

Proposal

‘Interreligious Community Enterprise Approach for Resilient and Sustainable Life of Yala People in the time Covid-19 pandemic’

Application for Multi-religious Humanitarian Fund in response to Covid-19

Name and Location (Country) of the *RfP* Interreligious Council / Organization:

Religions for Peace-Interreligious Council of Thailand (*RfP*-IRC Thailand)

Name and Title of Responsible Official: Dr. Suphatmet Yunyasit, Secretary General, Religions for Peace-Interreligious Council of Thailand and a lecturer at the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, Thailand.

Background and rationale of the project

Covid-19 pandemic has been going on for more than 8 months, affecting millions of people living in every country around the world. Thailand seems to cope well in terms of curbing the spread of the virus using its strength of various local health-care mechanism and structures. But, similar to many countries around the world, the new challenges brought by the pandemic have taken its toll on the society, economy, and vulnerable groups throughout the country. It is still very much in need of measures and strategies to deal with the socio-economic effects of the pandemic.

In its three southernmost provinces—where violent ethnic conflict between Thai-Buddhist State and Malay-Muslim insurgent groups has since 2004 caused more than 7,000 lives and where the **Interreligious Council of Thailand** has set as its key targeted area in its peacebuilding mission since 2009—the Covid-19 pandemic situation has now reached a stable state after passing through a critical period four months ago. At that time, Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat reported high number of COVID-19 confirmed cases with Yala being ranked as the country’s current hottest spot of the pandemic with 126 confirmed cases.¹ Pattani and Narathiwat are also among top 10 Thai provinces most affected by the pandemic with 91 and 31 confirmed cases respectively.²

The Covid-19 pandemic has greatly affected the likelihood of the people, Buddhist-Muslim alike. Our IRC members consisting of key religious leaders of the south and the center, our Women of Faith for Peace (WFP) and Youth of Faith for Peace (YFP) have, since the starting of the pandemic, exchanged, discussed and tried to identify ways we can help relieving the situation in the south and lessening the strain on the already tensed relationship between Buddhist-Muslim communities. Some of our IRC members have worked in the south for a long time, trying to bridge the gaps and promote better understanding between religious communities while women and youths in IRC Thailand network tend to engage themselves in various types of social works that benefit people beyond their own religious community. Their exchanges via LINE application groups then serve as key source of information on the pandemic situation, its impact on the

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/thai/thailand-52090088> date of access Sept 3, 2020

² Ibid

likelihood of the people and the updates regarding the relationship between religious communities there. More direct communications between *R/P* Thailand's Office of Secretariat based at the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, and IRC members in the south also helps in the mapping of vulnerable groups, their challenges, and needs. Moreover, the secretariat team consisted of the *R/P*-IRC secretary general, deputy secretary general, an advisor to the council, and *R/P* Thailand coordinator traveled to the south in September to listen directly from some Thai-Buddhists and Malay-Muslim community leaders of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat their grievances, needs, concerns as well as the opinion on how best to tackle the situation if the strict lockdown and social distancing measures are imposed again in the near future.

After visiting the field and learn first-hand from the experience and challenges faced by the people of three southernmost provinces, it is clear that the challenges brought by the pandemic in the three southernmost provinces are as follows:

- 1. Economic challenges:** When strict lockdown and social distancing measures imposed nationwide by the government in March, April and May, business sectors have to lay-off their workers, turning hundreds of thousands of Thais into the unemployed. Since April 2020 people of the south welcome the return of their family members who earlier left home to earn a living in big and touristic cities around Thailand such as Bangkok, Chiangmai, and Phuket and in various states of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur and Kedah in particular. Those who worked in Malaysia are mostly of ethnic Malay and are Muslims. They were forced indirectly to leave Malaysia according to the economic situation in Malaysia during the pandemic, Malaysian government Movement Control Order-MCO and oversea travelling bans since April and to return to the south. Since April there are about 4,000 Thai workers returning to Thailand and mostly, they are originated in the three southernmost provinces.³ Once arrived in the south these returnees face difficulties in making a living. Most of them get by daily with support from family members who are not really economically better-off than they are. Apart from these returnees from Thai big cities and Malaysia, there are also those who are living in the area (Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat) and currently become unemployed as the businesses, companies, and shops they worked for are closed down or are reducing number of workers in order to stay afloat. These unemployed people reside in both urban and rural areas of the provinces.
- 2. Social challenges:** The three southernmost provinces are listed as one of Covid-19 hot spots. Interestingly COVID-19 patients of the three provinces are reported to be of Malay-Muslim community alone. Islam is also viewed under this situation as religious institution that fails to curb the spread of the virus among its people. This is due to the high number of Muslims contracting the virus presumably from attending religious rituals both in Thailand and overseas. Stigma on Muslim community as a virus-spreader is also derived from the action of some Muslim religious leaders who ignored social distancing measures implemented by Thai state nationwide as well as by the Shiekhul Islam Office of Thailand. Discrimination against Muslims in the deep south as a result of this stigma has yet to manifest. However, this stigma is likely to deter the Buddhists from having social interaction with them for fear of contracting the disease.

