed logistical challenges in terms of follow-up visits and support. This required increased travel costs and time, which strained the project budget.
- **Market Competition:** There was significant competition from cheaper, mass-produced woven items from China, which impacted the demand for the handmade woven pieces produced by the beneficiaries. This made it more difficult to sell the products at profitable prices.
- **High Initial Costs and Quality Concerns:** The initial woven pieces were of lower quality, requiring more resources to improve their quality. This resulted in selling the first products at a loss, making it difficult to recover the initial investment.



Feedback

This project demonstrated the profound impact that traditional crafts can have on individual empowerment and community development. The weavers, primarily women and students, gained a sense of independence and self-sufficiency by being able to generate their own income. This financial independence not only improved their quality of life but also contributed to their families' welfare, reducing reliance on male breadwinners. For young mothers, this project was particularly transformative as it allowed them to balance family responsibilities with income-generating activities.

Furthermore, preserving and enhancing the traditional weaving techniques were crucial to ensuring that the cultural heritage is passed to future generations. By investing in these skills, the project ensured that local crafts would continue to thrive, supporting both cultural and economic sustainability. The collaborative aspect of the project also strengthened the social fabric of the community. Through regular interactions and mutual support, beneficiaries formed a network that fostered skill-sharing and solidarity, helping them overcome personal and financial challenges.

The project's impact went beyond individual beneficiaries. It created a ripple effect, as family members and the wider community began to see the value of traditional skills as a means of economic empowerment. The project leader's ability to grow the initiative, even amidst challenges, proved that with the right support and commitment, community-driven projects can flourish and make a lasting difference in the lives of participants.

In conclusion, the project not only provided a source of income but also contributed to social cohesion, cultural preservation, and gender empowerment. It highlighted the potential of traditional skills to address economic challenges and created a blueprint for future initiatives aimed at empowering marginalized communities through sustainable, locally-driven solutions.

Project Area

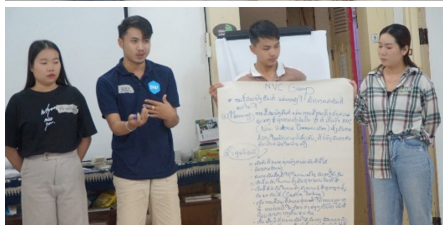
- Watnak Village, Sisattanak District, Vientiane Capital
- Vientiane Center Park, Vatchan Village, Sisattanak District, Vientiane Capital
- Sikhot High School, Sithan Village, Sikhottabong District, Vientiane Capital

Activities

- Recruiting of 7 youth volunteers aged 18-25 years from diverse backgrounds in Vientiane Capital.
- Conducting training sessions for volunteers, including:
 - Leadership and Teamwork facilitated by Rural Development Agency (RDA).
 - Mental Health Knowledge provided by WECARE, a mental health organization.
 - Music Editing Training conducted by a sound engineer with a disability.
 - Music Content Production led by a renowned young singer in Laos.
- Organizing a music outreach activity at Vientiane Central Park, featuring:
 - A musical performance by youth volunteers focusing on mental health issues.
 - A panel discussion on “Social Concerns about Mental Health” with speakers from WECARE and the Mental Health Counseling Center at the National University of Laos (NUoL).
 - Open Space Session for dialogue and knowledge exchange on youth mental health.
 - Networking sessions to build connections among participants and stakeholders.

Total Beneficiaries

- **Direct Beneficiaries:**
 - 7 youth volunteers: 2 females, 4 males, and 1 identifying as other.
 - 60 direct participants at the outreach event.
- **Indirect Beneficiaries:**
 - Approximately 240 individuals indirectly reached through the outreach event.



LAOS

Youth Edutainment Creative for Society in Vientiane Capital (YES)

Project Overview

The Youth Edutainment Creative for Society (YES) project utilized music and creativity as tools to address mental health challenges in Vientiane Capital. By engaging young musicians, the project aimed to raise awareness about mental health and promote well-being through creative expression. The project provided participants with comprehensive training in mental health, music production, and leadership skills, empowering them to deliver impactful messages through their musical performances.

Despite challenges such as reduced volunteer numbers and activity restrictions due to the ASEAN Summit, the project successfully conducted an outreach event at Vientiane Central Park. The event reached over 60 direct participants and 240 indirect participants, showcasing original songs addressing mental health themes. These activities fostered community engagement, raised awareness about mental health issues, and built a network of youth and mental health stakeholders.

Lessons Learned or Successes

Managing a team of seven volunteers from diverse backgrounds provided valuable lessons in handling differences in personality, habits, and talents. This experience highlighted the importance of adaptability and communication in fostering teamwork. The project demonstrated how music could serve as a medium for emotional connection, with volunteers successfully producing five original songs addressing mental health themes. These songs inspired caregivers and those dealing with mental health challenges, showcasing the power of creative expression to convey meaningful messages.

The integration of mindfulness and self-care practices was another key takeaway, as these activities helped both volunteers and participants cultivate positive thinking and reduce stress. Guided breathing exercises and reflective journaling proved effective in promoting mental well-being. Additionally, the project underscored the significance of open dialogue, where knowledge exchange and shared experiences fostered collaboration among participants and stakeholders.

Challenges

Recruiting the planned number of volunteers was a significant challenge, as many potential participants were unable to commit to the project timeline. This resulted in a smaller team of seven volunteers instead of the intended ten. Logistical constraints due to the ASEAN Summit and government restrictions further limited the project's scope, reducing the planned three outreach activities to a single event at Vientiane Central Park.

Coordinating schedules with volunteers was also difficult, as most participants were only available on weekends. This required careful planning to ensure all activities could be accommodated. Efforts to engage schools and hospitals for outreach were hindered by competing priorities and scheduling conflicts, restricting activities to a community setting. Budgetary challenges arose from cost fluctuations in training sessions, participant support, and administrative expenses, requiring adjustments to ensure the project could proceed as planned.

Feedback

The project demonstrated the unique ability of creative expression, particularly music, to address mental health challenges and engage youth in meaningful dialogue. The original songs created by the volunteers served as a powerful medium for emotional connection, inspiring both participants and the community. This approach helped to destigmatize mental health issues and fostered a culture of openness and empathy.

Empowering young volunteers with leadership and creative skills had a transformative impact. The skills gained during the project enhanced their confidence and ability to contribute to social causes. The outreach activity strengthened networks among youth, mental health professionals, and community organizations, creating a foundation for future collaborations. Despite logistical and financial hurdles, the project achieved its objectives, highlighting the potential of youth-led initiatives to promote mental well-being and drive positive social change.

Project Area

Pek District, Xiengkhouang Province, Laos

Target villages: Phonxai Village, Khong Village, Nong Village, Sailoum Village, and Si Village

Activities

- Conducted training sessions for 20 youth representatives, including 15 from villages and 5 from the People with Disabilities Development Association of Xiengkhouang (PDDA XKH).
- Provided skills training on community needs analysis, data collection, mobilization of ideas, and proposal writing.
- Engaged participants in practical exercises, including structured interviews, data analysis, and concept note preparation.
- Organized community meetings led by youth, where findings and development ideas were presented and discussed with village members.
- Involved village chiefs, who officially appointed youth representatives to ensure alignment with local leadership.
- Developed five concept notes, one for each village, to propose development initiatives tailored to local needs.

Total Beneficiaries

- **Direct Beneficiaries:**
 - 20 individuals, including 3 males and 17 females
 - 5 participants with disabilities
 - Participants from 20 households
- **Indirect Beneficiaries:**
 - Entire village communities benefiting from proposed development projects



LAOS

Strengthening Youth Capacity for Community Needs Analysis in Xiengkhouang

Project Overview

This project aimed to strengthen the capacity of youth in five target villages to assess community needs and create actionable development plans. Youth participants were trained in leadership, mobilization, and proposal writing to address challenges faced by their communities.

The training sessions empowered youth to engage in dialogue with their communities and identify pressing needs. As a result, five concept notes were developed—one from each village—proposing projects tailored to their specific conditions. These proposals were prepared for submission to potential donors, ensuring the sustainability of community-driven initiatives.

