



Impact of Emergency Food Distribution During Covid-19 Pandemic A Survey by M'Lop Tapang (October, 2020)

Brief Background: The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted families and children around the world, including those Cambodian families that M'Lop Tapang works with. Cambodia has been very fortunate health-wise, with only 283 confirmed cases of Covid-19 and 0 deaths. However, the socio-economic impacts have been significant.

We know from a [brief survey conducted by our teams in May, 2020](#), that most already vulnerable families were experiencing even greater financial difficulties. A [recent World Bank report](#) indicates the global epidemiological and economic crisis unleashed by COVID-19 poses the greatest threat to Cambodia's development in its 30 years of modern history.

In response to increased family needs, since the Covid-19 pandemic began the teams at M'Lop Tapang have provided emergency food support to approximately 1,000 families that we work with. The majority of these families have received this support multiple times over the last few months.

We recently conducted a follow up survey with 150 of those families to try and assess the impact of our emergency food distribution activities. These 150 interviewees have a total of 734 family members living in their households. None of the findings in the survey were a great surprise, but do highlight the importance of efforts being made to support the most vulnerable members of the community.



During the period of March - September, 2020, our teams distributed more than 25,000kg of rice (along with other food stuffs and hygiene supplies) to local families in the Sihanoukville area.

*Sreymom**, a mother of 5 young children, is typical of the parents that our teams have been providing support to. Already living in poverty and struggling to get by day-to-day, the impact of Covid-19 has made their situation even more bleak. Her husband is a construction laborer, but like many unskilled workers, is finding less work now and has less of an income to support their family.

“Before, I used to be able to cook about 1kg of rice for each meal to feed my family. After Covid happened we now have less work and less money so we can't do that anymore. With less money we could only buy 1 kg of rice and had to make it last for 2 days. Sometimes it meant that we were still hungry. Now M'Lop Tapang is helping and my children aren't hungry anymore.”

**name changed for confidentiality.*



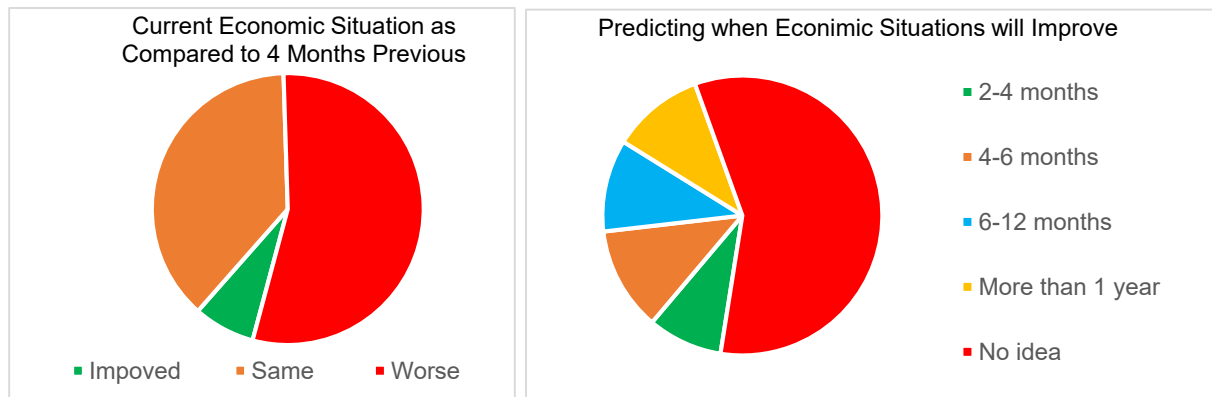
Having less money, many families have had to decrease the amount of food at mealtimes.



Survey Findings:

55% of the families interviewed reported that their economic situation had gotten worse over the last four months.

- 38% reported that their economic situation has stayed the same
- Only 7% reported that their economic situation had improved.



Not only do more than half of the families' report that their economic situations have become worse, the majority of people interviewed stated they have no idea when the situation will improve. This level of uncertainty about what will happen next limits families in their planning for the future and only adds to higher levels of stress.

“Before Covid-19 my parents were busy working outside, but since covid-19 they are free to stay at home and sometimes my father goes fishing. He borrowed money to buy a fishnet so that he can catch fish for our food and if he catches a lot he can sell to other people to make some money.

Before covid-19 we had delicious food to eat but now it is not delicious anymore. When we run out of rice, my mother calls the MT hotline to ask for rice support. My mother feels shame when she has to ask for more rice from the MT social worker, but we don't have money to buy rice.”

- 11-year-old boy with 2 younger siblings.



Social worker meeting with a family in the local community.



*Leakhena** is a mother of two, a 13-year-old boy and a 10-year-old girl. They live a small makeshift house that has no electricity or running water. What little income she earns comes from traveling around her village selling food from the back of her motorcycle.