³ <https://prachatai.com/journal/2020/04/87219> date of access 11 Sept 2020

This social separation is likely to affect the relationship between the two communities and intensify the already existing tension in the area.

The identified need and approach for the above challenges (How do we tackle these challenges?)

Under this complex circumstance in which people feel vulnerable socially and economically, it is then crucial for communities of the south to work more closely together and to help each other. The Covid-19 pandemic has yet to cease. After experiencing no new locally-transmitted Covid-19 cases in two months and ten days (from late May until early September), in early September Thailand found 1 new local case and the government is now ready to enforce strict social distancing measure and, probably, nation-wide lockdown once again if more local cases are found. On Sept 13 the governor of Yala province has issued a declaration, asking all Yala public and private sectors to prepare for the second wave of the pandemic.⁴ This new development is now taking into account when IRC Thailand attempts to identify urgent needs for the listed challenges.

When it is clear that social mobility is likely to be controlled soon and the economy will not be recovered anytime soon, meaning that there will not be enough new hiring to match the number of those currently unemployed. The affected people, according to informal interviews, also wish to stay permanently in their communities; *'the grass is not greener on the other side'*, they said. If there are some jobs that provide them with regular income, they will not seek to stay elsewhere. The idea of setting up **community enterprise** for affected communities/groups is likely the sound response to these two challenges and the wish of the people to reside permanently in their communities. Community enterprise emerges from the principle that people have potentials and abilities to make their own community strong, resilient and economically and socially prosperous if they work together. In Thailand the concept of community enterprise has been well-received and supported by the government as well as government agencies of each province.

Using the **community enterprise as guiding approach for this project**, the project will be able to answer to the needs of the affected communities:

1. **Economic needs:** Once the community members come together and work in a form of community enterprise, producing products (agricultural or non-agricultural products) or offering services, income will be generated and shared by the members. Once they register their group as official community enterprise endorsed by the local government agency, they will be able to reach out to wider markets and can double their profit.
2. **Social needs:** Community enterprise approach encourage community member to learn and build relationship. In order to be registered as a formal community enterprise, the members of the enterprise have to exceed the number of 7 and all of these 7 people have to live in the community and they cannot come from the same family. This is to ensure that the set-up enterprise truly belongs to community members, not to the outsiders or to just one family. Although in most communities of the south, the Malay-Muslim outnumber Thai-Buddhists, the Buddhists can participate in this activity. Meaningful social interaction between Buddhists and Muslims is likely to spring from working, learning, overcoming obstacles together. Accordingly, it would lead to the reduce in prejudice and mistrust between groups.

⁴ <https://mgronline.com/uptodate/detail/9630000094013> date of access 14 September 2020 (in Thai)

In addition, in the process of equipping the affected people with the knowledge and skills to operate their own community enterprise, **some other successful community enterprises with Buddhist and Muslim members can act as their mentors.** The project will then connect these targeted communities with a wider network of multi-religious community enterprises in the three southernmost provinces and even beyond. Hence, it can generate wider impact and send the message that interreligious collaboration for resilient community to fight against Covid-19 pandemic is not only possible but also suitable approach to tackle various economic and social issues at one time.

Once the need and approach are identified, it is important to state key actors involved in the project and their roles. In order to achieve the goal and objectives of the project, **multi-partnership approach is adopted.** Actors involved in the project and their roles are as follows:

- 1) **Religions for Peace International** provides fund and overarching guideline for the successful execution of the project
- 2) **R/P-IRC Thailand** acts as focal body of the project, oversees every step of the project, makes sure the fund is spent according to the plan and with transparency and the overarching guideline is observed. It identifies successful community enterprise (s) and/or individuals to be served as mentor (s) for the target groups/communities. It will be the key organizer for each activity of the project, though each activity will be jointly designed between R/P-IRC Thailand, mentor community enterprise (s), and the leader of the targeted community/group. The secretariat team does the bookkeeping, write financial and narrative reports to be submitted within 15 days after the project ends.
- 3) **Mentor community enterprise (s)** provides knowledge and skills needed for targeted community/group to transform itself into community enterprise. It also provides guidance and feedbacks to the targeted community/group on necessary steps to take in order to become strong and resilient community enterprise. The mentor community enterprise will introduce the targeted community/group to the existing network of community enterprise and get them involved in the learning and sharing of the network.
- 4) **Targeted community/group** identifies its members and do the mapping of each members' already acquired skills, ability, preference and limitations. It will inform its goals (short and long term ones), to R/P-IRC Thailand and the mentor community enterprise (s) and participate in the operational and financial planning of its 6-month kick-start project. The group will provide individual and collective feedbacks and assessments on how they benefit from the project as well as rooms for improvements.
- 5) **Other actors and parties** can also be identified by R/P-IRC Thailand and the mentor community enterprise (s) and be invited to help in the knowledge and skills providing steps and/or any other step if needed.