Lessons Learned or Successes

Youth participants gained valuable skills in leadership, mobilization, and proposal writing, which are critical for driving community development. They learned to analyze community needs effectively, using structured interviews and discussions to gather data. The appointment of youth representatives by village authorities enhanced their credibility and enabled them to actively lead community discussions.

Practical experiences, such as serving as moderators during village meetings, built participants' confidence and public speaking abilities. Although nervous at first, they gradually improved and took on leadership roles within their communities. The project successfully produced five concept notes, showcasing the participants' ability to turn community challenges into actionable plans for development.

Challenges

Recruiting suitable youth representatives was difficult, as few were both available and willing to commit to the project. Some participants lacked decision-making confidence and struggled with analyzing community needs during training sessions, requiring additional support from PDDA staff.

Proposal writing posed another challenge, as many participants were unfamiliar with structuring detailed activity plans. This required extensive guidance from trainers to ensure the proposals were practical and actionable. Additionally, participants faced difficulties balancing individual priorities with group needs, as community discussions revealed varying perspectives on development priorities.

Feedback

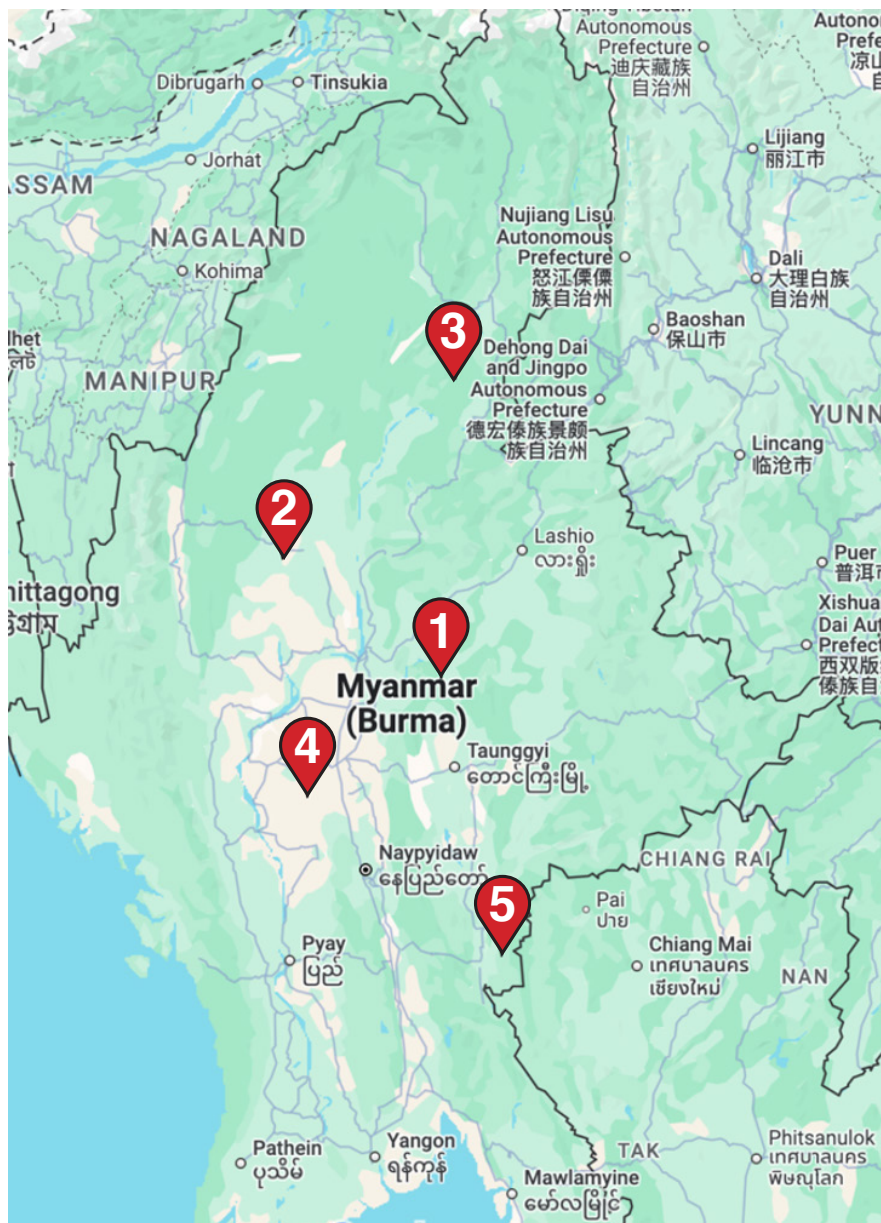
The project demonstrated the power of youth engagement in community development. By equipping young people with the skills to analyze and address local needs, it fostered a sense of ownership and responsibility among participants. As they gained confidence, youth began to take on leadership roles that contributed to guide positive change in their villages.

The involvement of village authorities ensured the project was well-integrated into the community, enhancing its sustainability and long-term impact. The five concept notes developed during the project are a testament to the effectiveness of this approach, providing a foundation for future donor-funded initiatives.

This project also highlighted the importance of inclusivity, with participants from diverse backgrounds, including persons with disabilities, actively contributing to the process. The practical experience gained by participants not only prepared them for future leadership roles but also demonstrated that even small-scale initiatives can have a significant impact when driven by empowered local youth.

MYANMAR

SSMF 2024 Project Areas



1 Youth Leaves for Community Development

2 Teacher Education Academy: Professional Learning Community (PLC)

3 Promoting Inclusive Community Resilience

4 Goat Farming for Sustainable Food Security

5 Vocational Education and Training (VET) Program







Project Area

Southern Shan State, Myanmar

Activities

- Conducted six training sessions focusing on artistic craftsmanship, entrepreneurship, and community engagement.
- Organized three community-based activities to preserve cultural heritage and promote economic growth.
- Provided mentorship throughout the project to sustain the impact of training and encourage long-term community development.

Total Beneficiaries

- **Direct Beneficiaries:**
45 individuals (10 men, 30 women, 5 others - LGBTQ+).
- **Indirect Beneficiaries:**
Approximately 150 individuals, including families and friends.

MYANMAR

Youth Leaves for Community Development

Project Overview

The Youth Leaves for Community Development project was initiated to address the critical socio-economic challenges faced by youth in the project areas. The region's young population has been grappling with political instability, economic decline, and social unrest, which have left many unemployed and marginalised.

This project aimed to equip 45 youth participants with essential skills in artistic craftsmanship, entrepreneurial thinking, and community leadership. These skills were not only tools for individual empowerment but also catalysts for preserving cultural identity and fostering social cohesion. By engaging community leaders and leveraging local resources, the project ensured inclusivity and sustainability. Ultimately, the initiative sought to create a ripple effect, benefiting not just the participants but also their families and broader communities.

Lessons Learned or Successes

- **Adaptability in Training Locations:** Due to the unstable conditions, the team relocated training sessions. This decision highlighted the importance of flexibility in project implementation. Despite the disruption, the participants formed a bond like family in the unfamiliar environment through, sharing knowledge and supporting one another through laughter and challenges. This adaptability not only ensured the project's continuity but also strengthened the group's resolve.
- **Community Engagement is Crucial:** The project's success was deeply rooted in the involvement of local leaders, youth organizations, and community members. Their input during the recruitment and implementation phases ensured the inclusion of diverse participants. This approach fostered trust and collaboration, creating a favorable environment for training sessions and community activities.
- **Sustained Mentorship Leads to Long-Term Impact:** Providing ongoing support to participants beyond the training sessions proved invaluable. Regular mentorship not only helped them refine their skills but also boosted their confidence to initiate community-based projects. For example, participants applied their newly acquired craftsmanship and entrepreneurial skills to create products that celebrated their cultural heritage, fostering pride and economic opportunity.