“It’s hard now because no one wants to buy from me very much anymore. They have no money too and sometimes they want to buy on credit from me.”

Like many mothers we talked to, Leakhena has had to adapt to having less. *“Sometimes now when I cook rice for my family I water it down and make it into ‘bor-bor’ (Cambodian porridge) so it can feed more people.”*

*name changed for confidentiality



Supporting vulnerable families in Sihanoukville.

The results of the survey indicate that food distribution by M'Lop Tapang is having a very positive impact. Nearly two thirds of the families’ report that by receiving the emergency food packages they have enough to feed their children every day. The support has also helped to lessen stress and worry in the household.

Of the 150 families we interviewed, only 40% reported that they held government issued ID Poor Cards. Having these ID Poor Cards is important for accessing government support and services, even more so during the Covid-19 pandemic. 93% of those that did have ID Poor Cards had received monthly Covid-19 relief cash transfers from the government (this is generally \$20-\$30/month plus additional supplements depending on the family composition).

Percentage of families reporting how has food support from M'Lop Tapang has helped their family

Area of impact	%
Have more money to spend on other household expenses	65%
Children have enough to eat every day	64%
Worry less about having money for food	57%
Don't have to borrow money for food	55%
Worry less about the health of children	41%
There is less stress and conflict in the family	25%
It has not helped	0%



Almost two thirds of parents’ report that food support from M'Lop Tapang means having enough to feed their children every day.



When we asked what they thought the impact to their families would be if M'Lop Tapang stopped providing food support, two big things stood out: the likelihood of increased family debt and the increased risk of the health and safety of children.

Two thirds of those interviewed said that without the support from M'Lop Tapang they would have to borrow money just to buy food. Having to do this would only drive many poor families even deeper into poverty, a vicious trap to escape from.

Also very concerning were the very real risks to children's health, education, and safety if emergency food supplies stopped. More than 40% of parents stated that they would have to decrease the amount of food at meals and a third reported that their children would have to miss meals sometimes. One out of five interviewees reported that their children would have to miss school during the daytime in order to help the family earn money, and more than 10% said they would need their children to work at nighttime to make money.

Percentage of families reporting how their family would be impacted if MT stopped providing food support	
Area of impact	%
Need to borrow money to buy food	68%
Need to borrow food from neighbors	57%
Decrease the amount of food at meals	41%
Children would miss meals sometimes	34%
Buy inexpensive, but not healthy, food for children so they don't feel hungry	31%
More conflict and stress in the family	25%
Need children to miss education at school to bring in income during the day	21%
Need to send children out at nighttime to bring in an income	11%

Food insecurity can have a detrimental impact on education and learning. More than one third of the families we interviewed told us that if M'Lop Tapang stopped providing food support their children would sometimes have to miss meals. Missing meals and experiencing hunger impairs a child's concentration and performance and this is something we have already been witnessing.

*Chamroeun**, a little 7-year-old boy, was in one of the classrooms at our Education Center drawing pictures with some other children. The staff in the room noticed that he could barely keep hold of his coloring pencils and couldn't focus on the task very well. The teacher sat down to talk with him and learned that although he did have some 'bor-bor' (porridge) at our center earlier in the morning, Chamroeun was still very hungry. The night before, with almost no food left in their house, he, his six brothers and sisters, and his parents had almost nothing to eat. The entire meal for the nine family members consisted of only three packages of instant noodles shared between all of them.

The teacher has since reported this to our Outreach Team who are now providing increased support to Chamroeun's family.

*name changed for confidentiality



70-year-old *Champa** is the sole caretaker for her 6-year-old grandson and a 4-year-old granddaughter. Both children attend regular daily activities at M'Lop Tapang's Education Center.

"Sometimes people see me and say 'You are too old. Why not give your children to someone else? It will be easier for you'. Many people have asked to take my grandchildren to be their own children and even offer me money to do this. But I love my grandchildren and don't want to give them to someone else."

Having an ID PoorCard, Champa does receive some support from the government that she explains helps to pay her monthly rent of \$50/month. She also does odd jobs around her neighborhood sometime, like laundry or washing dishes, to make a little extra money. *"The support from the government is not enough, but with the food that M'Lop Tapang gives us, I don't need to buy much."*

"I am getting older, but I know that if something happened to me or even if I died that M'Lop Tapang would still help the children."

*name changed for confidentiality



M'Lop Tapang has provided emergency food and hygiene support to approximately 1,000 local families since Covid-19 began.

Conclusion

We are grateful to all of the individuals who participated in this survey. We can conclude from their feedback that the increased efforts of providing emergency food supplies is having a positive impact in the lives of vulnerable families in the local area: families report that they have more funds available to pay for other household expenses, they have enough food to feed their children, and stress and worry is less. Furthermore, understanding the potential risks posed to children if this emergency food support was stopped warrants continuing these efforts.