

KWO COVID-19 Response Report

Summary

At the beginning of March 2020, the Coronavirus COVID- 19 outbreak spread all around the world including in Thailand and Burma. The World Health Organization and then governments in each country released statements for preventing the spread and a set of regulations for the public to follow. This included Thailand and Burma.

As KWO received the new rules and regulations, we reviewed our work plans for our projects and activities. In these difficult circumstances, like many other organisations, we had to postpone or cancel planned activities which involved large groups of people, like training or special events. This has impacted our daily work. However, with the capacity and resources that we had available, we continued to work hard within the new limitations, to meet many of our target goals and objectives.

In this pandemic period, KWO has intervened to advocate for at-risk, and vulnerable communities and individuals, so as to ensure access to information and basic services.

Organizational operation:

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we continue to maintain close communication with KWO staff and leadership in the refugee camps and districts in Karen State. We are providing instructions and have developed new guidelines so that they can carry out their work more safely. We are able to communicate through a variety of methods, depending on availability in each site: phone, internet, social media.

We have developed new guidelines for home visits so that our staff and the householders can be protected, but still benefit from essential services. We have created a variety of simple tools for community awareness raising about the prevention of COVID-19 in the Karen language and publicized/distributed them widely in refugee camps and Karen State, in collaboration with our local networks.

KWO at Central level is in regular communication with KWO in all camps and KWO in districts in Karen State in Burma to share information and update each other with any developments. We want to make sure that Karen people are well-informed and safe in all areas. While KWO office-based central staff continue to work at home, we are focusing on completing or reviewing management and training tasks, like refreshing training manuals, writing up project reports and proposals, designing posters, developing policy etc.

Coordination Meetings

KWO in all areas has been participating in various new coordination meetings at township, district, camp and central level. Some are online meetings and some are small face to face meetings with a few people. All of the coordination meetings focus on the collaboration between relevant service providers about raising awareness in the community for COVID-19 prevention and related protection issues.

KWO at the central level is participating in online meetings with NGOs, UNHCR and some other community groups: Protection Working Groups and Education providers. KWO especially advocates for the real needs of refugees and women in the current crisis.

Some of the issues raised by KWO in the Protection Working Group Meetings have been: needs of the most vulnerable, needs of women and children, refugees who are at an increased risk because stalled justice procedures impacting their security, women and children without access to rations.

Some of the education related issues in refugee camps raised by KWO: the need for students and teachers to receive clear information about schools reopening when the new school year starts, what new behaviours will be expected of students and teachers to prevent COVID-19, what hygiene resources will be available for schools. KWO is responsible for Early Childhood schools in 2 camps and Special Education Centres in 7 camps, and we are currently developing new guidelines and regulations for those activities.

Provision of Services KWO Provide Services:

Due to the new social distancing rules and the restriction on movement from district to district in Karen State and along the border of Thailand and Burma, including lockdown in some areas, many people panicked. The new situation was especially hard for the extremely vulnerable in the community, those who could not access hygiene items or masks for prevention.

KWO is continuing to run project activities and services as usual, but with the safety and prevention guidelines in place. We are offering emergency services to support vulnerable groups through home visits where staff are providing hygiene packs, nutritional food supplies, masks and information on the prevention and protection against COVID-19 in the camps and in Karen State.

In response, KWO staff have organized themselves: women have sewn thousands of masks, purchased and packed hygiene items (soap, washing powder, shampoo, tooth-paste/tooth brush, clothes for children), purchased and created emergency food packs, including yellow beans, dry fish, cooking oil, tinned fish, chili, and noodles. To date, in our ongoing activities, KWO has visited approximately **2000** families and has made masks distributed to **5000** people, combined with awareness raising activities

KWO is continuing to distribute these items to very vulnerable families and individuals in the community in seven refugee camps and in all districts in Karen State. We have also supported those in Ei Htu Hta camp with emergency food support to vulnerable groups and prepared an emergency food stock so they can still access food with the restrictions on movement in place.

Vulnerable groups are considered those including the elderly with no relatives to depend on, single mothers with many young children without livelihood income, families with limited income because of physical and mental disabilities in the camps and inside Karen State.

Challenges:

- KWO has postponed or cancelled all activities or events which involved large numbers of people (eg big meetings, or workshops or special events).

- KWO received a report that in some districts in Karen State, and in camps, they have seen an increase of domestic violence in families, due to being confined to homes, and the increased anxiety and tensions around accessing food and work.
- Elderly people living alone, have been identified by KWO in all sites as facing increased and significant hardships now.

Benefits

Due to our early action to share simple prevention information on COVID-19 in the Karen and Burmese languages in communities in camps and in Karen State, we contributed to keeping a very low number of cases. So far there are still no identified cases in camps and most parts of Karen State.

- Our essential services were maintained and we could therefore reach out to the most vulnerable people in the community and provide basic life-saving assistance.
- In this crisis situation, KWO staff are continuing to lead with a compassionate heart and trying our best to protect the community and making sure that no one is left behind.

Current Concerns

- We do not know how long the community has to live with this crisis situation, and this uncertainty has an impact on all of us.
- Some of KWO's planned activities may not achieve their agreed targets set for this year.
- Domestic violence, suicide cases may increase in the community.
- Ordinary people who survive by small earnings day by day, and with no secure savings, and no government support, will face increasing poverty and hardships.

Future Plans

- KWO staff will continue to produce masks and distribute to the vulnerable target group.
- KWO staff will continue to provide hygiene and food packages to the vulnerable target group.
- KWO will continue to provide our essential services in the community with a special focus on women's protection.
- KWO will take the necessary steps to intervene and lobby for the community to access other avenues of appropriate protection.
- KWO will continue to support survivors of violence to access justice in the judicial system.
- KWO will continue to coordinate and collaborate with all actors and service providers in order to strengthen our services and responses.
- KWO will continue to implement our community projects and activities as much as the new COVID-19 regulations allow, and will adjust as the situation evolves.