Challenges

- **Navigating Political Instability:** The volatile political climate posed significant risks, necessitating frequent adjustments to the project plan. Relocating the training sessions to a safer area ensured participant safety but required additional coordination and resources. Despite these hurdles, the team remained steadfast in delivering impactful training.
- **Overcoming Cultural Resistance:** Some community members were initially sceptical, fearing that the project might disrupt traditional practices. To address this, the team prioritized open dialogue with local leaders and emphasized the project's focus on preserving cultural heritage. This transparency built trust and encouraged broader community participation.
- **Resource Constraints:** Limited access to materials and supply chain disruptions created challenges in maintaining the quality of training sessions. The team tackled this by fostering relationships with local suppliers and improvising with readily available resources. This approach not only ensured continuity but also promoted local economic engagement.

Feedback

This project stood out for its dual focus on cultural preservation and economic development. Teaching artistic craftsmanship rooted in local traditions empowered participants to embrace their heritage while building sustainable livelihoods.

Participants experienced the project's transformative power. One woman who was initially disheartened by limited opportunities in her village, discovered newfound confidence and purpose through the training sessions. She not only mastered craftsmanship but also inspired her peers.

The project created a strong sense of community among participants. Sharing experiences, challenges, and successes fostered deep bonds that extended beyond the training sessions. This unity was particularly evident in their collaborative efforts to preserve cultural practices and advocate for social change.

Through its innovative approach and unwavering commitment to the community, the Youth Leaves for Community Development project demonstrated the profound potential of grassroots initiatives to create lasting, meaningful change.



MYANMAR

Teacher Education Academy: Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Project Overview

The PLC initiative was designed to address the urgent need for teacher capacity-building in Myanmar, particularly in conflict-affected and underserved regions. The project aimed to enhance educators' professional competencies through diverse and accessible learning opportunities. Webinars and workshops focused on practical, evidence-based methodologies to improve teaching outcomes and foster lifelong learning among teachers.

A critical aspect of the project was its emphasis on inclusivity, with efforts to engage educators from remote and marginalized areas. Special sessions were conducted to equip teachers with the tools to navigate challenges in resource-limited and politically unstable environments.

Lessons Learned or Successes

- **Contextualizing the Training:** Tailoring workshops to the local context proved essential. For example, the Introductory Teacher Training Course in Sagaing Region specifically addressed the challenges faced by teachers in conflict zones, such as limited resources and high stress levels. This localized approach ensured relevance and impact, as teachers could immediately apply the skills to their unique circumstances.
- **Diversity in Delivery Methods:** The mix of webinars, workshops, and intensive in-person training allowed the project to reach a wide range of participants. While webinars provided accessibility for remote participants, hands-on workshops facilitated deeper engagement and practical learning. This balance proved effective in meeting the diverse needs of educators.
- **Sustained Support:** Many participants highlighted the need for ongoing mentorship and peer-coaching programs. The program's emphasis on continuous learning inspired educators to remain engaged, and several expressed interest in follow-up initiatives to implement and expand on their training.

Challenges

- **Technological Barriers:** Many participants faced connectivity, no electricity and internet access especially in rural areas. To address this, the team provided recorded sessions and downloadable materials, ensuring that content remained accessible despite technical difficulties.
- **Accessibility for Remote Areas:** Educators in regions like Sagaing faced logistical challenges in attending live sessions. By organizing in-person training in these areas, the project bridged the gap and provided direct support to teachers working under challenging conditions.
- **Engagement in Virtual Sessions:** Sustaining high levels of engagement during webinars was a challenge, particularly for participants juggling multiple responsibilities. Interactive elements such as Q&A sessions and group discussions helped to maintain interest.

Project Area

Coverage across Myanmar with a focus on the Sagaing Region

Activities

- Conducted 20 professional development sessions from May to December 2024, including webinars, workshops, and in-person training.
- Special workshops tailored to teachers in conflict-affected areas, particularly in Sagaing Region.
- Distributed session recordings and resources for participants unable to attend live sessions.

Total Beneficiaries

- **Direct Beneficiaries:** 1,183 participants, including:
 - 819 in-service teachers (78% female, 22% male).
 - 249 pre-service teachers and volunteers.
- **Indirect Beneficiaries:** Estimated impact on 32,040–53,400 students through the educators' work.

Feedback

The project's focus on addressing the unique challenges of educators in conflict-affected areas was particularly impactful. Teachers in Sagaing reported that the training provided practical strategies for managing trauma and fostering student engagement, even under adverse conditions. Many young teachers gained confidence and practical skills, such as CV writing and integrating technology into classrooms, which opened doors to further academic and professional opportunities. TEA's free webinars have been commended for their accessibility, relevance, and quality. Educators from various regions noted the importance of continuing such initiatives to build a community of lifelong learners dedicated to improving Myanmar's education system. By equipping educators with tools for creative and inclusive teaching, the project indirectly benefited thousands of students. Workshops on brain-based learning, motivation, and Universal Design for Learning empowered teachers to create more engaging and inclusive classrooms.

The PLC initiative exemplifies how targeted professional development can transform education systems, one teacher at a time. By focusing on both foundational and advanced teaching practices, the project has left a lasting legacy of resilience, innovation, and community impact.



Project Area

Kachin State, Myanmar

Activities

- Conducted six in-person training sessions (three at each IDP camp) focusing on Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), and psychosocial support.
- Organized three online training sessions for participants unable to attend in-person events.
- Distributed awareness materials on GBV, SRHR, and mental health support.

Total Beneficiaries

- **Direct Beneficiaries:**
320 individuals (140 males, 180 females).
- **Indirect Beneficiaries:**
Over 500 individuals, including families, neighbouring communities, and local advocacy groups.

MYANMAR

Promoting Inclusive Community Resilience: Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Advocating for Gender Equality Practices in IDP Youth

Project Overview

This project aimed to empower marginalized youth aged 12–35 living in two Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. The youth faced challenges such as financial instability, early marriages, domestic abuse, and limited access to sexual and mental health education.

By raising awareness of GBV and SRHR and offering psychosocial support, the project sought to equip participants with the knowledge and skills to identify, prevent, and respond to violence and discrimination. Through participatory trainings, the initiative also aimed to shift traditional gender norms and foster a more inclusive and resilient community within the IDP camps.

Lessons Learned or Successes

- **Contextual Adaptation Ensures Success:** Political instability and cultural sensitivity necessitated flexible implementation strategies. For instance, pre-training consultations with local leaders helped tailor the sessions to the unique needs of each community, ensuring acceptance and relevance. This approach enhanced the impact of the training.
- **Interactive Methods Drive Engagement:** Incorporating role-playing and group discussions proved highly effective in encouraging active participation. For example, a role-playing activity on GBV scenarios allowed participants to practice real-life responses, boosting their confidence to take action in similar situations.
- **Real-Life Impact on Participants:** Many attendees shared how the training transformed their perspectives in a safe space for examining sensitive areas of GBV. One young woman realized that domestic violence in her home was not normal and sought help. Similarly, a young man gained knowledge about safe sexual practices and began raising awareness among his peers.

The project demonstrated the importance of tailoring interventions to the local context and employing interactive, participatory methods to ensure meaningful engagement. By focusing on practical skills and real-world applications, the training not only equipped participants with valuable knowledge but also inspired transformative personal growth.

Challenges

- **Political Tensions Impacting Participation:** Armed conflict in Kachin State posed significant risks. Constant coordination with local authorities and flexible scheduling ensured the safety of participants and trainers. Despite these efforts, some sessions experienced lower-than-expected attendance due to ongoing violence.
- **Access and Digital Divide:** Travel restrictions limited mobility, while internet access in remote areas was unreliable. Although online sessions were organised to address this, some participants struggled to connect due to poor infrastructure. Creative solutions, such as sharing recorded sessions and offline resources, partially mitigated this issue.
- **Youth Migration for Work:** Many young people were forced to prioritize employment or migration over training participation, reducing the reach of the program. Engaging their families and community leaders helped emphasize the importance of attending the sessions.

While the challenges faced during implementation were significant, they highlighted the resilience of both the organizers and participants. The project's flexible approach and focus on addressing barriers ensured that key objectives were achieved despite the difficulties.



