



SUCCESS STORY

Care Crosses the Thai-Burma Border

Health worker treats families on both sides of a heavily patrolled border ensuring that sister villages remain healthy



Burmese children receive oral polio vaccine from Wararat Takuntallanong, a Thai Border Health Worker based in Chiang Rai Province in northern Thailand.

USAID educated an Akha tribeswoman who provides medical care to villagers living nine miles, by rugged mountain trails, from the closest provincial health center.

Each winter, the preschoolers living in the Burmese village of Baan Pa Khao trek four kilometers to the Thai border where they meet a Thai Border Health Worker based in the nearby Thai village of Baan Jalor. With infantrymen watching, she squirts a drop of polio vaccine onto each child's tongue, a health service they are unable to receive inside Burma.

In 2009, Wararat Takuntallanong vaccinated 85 Burmese and 45 Thai children. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) paid for Wararat's training so she could run the Ja Lor Health Post, one of 40 health stations supported by USAID. Thailand's Ministry of Public Health provided the vaccine. Baan Jalor School donated the rooms used as a clinic.

"Disease knows no borders," Wararat said. "There are family members on both sides of the border, so we take the sister-village approach to prevent disease and treat illness."

There are 337 Thais in Baan Jalor and 320 Burmese in Baan Pa Khao. Both villages are Akha, a hill tribe with its own language and customs. Wararat is Akha and speaks her native tongue when providing pre- and postnatal care, dressing wounds, and treating minor illnesses. Diseases preventable by vaccination have been eradicated since the clinic opened at Baan Jalor School for Thai and Burmese youths in 2006.

With the communities so closely linked, it is imperative that health care be provided on both sides of the border, says a Thai provincial health official. Preventable and treatable conditions such as malnutrition and malaria are relatively rare in Thailand, yet commonplace in Burma where malaria is the leading cause of death among children under the age of five.

"I'm very happy to help my family, community, and the community in Burma," said Wararat, 23. She was among the first 27 trainees to complete the USAID-supported Border Health Worker Training program, consisting of classroom instruction, training at a Thai government hospital, residency at a government health center, and work at a community health post. Another 26 Border Health Workers will be accredited in late 2009.