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ASIA

SNAPSHOT

Social Action for Women on the Border

A women-operated community organization, assisted by USAID, provides protection and shelter to migrant women and children along the Thai-Burmese border



SAW was founded in 2000 by women living on the Thai-Burmese border. SAW supports women and children by providing shelter, health education, health care, counseling and vocational training for unskilled women. / Photo: American Jewish World Service.

“If SAW did not help us we would be in a very difficult situation. My children would not be at school and I think it would be very hard for me to keep working for much longer to support them.”

- Nwe Nwe, beneficiary of USAID support

The tension within Burma contributes to the present-day exodus of people into Thailand. Nwe Nwe, one of many who sought a better life across the border, was a widowed mother diagnosed with TB and HIV when she travelled with two children from Burma to Bangkok to seek work. In desperation, Nwe Nwe and her eldest son took jobs in a bean factory in Mae Sot where they each earned \$2 per day.

In June 2009, she contacted the USAID-funded NGO Social Action for Women (SAW). Nwe Nwe says, “If SAW did not help us we would be in a very difficult situation. My children would not be at school and I think it would be very hard for me to keep working for much longer to support them.”

Founded by Burmese women living in the Thai-Burmese border in 2000, SAW focuses on the abused, abandoned, and disabled; child labourers; victims of trafficking and gender-based violence; and HIV-positive mothers. A decade ago, it had eight volunteers and one care center that was giving shelter to 10 people. Its only source of income was a small shop it operated that earned \$120 per month. Director Aye Aye Mar says, “I could see that a lot of women and children were in trouble. Some women were being sold to be sex workers and children were being trafficked. These were neglected cases and the victims were not receiving help.”

In 2006, SAW began receiving assistance through one of USAID’s partner organizations. USAID assistance provided capacity building and staff training in office management, strategic and financial planning, and proposal writing. As a result, SAW now receives funds from approximately fifteen supporters including the American Jewish World Service, the Body Shop Foundation, and the Rotary Club. In 2008, SAW was one of 25 organizations worldwide to receive the Red Ribbon Award from UNDP for providing outstanding HIV prevention, treatment and education on a grassroots level.

Today, thanks to USAID support, SAW has a \$30,000 monthly budget, 80 paid employees, and coordinates six safe houses. SAW also operates a call center and several schools and runs outreach and information-related projects. By supporting vulnerable women and children, SAW hopes it will strengthen their abilities to face future challenges and help them develop into healthy and productive members of society.