Feedback

This project uniquely addressed the intersection of gender equality and mental health in conflict-affected areas. By equipping youth with practical knowledge and skills, it empowers them to take control of their lives and advocate for positive change in their communities. The project's collaborative approach fostered trust and unity among participants, trainers, and local leaders. This was evident in the way participants formed peer-support groups to continue the dialogue on GBV and SRHR beyond the training sessions.

Some participants' stories highlighted the project's profound impact on the personally. One participant who formerly accepted domestic violence as the norm now leads discussion groups on gender equality. Another participant who was previously uninformed about SRHR, has become a vocal advocate for safe practices and mutual respect in relationships. By collaborating with local civil society organizations and engaging indirect beneficiaries, the project laid the groundwork for sustained advocacy on gender equality and mental health awareness in the region.

The feedback from participants and the community underscored the transformative power of this initiative. By addressing deeply rooted issues with sensitivity and collaboration, the project became more than a training—it ignited a movement toward inclusion, resilience, and sustainable change. This project underscores the importance of integrating gender sensitivity, mental health support, and community resilience in development efforts. Through its inclusive approach, it not only addressed immediate needs but also inspired long-term, systemic change.



MYANMAR

Goat Farming for Sustainable Food Security

Project Overview

The Goat Farming for Sustainable Food Security project addressed critical food security issues in the conflict-affected area. By introducing goat farming, the project aimed to provide a reliable emergency food source for displaced and vulnerable communities.

Political instability and environmental challenges compounded the region's struggles, leaving families with limited resources. Goat farming was selected as a practical, sustainable solution to provide immediate nutritional support while fostering economic resilience. Through collaborative planning and co-breeding arrangements, the project encouraged community participation and ensured long-term impact.

The project also included measures to improve access to clean drinking water, such as the distribution of LifeStraw units. While these efforts addressed some challenges, the limited quantity highlighted the ongoing need for sustainable water solutions.

Lessons Learned or Successes

- **Collaborative Community Efforts:** The success of the project hinged on the active involvement of local leaders and residents. Community-driven decisions, such as co-breeding agreements, not only ensured the fair distribution of resources but also fostered a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. For example, co-breeding agreements allowed participants to distribute kid goats between herders and owners, strengthening social ties and resource-sharing practices.
- **Flexibility in Implementation:** Adapting to local market conditions and price fluctuations proved critical. The team purchased more nanny goats than originally planned due to lower-than-expected prices, significantly increasing the project's reach and long-term benefits. This strategic adjustment demonstrated the importance of being responsive to real-time conditions.
- **Sustainability as a Core Principle:** Goat farming provided immediate food security and established a sustainable livestock resource for the community. The first breeding cycle alone produced 16 kid goats within three months, showcasing the rapid and scalable nature of this solution.

By leveraging community knowledge and maintaining flexibility, the project successfully addressed immediate food needs while laying the groundwork for economic and social resilience.

Project Area

Magway Region

Activities

- Established three goat shelters to support breeding efforts.
- Purchased 106 nanny goats and 12 billy goats for distribution and breeding purposes.
- Facilitated community-led construction of shelters and established co-breeding agreements for sustainability.
- Distributed LifeStraw units to address the community's need for clean drinking water.

Total Beneficiaries

- **Direct Beneficiaries:** 4,092 individuals (1,204 households; 2,525 males, 2,964 females, 2,108 children).
- **Indirect Beneficiaries:** 1,397 individuals, including neighbouring communities and additional IDPs.

Challenges

- **Political Instability and Mobility Issues:** Frequent evacuations due to armed conflict complicated project implementation. For instance, two goats were lost during a community evacuation, and herding large numbers of goats to safer areas proved logistically challenging. Despite these difficulties, the community worked together to minimize losses and continue operations.
- **Resource Scarcity:** The rising costs of transportation and construction materials due to inflation posed significant challenges. The budget was stretched to cover increasing costs, such as fuel and roofing materials for shelters, highlighting the impact of broader economic instability.
- **Insufficient Clean Water Supply:** The dry zone's water scarcity remained a persistent issue. Although LifeStraw units were distributed to provide clean drinking water, the quantity was insufficient to meet the community's needs. This highlighted the need for more robust, long-term water solutions.

While challenges such as conflict and resource scarcity were significant, the community's resilience and problem-solving abilities allowed the project to adapt and continue providing essential support.

Feedback

The project exemplified how a innovative yet strategic initiative, like goat farming, could address both short-term and long-term food security needs. The co-breeding arrangement ensured that the benefits were shared equitably, creating a sustainable cycle of resource use and community support. This project was the first of its kind in the region, fostering self-reliance and collaboration among stakeholders. Following its success, the villages initiated a peanut farming project funded by collective contributions, showcasing how this project inspired further grassroots initiatives. By increasing the local goat population and improving cash flow within the community, the project stimulated the local economy. For example, lower goat prices coincided with project implementation, allowing for a more extensive breeding program that benefited both goat sellers and buyers.

The Goat Farming for Sustainable Food Security project not only provided immediate nutritional and economic benefits but also catalyzed long-term community empowerment. Its success demonstrates the potential of community-driven solutions to address systemic challenges in vulnerable regions.



Project Area

Karenni State, Myanmar

Activities

- Conducted two rounds of training for adolescents and young adults aged 15–24.
- Provided vocational courses, including:
 - Traditional weaving and knitting.
 - Basic motorbike and electrical repair skills.
 - Organic fertilizer production and agricultural practices.
 - Baking, crochet training, and cloth-making.
- Organized workshops on environmental studies and psychosocial support, such as the Human Library activity.
- Held field trips to local businesses, such as a tea plantation, to study business models.

Total Beneficiaries

- **Direct Beneficiaries:**
60 adolescents (30 per batch) from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, including from 4 ethnic groups.
- **Indirect Beneficiaries:**
Over 200 individuals, including families and communities benefiting from the participants' skills.

Feedback

The program's focus on vocational skills gave participants tangible tools to improve their livelihoods. Stories of success, such as a student starting a small-scale bakery business, illustrate the real-world impact of these trainings.

By involving local leaders and tailoring courses to community needs, the program fostered a sense of ownership among participants and stakeholders. The introduction of organic fertilizer production, for example, directly addressed agricultural challenges in the region. Beyond vocational training, the program nurtured psychosocial well-being through activities like the Human Library and environmental workshops. These initiatives helped participants build confidence, resilience, and a broader understanding of their role in community development.

The VET program exemplified how targeted interventions can create lasting change. By addressing both immediate needs and long-term challenges, the initiative empowered youth to rebuild their lives and contribute meaningfully to their communities, leaving an enduring legacy of hope and resilience.

MYANMAR

Vocational Education and Training (VET) Program

Project Overview

The VET program targeted adolescents and young adults in Karenni State who had been displaced or marginalized due to the 2021 military coup and ongoing conflict. These youth had lost access to education for over four years and faced challenges such as economic instability, food insecurity, and limited employment opportunities.

The program provided practical skills training tailored to local needs, focusing on job readiness, financial independence, and community development. By addressing barriers like low literacy rates and geographic inaccessibility, the VET program offered these youth a pathway to rebuild their lives and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Lessons Learned or Successes

- **Enhancing Practical Skills for Livelihoods:** Each course was designed to equip students with employable skills. For example, the baking class not only taught participants how to make and sell baked goods but also fostered entrepreneurial thinking. The success of these courses encouraged some participants to start small businesses within their communities.
- **Integrating Leadership and Collaboration:** Establishing student councils allowed participants to practice teamwork and leadership. These councils facilitated fundraising activities, such as selling snacks, which reinforced their confidence in organizing and managing community projects.
- **Cultural and Social Inclusion:** The program emphasized preserving cultural heritage through traditional weaving and knitting courses. This approach not only provided a source of income but also empowered participants to take pride in their cultural identities, fostering social cohesion. By blending vocational training with leadership and cultural preservation, the program equipped participants with both practical tools and a sense of purpose, ensuring a more sustainable and inclusive impact.

