

Headline **Karaoke spreads message**
Date **04. Feb 2009**
Media Title **The Star**
Section **StarTwo**
Circulation **293375**
Readership **1026812**

Language **ENGLISH**
Page No **10**
Article Size **228** cm2
Frequency **Daily**
Color **One Spot Color**
AdValue **5101.60**



Karaoke spreads message

By **PAT MCGRATH**

IN Cambodia, a country where water-borne diseases cause tens of thousands of deaths every year, one development organisation is using the power of song to spread the word on safe water consumption.

For the past 18 months, the US-based Resource Development International (RDI) group has combined its public health and water safety message with one of this country's most popular pastimes – karaoke.

With its purpose-built karaoke truck, the group has toured many communities in predominantly rural Cambodia and invited residents to sing along with a range of specially composed tunes.

The songs' lyrics address a range of crucial public health issues including HIV-AIDS, bird flu and water sanitation; and according to RDI country director Mickey Sampson, they have struck a chord with people of all ages.

"Workshops and community meetings are great ways to teach people about the importance of

sanitation and healthy habits, but we have been amazed by the effectiveness of this karaoke programme," he said.

"These kinds of methods are very useful in countries like Cambodia where there is a poor level of literacy. I think it has also been particularly effective here because Cambodians seem to have very well developed aural abilities and they learn very well from music."

While generally limited to bars in many Western countries, karaoke is a popular family activity in Cambodia and is most commonly performed in people's homes and at parties, weddings and public festivals.

"Cambodians love karaoke, so they were more than willing to take hold of the microphone when we arrived in the villages," Sampson said. "Often making contact with people and getting them involved in campaigns can be a hurdle to raising awareness, but this is not the case with the karaoke programme."

Sampson said it was difficult to measure how the programme had changed people's behaviour,

but said there were signs the songs' messages were sticking.

"Although measuring the impact of the songs on behaviour is complicated, we have returned to villages weeks or months after our first visit and found that people are still singing the songs," he said. "Combined with our other services, such as providing ceramic water features, we have found this is a very simple and effective way of raising awareness about such important health issues."

Only 16 per cent of rural Cambodians have access to toilets, according to a report released in September by the World Bank-sponsored Water and Sanitation Program.

The report also said the lack of proper water sanitation and toilets in rural areas led to the deaths of more than 12,000 children aged under five through diarrhoea-related illnesses each year.

According to figures published on RDI's website, water-borne diseases contribute to 74% of deaths in Cambodia each year. – dpa