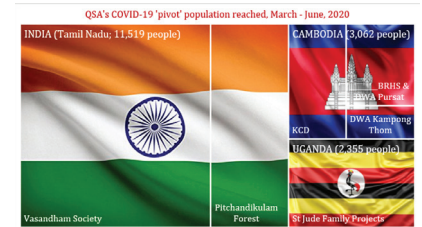




# QSA Notes

## Responding to COVID-19

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**Left:** A citizen from Theni District, Tamil Nadu, receives an emergency basic food package. Credit: Vasandham Society  
**Centre:** St Jude collaborated with farmer Eva to make hand sanitiser. Credit: QSA  
**Right:** Image from the handwashing video for children. Credit: KCD

The past six months have changed our lives and our world so profoundly and in ways that most of us have never anticipated. For those of us lucky enough to have safe and comfortable shelter, it has become a time for reflection on the complexities of our societies, economies and technologies; the interconnected yet fragile threads that hold us all together. For so many others, both in Australia and elsewhere, the COVID-19 pandemic remains a trying time and a cruel test of resilience, especially affecting people and populations who are already experiencing vulnerability.

In response, QSA's project partners have had to rapidly adjust their existing work in response to the pandemic.

**India** entered lockdown early. Initially there were many cases of brutal enforcement and few COVID-19 cases, until April when the return of migrant workers from abroad and interstate saw the number of cases rise steadily.

**Vasandham Society** in Tamil Nadu has coordinated with other local NGOs in the Theni District to reinforce

awareness-raising about the seriousness of COVID-19 and health and hygiene practices. Over 2000 women's federation members and farmers' groups, plus their families, have been supplied with government-approved immunity booster and masks.

Vasandham also targeted support to one hundred of the most marginalised families from three villages, providing basic food packages including rice, millets and government-approved immunity booster. Where possible, Vasandham has facilitated access to government welfare and food security schemes for these families, many of whom have historically been excluded because of systemic discrimination, and who are otherwise without basic supplies because of movement restriction orders.

**Pitchandikulam Forest** coordinated with its herbal entrepreneurs, local village nurses and health inspectors to prepare and distribute government-approved immunity booster together with masks, and reinforcing COVID-19 awareness, health and hygiene, to

almost 300 families in the project area of Villupuram via door-to-door visits, educational public posters and content in local language. Counselling was provided to 1700 students and parents over the phone across the lockdown period which has overlapped with school holidays.

**Cambodia** is fortunate with few COVID-19 cases and no official deaths to date. However, with borders closed and major industries halted, economic and social impacts have been severe. Families whose food security was already precarious, were severely impacted by job losses, market and border closures, and returning economic migrants. As with other projects, QSA is working with partners to address on-going social issues, including the increased risk of domestic violence, child abuse and unsafe, undocumented migration.

**Khmer Community Development (KCD)** in Kandal Province trained 80 villagers as facilitators to provide COVID-19 information and proper hand washing within their communities. KCD also produced educational videos



**Above left:** Awareness-raising by loudspeaker in remote villages. Credit: BRHS

**Above right:** Distributing hygiene packs in Samrong commune. Credit: DWA Pursat

covering COVID-19 topics such as hand washing, making them widely available via social media. In line with their usual work in nutrition, agriculture and income generation, KCD also distributed vegetable seeds to 1,335 households and launched a competition among field officers to model and promote home gardens.

Vocational training and handicrafts centre, *Bunrany Hun Sen* and permaculture trainers from the *Department of Women's Affairs, Pursat*, teamed up to work with local authorities to identify isolated villages that received little information about COVID-19 from government. Travel to these communities was difficult, so motorbikes and megaphones were used to broadcast information and deliver information packs of masks,

soap and hand sanitiser. Rice and other food to supplement was also delivered to tide over farmers unable to plant home gardens before the seasonal rains arrived.

*Department of Women's Affairs, Kampong Thom* also worked alongside local authorities to provide farmers (primarily women) with additional gardening equipment, seeds and seedlings to 300 families to create home gardens to supplement family food and incomes. With the arrival of the wet season in June, families were able to plant and harvest fast growing vegetables to supplement their diets.

In *Uganda, St Jude Family Projects* has adapted their trainings into smaller groups alongside individual household visits to farmers, taking precautions for health and hygiene. This has

slowed project work, but enabled more comprehensive agricultural extension support, opportunities to reinforce health and hygiene practices, and provide counselling, moral support and referral for those experiencing acute stress or family violence during the lockdown. Collaborating with a local farmer, St Jude is appropriating alcohol from fermented plantains to produce hand sanitiser – a very practical decision, as the scarcity of water restricts frequent hand washing, let alone savings or ingredients to make or purchase soap.

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QSA is a member of the Australian Council for International Development and is a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct. The purpose of QSA is to express in a practical way the concern of Australian Quakers for the building of a more peaceful, equitable, just and compassionate world. To this end QSA works with communities in need to improve their quality of life with projects which are culturally sensitive, as well as being economically and environmentally appropriate and sustainable.

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