Challenges

- **Security Risks:** Ongoing conflict and political instability posed significant safety concerns. Students and trainers faced disruptions due to evacuations, which delayed the program and required contingency planning.
- **Resource and Infrastructure Barriers:** Poor internet connectivity and inadequate transportation infrastructure hindered access to training materials and remote coordination. Despite these barriers, the program utilized offline teaching resources and fostered strong community support to keep operations running.
- **Gaps in Foundational Education:** Due to years away from formal education, many participants struggled with classroom-based lessons, such as English and basic social studies. The program addressed this challenge by adapting lesson plans to suit varying literacy levels. Despite these challenges, the program demonstrated resilience and adaptability, ensuring that its core objectives were achieved even in a volatile environment.

THAILAND

SSMF 2024 Project Areas



1

Youth Pride 2024 –
Empowering LGBTIQN+
Youth in Thailand

2

Educational Support for
Mr. Hannarong Rakjongjarean

3

Serm Rang Rian – Education Support
for Migrant and Stateless Children in
Chiang Mai





Project Area

Bangkok Arts and Cultural Centre,
Bangkok, Thailand

Activities

- Organized a two-day Youth Pride event:
 - Day 1: Capacity-building workshops at Asia Hotel, Bangkok, focusing on networking, leadership, and advocacy.
 - Day 2: Youth Pride event at the Bangkok Cultural and Art Center featuring forums, performances, workshops, and an art exhibition.
- Delivered sessions on critical topics such as sexual health education, self-expression, self-defence, and legal advocacy for LGBTIQN+ rights.
- Engaged 18 advocacy groups and organizations in booths to raise awareness and promote LGBTIQN+ issues.
- Created a collective art project where youth from across Thailand contributed individual fabric pieces representing their identities, showcased at the event.

Total Beneficiaries

- **Direct Beneficiaries:**
150 LGBTIQN+ youth aged 15–35, including transmasculine, ethnic minorities, sex workers, and migrants.
- **Indirect Beneficiaries:**
250 individuals, including community leaders, allies, and supporters attending the event.



THAILAND

Youth Pride 2024 – Empowering LGBTIQN+ Youth in Thailand

Project Overview

The Foundation of Transgender Alliance for Human Rights (ThaiTGA) organized Youth Pride 2024 to amplify the voices of LGBTIQN+ youth in Thailand. The initiative focused on empowering young activists by providing a platform to advocate for human rights, express creativity, and connect with like-minded peers.

Youth Pride aimed to highlight issues such as marriage equality, legal gender recognition, and the elimination of violence against LGBTIQN+ youth. By fostering youth-led participation, the event served as a safe space for young individuals to share their struggles, envision a better future, and contribute to the larger movement for equality.

Lessons Learned or Successes

- **Inclusivity Strengthens Movements:** The event successfully reached underrepresented groups, including transmasculine, ethnic minorities, and Burmese migrants. Their participation enriched discussions, fostering greater understanding and collaboration across diverse communities.
- **Youth Leadership Drives Advocacy:** Young participants led various sessions and contributed to key decisions, demonstrating the importance of empowering youth to take ownership of their movements. For instance, the “Growing Tree” activity allowed participants to identify values, systems, and dreams to support the LGBTIQN+ movement.
- **Strategic Sponsorships Enhance Impact:** This year, the organizing team declined sponsorships from businesses involved in “rainbow washing” and introduced a sponsorship checklist to ensure alignment with the movement’s values. This approach preserved the event’s integrity while maintaining financial support from trusted partners. The event underscored the transformative potential of inclusive, youth-led initiatives in creating safe spaces and advocating for systemic change.

Challenges

- **Safety Concerns for Vulnerable Groups:** LGBTIQN+ youth from the deep south of Thailand faced significant risks due to societal and religious stigmatisation. To protect their anonymity, organizers implemented strict confidentiality measures, such as prohibiting photography and social media posts featuring these participants.
- **Resource and Budget Constraints:** Despite financial support from various partners, the team faced challenges in covering rising accommodation and transportation costs. Efficient budget management and resource-sharing among partners mitigated these issues.
- **Balancing Representation with Logistics:** Ensuring nationwide participation while managing logistical complexities required careful planning. Volunteer networks and strong coordination with local allies were instrumental in overcoming this challenge.

These challenges highlighted the resilience and adaptability of the organizing team, reinforcing the importance of collaboration and thoughtful planning in achieving project goals.

Feedback

Youth Pride provided a platform for young LGBTIQN+ individuals to share their experiences, including those from vulnerable regions. This visibility challenged stereotypes and inspired others to join the movement for equality.

Collaboration among 24 partners and the involvement of 18 advocacy booths created a dynamic environment for learning and networking. For example, interactive board games at the booths educated participants on issues like legal gender recognition and reproductive rights.

The collective art project, featuring fabric pieces contributed by youth from different regions, symbolized unity in diversity. The exhibit served as a powerful visual representation of shared struggles and aspirations. By focusing on youth engagement, the event cultivated the next generation of activists. Many participants expressed a renewed commitment to advancing LGBTIQN+ rights in their communities.

Youth Pride 2024 not only celebrated the LGBTIQN+ community but also laid the groundwork for sustained advocacy and collaboration. Its success highlights the critical role of youth-led initiatives in shaping an inclusive and equitable future.

Project Area

Petchaburi Province Thailand

Activities

- Enrolment in an automotive engineering vocational school in Hua Hin, Prachuap Khiri Khan Province
- Provision of dormitory accommodation to facilitate consistent school attendance
- Travel to visit family on weekends via public transportation and later by motorbike
- Support for school fees and essential living expenses

Total Beneficiaries

● Direct Beneficiaries:

- One student (Mr. Hannarong Rakjongjarean)
- His immediate family: mother, grandmother, and three younger siblings

● Indirect Beneficiaries:

- Two sisters attending boarding schools in Chiang Rai and Ratchaburi provinces



THAILAND

Educational Support for Mr. Hannarong Rakjongjarean

Project Overview

This project aimed to provide educational support for Mr. Hannarong, the second son of Pholachi "Billy" Rakjongjarean, a renowned Karen human rights defender. Billy, a community leader, was advocating for the rights of indigenous Karen villagers who had been forcibly evicted from their ancestral lands within Kaeng Krachan National Park. Tragically, Billy became a victim of enforced disappearance in 2014, and his remains were discovered five years later, turning his case into a high-profile murder investigation.

The absence of Billy placed significant emotional and financial strain on his family. Despite these adversities, Hannarong demonstrated resilience and a strong determination to pursue vocational education in automotive engineering. The Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund stepped in to support his educational journey, providing the necessary financial aid to cover tuition, accommodation, and transportation expenses.

Hannarong's educational experience has not only allowed him to acquire practical skills for his future career but has also symbolized the continued hope and perseverance of his family amidst their ongoing pursuit of justice.

Lessons Learned or Successes

- **Value of Education Access:** Access to a quality education environment with dedicated teachers positively influenced Hannarong's academic and personal growth. His newfound confidence in completing coursework exemplifies the impact of educational support.
- **Importance of Social Interaction:** Building friendships and engaging in group work at school significantly improved Hannarong's social and communication skills, fostering a sense of belonging and collaboration.
- **Supportive Family Connections:** Despite living away from home, regular weekend visits allowed Hannarong to maintain strong family ties and contribute to household chores, showcasing his sense of responsibility and connection to his roots.

Challenges

- **Balancing School and Part-Time Work:** Hannarong initially intended to work part-time to support his expenses but found it difficult due to the demands of his academic schedule and social engagement at school.
- **Transportation and Commute:** Although initially reliant on public transport, the purchase of a motorbike significantly improved his ability to commute between school and home, enhancing his independence and reducing travel constraints.

Feedback

The project has successfully empowered Hannarong with the skills and knowledge needed for a future career in automotive engineering. His dedication to learning and positive attitude towards his school experience highlight the project's success.

Regular interactions with his family during school breaks fostered a balanced approach to education and family life. His contribution to farm work at home reflects his grounded values.

Supporting young students like Hannarong not only changes individual lives but also inspires communities by emphasizing the transformative power of education and perseverance. This project serves as a testament to the importance of educational opportunities in shaping futures. Hannarong's journey, filled with learning, responsibility, and hope, exemplifies the spirit of the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund's mission.

Project Area

Mueang District, Chiang Mai Province, Thailand

- Muslim community in Chang Klan
- Shan migrant worker community

Activities

- Academic support in subjects such as science, mathematics, and English for children aged 5–15.
- Thai language curriculum development for children with limited proficiency.
- Life skills and personal development workshops.
- Recreational activities, including art education, storytelling, and games.
- Health and hygiene education, including first aid and personal care.
- Emotional awareness activities using movies like Inside Out.
- Teacher workshops on curriculum design, children's rights, and fieldwork preparation.
- Community engagement activities, such as first-aid kit distribution to parents.

Total Beneficiaries

• Direct Beneficiaries:

- 70 children from the Chang Klan Muslim community.
- 20 children from the Shan migrant worker community.

• Indirect Beneficiaries:

- Parents of stateless children (10 individuals).
- Families and local community members in target areas.



THAILAND

Serm Rang Rian – Education Support for Migrant and Stateless Children in Chiang Mai

Project Overview

The “Serm Rang Rian” project aims to address the educational and social challenges faced by stateless and migrant children in Chiang Mai. Many of these children belong to marginalized communities, including Muslim and Shan migrants, who face economic hardship, language barriers, and limited access to education.

The project provided tailored academic support, Thai language instruction, and life skills training to help children integrate better into Thai society. Activities were designed to foster creativity, improve communication, and enhance emotional well-being. Volunteer teachers underwent comprehensive training to ensure quality and culturally sensitive education delivery.

Workshops such as “Dream School” and “Curriculum Design for Teaching” enabled teachers to create a curriculum suited to the needs of the children. Despite challenges such as flooding and limited resources, the project successfully provided a safe and engaging learning environment for the children.

Lessons Learned or Successes

- **Community-Centric Approach:** One of the most significant successes was the emphasis on community involvement. By engaging both migrant families and local Thai communities, the project ensured that the educational initiatives were not only supported but also sustained over time. For instance, the first-aid kits distributed to parents was not just a practical intervention but also a gesture of trust-building, especially since the kits were accompanied by instructions in Burmese, a language spoken by many of the families. This approach helped bridge gaps between the migrant communities and the broader society, fostering mutual understanding.
- **Tailored Curriculum Design:** A key achievement was that the curriculum was designed to address the specific needs of stateless and migrant children. Given that many children faced language barriers, the Thai language curriculum proved invaluable in improving their communication skills. This allowed them to integrate more smoothly into Thai society, both in terms of education and everyday social interactions. Tailoring educational content not only addressed language proficiency but also considered cultural sensitivities, ensuring that the content was relevant and accessible to all students.
- **Creative and Engaging Activities:** The project adopted a hands-on, creative approach to learning that helped children develop critical cognitive skills. Activities such as colour mixing and storytelling fostered creativity, while games like Scrabble helped with vocabulary building and problem-solving. These activities were instrumental in creating a learning environment that was both educational and enjoyable, keeping children engaged and motivated. This holistic approach to education proved to be effective in enhancing the children's academic progress as well as their overall development.
- **Empowered Volunteers:** The workshops held for teachers played a significant role in equipping volunteers with the necessary skills and tools to cater to the unique needs of the children. Through sessions like “Imaginary Teacher,” volunteers were encouraged to think outside the box and employ innovative teaching strategies that could better support the children's learning journeys. This empowerment of teachers was a pivotal aspect of the project's success, ensuring that the educators were well-prepared to handle the challenges they encountered in the classroom.
- **Holistic Approach to Education:** Beyond academics, the project made considerable strides in promoting life skills, emotional awareness, and personal development. Through activities such as movie-based emotional awareness exercises and life skills workshops, the project helped children understand and manage their emotions, improving their overall mental health and resilience. This well-rounded approach not only contributed to the children's academic success but also to their personal growth, preparing them for life beyond the classroom.



Challenges

- **Legal and Documentation Issues:** One of the most persistent challenges faced by the project was the legal documentation hurdles that many migrant and stateless children faced. The absence of official identification documents meant that these children often lacked access to formal education and essential public services. The project's team worked closely with local authorities to navigate these issues, often providing documentation assistance and working to raise awareness about the children's rights. Overcoming this obstacle required a multifaceted approach, including advocating for policy changes and building relationships with key local stakeholders.
- **Economic Pressures:** Migrant families often depended on additional income from their children's labor, which significantly impacted the children's ability to attend school regularly. This economic pressure made it difficult for some children to fully commit to their education, as they were expected to help with family earnings. To mitigate this, the project adopted a flexible scheduling model and reached out to families to emphasize the importance of education, even in the face of financial hardship. The project also encouraged parents to recognize that investing in education was crucial for their children's future well-being.
- **Unsuitable Learning Environments:** The project's target areas faced several infrastructural challenges, including frequent flooding that disrupted classes. In some cases, the local learning spaces were not adequate for the number of children enrolled. The team responded by relocating lessons to alternative indoor spaces and making necessary adjustments to ensure that learning could continue, even during adverse conditions. This flexibility demonstrated the project's ability to adapt to the ever-changing environment and ensured that the children received uninterrupted education.
- **Volunteer Management:** Volunteer coordination posed another challenge, as ensuring adequate support for all activities required significant planning and clear communication. Scheduling conflicts, volunteer burnout, and varying levels of experience among volunteers added complexity to the management process. To address this, the project implemented a structured volunteer training system and regular check-ins to ensure that volunteers felt supported and equipped to fulfill their roles. This ongoing support system contributed to the project's overall success, as the volunteers played a critical role in delivering quality education to the children.

Feedback

The "Serm Rang Rian" project successfully addressed the educational and social challenges faced by migrant and stateless children through a community-driven approach. By engaging both local and migrant communities, the project fostered collaboration and built trust, as seen in initiatives like distributing first-aid kits to parents. This strengthened community involvement and ensured effective project implementation.

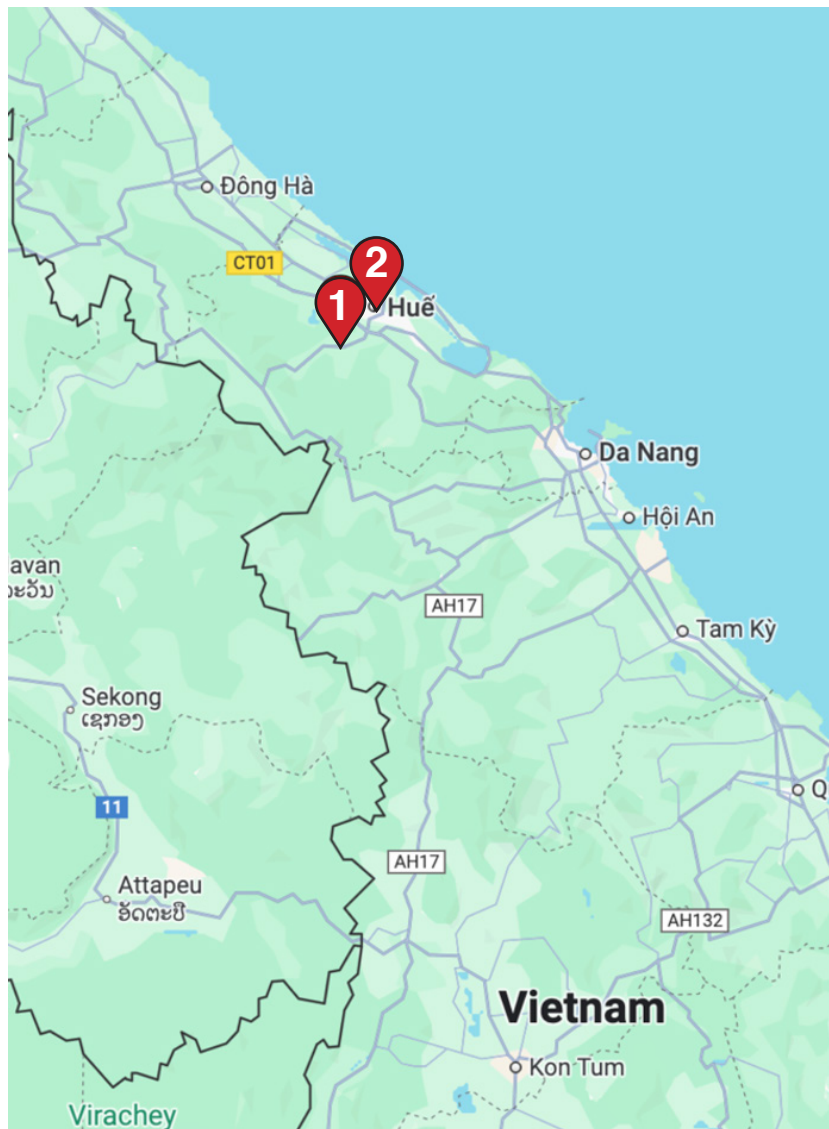
A key success was the tailored curriculum, which helped bridge language barriers and facilitated the integration of children into Thai society. The Thai language instruction and emotional awareness activities, such as those based on Inside Out, supported both academic and emotional growth, ensuring a holistic approach to education for marginalized children.

The project's focus on teacher empowerment through workshops allowed volunteers to design culturally sensitive curriculums that catered to the children's unique needs. Creative activities like storytelling and art encouraged self-expression and cognitive development, while fostering emotional resilience in children.

Despite challenges such as legal barriers and economic pressures, the project demonstrated adaptability and creativity. Flexible scheduling and a responsive approach ensured continued access to education, ultimately leaving a lasting positive impact on both the children and their families, setting a benchmark for similar initiatives in the region.

VIETNAM

SSMF 2024 Project Areas



1

MER Project –
Bringing Joy and Opportunities
to Children in A Luoi

2

Green Sprouts -
Environmental Awareness and
Education for Disadvantaged Children





Project Area

A Luoi District, Hue City, Thua Thien Hue Province, Vietnam:

- Location 1: Ca Cu 1 Village, Hong Van Commune
- Location 2: Star Classroom, Viet Tien Village, Hong Kim Commune

Activities

- Organized the “EM’s Tet” program for International Children’s Day, providing gifts and organizing games and cultural exchanges for children.
- Conducted the “I Am a Tour Guide” activity, where children learned to develop and present content about Anor Waterfall in English.
- Distributed essential items such as rice, warm clothes, school supplies, and other gifts to children in need.
- Engaged in interactive and extracurricular activities to help children develop soft skills, including communication, teamwork, and leadership.

Total Beneficiaries

- **Direct Beneficiaries:**
 - 40 children from Ca Cu 1 Village, Hong Van Commune.
 - 20 children from Star Classroom, Hong Kim Commune.
- **Indirect Beneficiaries:**
 - 60 households of children supported by the project.
 - Local government representatives and community leaders.
 - Seven project members, four volunteers, and classroom managers.



VIETNAM

MER Project – Bringing Joy and Opportunities to Children in A Luoi

Project Overview

The MER Project was initiated by seven university students from Hue University to address the material and emotional needs of children aged 5–10 years living in the mountainous A Luoi District. This region faces geographical isolation, challenging terrain, and limited access to resources, making it difficult for children to thrive.

The project provided essential items such as school supplies, warm clothes, and rice to improve the children's quality of life. Additionally, it organized engaging activities like “EM’s Tet” and “I Am a Tour Guide,” which encouraged the development of critical soft skills and fostered confidence and creativity.

Despite logistical challenges, including navigating dangerous mountain roads and unpredictable weather, the project successfully delivered both material support and joyful experiences to the children, leaving a lasting impact on the community.

Lessons Learned or Successes

- **The Power of Solidarity:** Collaboration among project members, volunteers, teachers, and local authorities was crucial to the project's success. Through open communication and mutual respect, the team overcame numerous challenges and executed activities seamlessly. For example, teamwork ensured the smooth distribution of gifts and the organization of engaging programs like “EM’s Tet.”
- **Adapting to Challenges:** Flexibility and problem-solving were essential. The team adjusted plans as needed, such as managing transportation delays and preparing for weather-related disruptions. Their determination demonstrated that even in challenging circumstances, commitment and creativity can lead to success.
- **Empowering Through Participation:** Activities like “I Am a Tour Guide” empowered children by giving them the opportunity to present in English, fostering confidence and practical skills. This program highlighted the importance of experiential learning and its potential to inspire children to explore new opportunities. These lessons reaffirmed the importance of teamwork, adaptability, and child-centred programming in creating impactful community projects.



Challenges

- **Geographical and Transportation Barriers:** The project's location in a remote mountainous district made transportation cumbersome and time-consuming. The team had to navigate dangerous roads and poor weather conditions, which required meticulous planning and precautions to ensure safety.
- **Resource Constraints:** Limited financial and human resources posed challenges to the project's scope. With only seven core members (six women and one man), the team relied heavily on external volunteers and donors to achieve its objectives.
- **Volunteer Coordination:** Managing volunteers for on-site activities was another challenge. The team developed detailed plans and work assignments to ensure smooth execution, but the reliance on volunteer support added complexity to logistics.

Despite these challenges, the project's success highlights the resilience and dedication of its team. Addressing these barriers strengthened their problem-solving skills and deepened their connection with the community.

Feedback

The project's motto, "Simple joy in simple things," was evident in every activity. Whether it was providing gifts during "EM's Tet" or creating English-language content about Anor Waterfall, the project delivered meaningful and memorable experiences to children.

The "I Am a Tour Guide" activity showcased the children's potential to learn and share their cultural heritage. By introducing them to the role of a tour guide, the project not only developed their English skills but also instilled pride in their hometown's beauty and culture. The project left an indelible mark on participants, project members, and the community. A memorable moment for the team was filming videos at Anor Waterfall, where the stunning natural scenery provided both a learning opportunity and emotional rejuvenation for everyone involved.

The MER Project demonstrated how small, community-driven initiatives could bring joy, skill-building opportunities, and lasting memories to marginalized children. Its success reflects the power of dedication, creativity, and collective effort to transform lives in even the most challenging environments even though they applied for the grant amount of only \$650.

Project Area

Huong Tho Village, Hue City, Thua Thien Hue Province, Vietnam.

Activities

- Organized environmental education classes for disadvantaged children aged 8–13, focusing on topics such as recycling, tree planting, and the life cycle of a butterfly.
- Conducted creative workshops, including poster-making competitions, recycling projects, and the creation of mazes and bookmarks from household waste.
- Delivered experiential learning activities such as farm field trips, nature exploration, and scientific experiments on natural disasters.
- Distributed over 10 storybooks to each student to encourage reading and environmental learning.
- Facilitated a program where students engaged family members in at-home recycling and tree-planting activities.

Total Beneficiaries

- **Direct Beneficiaries:**
 - 60 children from disadvantaged households in Huong Tho Village.
 - 60 households were directly impacted through student involvement.
- **Indirect Beneficiaries:**
 - 180 neighboring households.
 - Approximately 700 individuals, including 200 men, 200 women, and 300 children (relatives and neighbors).



VIETNAM

Green Sprouts - Environmental Awareness and Education for Disadvantaged Children

Project Overview

This project aimed to raise environmental awareness among disadvantaged children living in Huong Tho Village, a remote, socioeconomically challenged area 20 kilometres from Hue City. The initiative addressed the lack of quality education and environmental awareness among these children, many of whom had limited access to English classes and knowledge of sustainable practices.

By leveraging the natural surroundings of a farm, the project provided a hands-on learning environment where students could engage deeply with nature while improving their English and environmental literacy. The curriculum included interactive lessons on recycling, pollution, and tree planting, combined with storytelling, arts, and experiential field trips.

The program also extended its impact to families and neighbours, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for sustainability and environmental stewardship within the community.

Lessons Learned or Successes

- **Creative Engagement Yields Results:** Hands-on activities like recycling old clothes into tote bags and planting trees captivated students and encouraged active participation. For example, students brought their projects home, such as upcycled bookmarks and cardboard mazes, which sparked family discussions on sustainable practices.
- **Community Involvement Strengthens Impact:** Encouraging students to involve their families in recycling and tree-planting activities created ripple effects. Families collectively worked on reducing waste, conserving resources, and planting native trees, demonstrating how small actions can lead to broader community change.
- **Adaptive Teaching is Crucial:** The project faced challenges with book availability, but the team creatively sourced alternative materials, ensuring students continued to receive high-quality lessons. This adaptability enhanced the learning experience and underscored the importance of flexibility in educational projects.

The project demonstrated that engaging children through creative, community-driven approaches not only fosters their learning but also builds a culture of environmental responsibility within their households and communities.

Challenges

- **Transportation and Accessibility:** Some students faced difficulties traveling to the farm due to distance and their parents' work schedules. Volunteers stepped in to pick up and drop off these students, ensuring no one missed the sessions.
- **Managing Large Class Sizes:** As the number of students increased, the team reorganized the class structure, creating smaller groups of 10 to provide more personalized instruction and improve the learning environment.
- **Weather Disruptions:** The farm lacked adequate indoor facilities, which posed challenges during unexpected rains. With the help of farm staff, makeshift classrooms were set up in sheds and barns to ensure lessons could continue without interruption.

Feedback

Activities like poster competitions and storytelling sessions not only educated students but also encouraged them to envision a greener, more sustainable world. Many posters reflected their dreams of lush forests and clean rivers, showing their deep connection to nature. The project inspired families to work together on sustainability efforts, such as tree planting and waste reduction. This collaboration strengthened family bonds and created a shared commitment to environmental preservation. Field trips and hands-on activities, such as exploring the life cycle of a butterfly and simulating volcano eruptions, left lasting impressions on students. These experiences nurtured curiosity and a love for science and nature. By combining environmental education with soft-skill development, such as teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership, the project equipped students with life skills that extend beyond the classroom.

The Environmental Awareness and Education project effectively empowered children and their communities to take meaningful steps toward sustainability. Its innovative and inclusive approach serves as a model for future initiatives aiming to combine education, environmental stewardship, and community building.

Steering Committee Members

The steering committee plays a crucial role in the selection process of the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund, ensuring that grants are awarded to the most deserving applicants. In 2024, the committee consisted of six members, while in 2025 it expanded to nine members to enhance the decision-making process. Each member brings diverse expertise in Education, Youth Empowerment, Human Rights, and Community Development. Through a transparent voting system, the committee carefully evaluates and selects the most impactful applications that align with the fund's mission.



1. Shui-Meng Ng

Shui Meng Ng is a dedicated human rights advocate from Laos and the wife of Sombath Somphone, a renowned community development leader. With a background in social development and education, she has worked extensively on issues related to youth empowerment, education, and community resilience. Following Sombath's enforced disappearance in 2012, Shui Meng has tirelessly campaigned for justice and human rights in Laos and beyond. As a founding member of the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund (SSMF), she plays a crucial role in ensuring the fund supports initiatives that reflect Sombath's vision of sustainable, community-led development in the Mekong region.



2. Somboon Chungprampree

Somboon Chungprampree is a Thai social activist and executive secretary of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), and International Director of the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM). With over two decades of experience in social activism, he has played a pivotal role in promoting peacebuilding, social justice, and environmental sustainability across Asia. Deeply rooted in engaged Buddhism, his work focuses on empowering marginalized communities, fostering interfaith dialogue, and advocating for human rights. As a steering committee member of the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund (SSMF), Somboon brings his expertise in grassroots activism and Buddhist principles to support youth-led initiatives and sustainable development efforts in the Mekong region.



3. Areewan Sombunwattanakun

Areewan Sombunwattanakun is a dedicated advocate for environmental sustainability and community rights in Thailand. She has been actively involved in addressing concerns related to the Dawei Special Economic Zone (DSEZ) project, which has raised significant environmental and human rights issues. In 2014, Areewan co-authored "Voices from the Ground," a report highlighting the adverse impacts of the DSEZ on local communities. Her work emphasizes the importance of meaningful consultation with affected populations and adherence to environmental safeguards. Through her efforts, Areewan continues to promote sustainable development and the protection of indigenous rights in the region.



4. Chanthalangsy Sisouvanh

Chanthalangsy Sisouvanh is the Founder and Executive Director of the Rural Development Agency (RDA) in Laos. With a Master's in Economy and Society from Lancaster University and a Bachelor's in NGO Management and Social Work, she has extensive experience in community development, youth empowerment, and environmental education. She has worked on women's leadership, nutrition, WASH, and climate change initiatives. Sisouvanh has collaborated with organizations like CARE International and SNV and received multiple awards, including the U.S. State Department's Alumni Impact Award.



5. Premrudee Daoroung

Premrudee Daoroung is an environmental activist from Thailand, known for her advocacy on environmental and social justice in Southeast Asia, especially concerning the Mekong River. She has worked against large-scale infrastructure projects like dams that harm local communities and ecosystems. Formerly the director of TERRA, she founded Project SEVANA to unite regional activists addressing impacts from infrastructure developments. Currently, Premrudee coordinates Project SEVANA, Laos Dam Investment Monitor and the Mekong-ASEAN Environmental Week (MAEW), the regional exchange platform for CSOs and local communities in the region.



6. Toshi

Toshiyuki Doi (Toshi) is currently Senior Advisor with Tokyo-based NGO Mekong Watch. Over the past 25 years, Toshi has been monitoring impacts of development finance on the Mekong region, particularly local communities' access to natural resources. His research interests include policies and practices of multilateral development banks such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the revitalization of languages, cultures, and traditions of Indigenous Peoples in Asia.



7. Bo Bo Lwin

Bo Bo Lwin is a committed civil society leader and education advocate from Myanmar, focusing on youth development and community empowerment, and the former Executive Director of Kalyana Mitta Development Foundation (KMF) Myanmar. With extensive experience in grassroots activism, he has worked on capacity-building programs that equip young people with skills to navigate social and economic challenges. His work spans areas such as peacebuilding, leadership training, and access to education, particularly for marginalized and conflict-affected communities. As an SSMF steering committee member, Bo Bo is dedicated to ensuring that young changemakers in the Mekong region receive the support they need to drive sustainable community transformation.



8. Quách Thanh Thiên

Quách Thanh Thiên is the founder of Vcíl Community - a network and community of people who advocate paradigm shift toward a regenerative and well-being society through alternative education and social innovation. With a strong background in community development and capacity-building, he has been actively involved in programs that promote alternative education, regeneration, social justice and fair economy. Through Vcíl Community, he works to equip young leaders with the skills and mindset needed to drive positive change in their communities. As a member of the SSMF Steering Committee, he brings his expertise in youth engagement and leadership to support meaningful grassroots initiatives in the Mekong region.



9. Sarom Sek

Sarom Sek is a dedicated peacebuilder and educator from Cambodia with extensive experience in leadership training, conflict resolution, and interfaith dialogue. She has worked with Dhammayietra, Cambodia Peace Gallery, and Aide et Action, empowering youth and marginalized communities. As a certified legal and medical interpreter, she has supported initiatives on human trafficking, labor rights, and Buddhist approaches to conflict resolution. Sarom has contributed to peace events, interfaith workshops, and study tours, promoting social cohesion and nonviolent activism.



SOMBATH SOMPHONE

Memorial Fund 2024



*****Amount of Funds Available per Application – 3,000 USD*****

Fund Objectives

- **Education** - To provide full or partial scholarships, especially to marginalized children and young people seeking to complete their education in schools or colleges.
- **Community Projects** - To provide small grants to active young adults (up to 35 years of age) to initiate start-up work or activities for youth in community education or development.
- **To support organizations providing education or humanitarian relief** to at risk children and families.

**CALL FOR
PROPOSAL**

Who can apply?

- Non-profit organizations
- Small groups
- Individuals

Project Target Areas

Mekong Sub-Region
(Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Southwest region of China)

Target groups

- Marginalized children
- Active and socially engaged young adults
- At-risk children and families in need of emergency support and/or humanitarian assistance

MORE INFO



Application Deadline
31 March 2024

[Click Here!](#)

sombathfund@inebnetwork.org



The Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund and Its Partners



International Network
of Engaged Buddhists