The project's goal is to **build a resilient and sustainable way of life for communities affected socially and economically from the Covid-19 pandemic using the community enterprise and multi-religious/multi-partnership approaches.**

The **objectives** of the project are as follows:

- 1) to lessen the economic hardships caused by Covid-19 pandemic on 3 affected groups/communities;
- 2) to provide the affected groups/communities knowledge and skills necessary for them to set-up their own community enterprises.
- 3) to promote interreligious collaboration among communities and social groups in three southernmost provinces via working together and learning from one another in the issues of economic resilience and sustainable way of life;
- 4) to enhance the sense of trust and friendship among people of different religious affiliations in the target areas
- 5) to make IRC members and its women and youth groups contribute constructively to the Covid-19 pandemic situation in the south of Thailand;

Target groups and area:

There are agencies, organizations and individuals who try to help the people of the south. However, their help and support has yet to reach certain communities and area. The IRC Thailand secretariat team found out that among the three southernmost provinces, **Yala**, ranked no. 3 of all Thai provinces in terms of number of Covid-19 patients,⁵ is under the most worrisome situation. There are many communities in need of supports in Yala and these communities' greatest challenge is the economic one. There are three groups of people living in Yala that are currently hard-hit by the pandemic and need urgent helps and supports. These three groups live in three different districts of Yala namely *Raman*, *Yaha*, and *Mueng Yala* and they are as follows:

- 1) A group of Malay-Muslim youths living in Raman area who has returned from Malaysia for more than 3 months. They possess skills in sewing as they had worked in a garment industry in Malaysia prior to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic (approximately 20 people);
- 2) A group of Buddhist and Muslim women living in Yaha area who are currently unemployed but have basic skills in baking and cooking (approximately 20 people);
- 3) A group of folks of various age living in Mueng Yala area who are unemployed because of the pandemic and wish to engage themselves in agriculture-related occupations (approximately 10-15 people)

Total number of direct beneficiaries (at this stage of proposal drafting): 50 people of Yala of Buddhist and Muslim religious affiliations

Project's feasibility: (Why are you able to undertake the actions proposed below/What is your Interreligious Council prior track record in such an area?)

1) IRC Thailand track record and experience working in the area:

R/P-IRC Thailand has since 2009 established a concrete network of religious leaders in the three southernmost provinces. It also has women and youth network established in 2015 and 2017 respectively. The council members are recognized as influential community leaders, key actors who

⁵ <https://covid19.ddc.moph.go.th/>

can create considerable level of impact in the area. In 2017 IRC Thailand organized a project called **‘Interreligious Dialogue for Empowering Interfaith Women for Their Roles in Peace Building’**.⁶ With this project we successfully enhance our IRC’s Women of Faith for Peace across three southernmost provinces, Yala included. The project also helped IRC Thailand reach out to various groups of women engaging in social works in the area.



IRC Thailand secretariat team and IRC Thailand’s Women of Faith for Peace visiting offices of women groups engaging in various types of social works in September 2017

With this new project, IRC Thailand plans to continue the solid works we have done in the south since 2009.

Mentor’s role for two of our Women of Faith for Peace (WFP): two of our WFP members are proposed to act as mentors and project consultants for this Covid-19 humanitarian project. They are **Mrs. Chitra Kulati**, Sikh member of WFP and **Ms. Lamai Manakan**, Buddhist member of WFP. The two have been engaging with IRC Thailand since 2010 and are the founding members of the group when it was established in December 2015. Mrs. Chitra Kulati has direct experience

⁶ For full narrative report, please visit <http://thairfpirc.com/annual-report-2017-2/>

and expertise in garment industry. She has a successful clothing business called 'Jai Dee Store', selling traditional batik and local fabric clothes for both men and women. We propose her to serve as one of the mentors for the youth group of Raman who wish to set up their clothing community enterprise. Ms. Lamai Manakan has been actively engaged as a member of civil society for environment issues. She also loves agriculture-related activities and has helped various projects on farming and irrigation. With her help as one of the mentors for folks of Mueng Yala group who wish to engage in farming activity, the folks are likely to receive useful guidance and suggestions on their activities.

2) Engaging members of our religious leaders, Women of Faith for Peace (WFP) and Youths of Faith for Peace (YFP) to the project:

Prior to the drafting of this proposal, IRC Thailand's secretariat team gathered information on the pandemic situation in the south from our WFP and YFP. The information from them was used in the process of target area and target group's identification. IRC Thailand secretariat team plan to engage WFP and YFP in the project by allowing them to act observers. Our initial idea is to pair our YFP with the youths of Raman group and WFP with the women of Yaha group. Some Buddhist religious leaders of IRC network have dedicated a piece of land within their temple to farming activities. We do hope that they could join in the activities of Mueng Yala group. However, this matching is not strictly imposed. For example, if some members of YFP are interested in Bakery community enterprise, not the clothing community enterprise, they are welcomed to join the Yaha activities. The same also applies to WFP. They will be informed about the whole project activities and their date and time.

3) Other partners and collaboration that will benefit the project's feasibility:

When embarking on the journey of peacebuilding and conflict transformation, R/P-IRC Thailand has since 2009 emphasized on multi-partnership approach. Having its secretariat office at the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies (IHRP), Mahidol University, R/P-IRC Thailand takes IHRP connection and track records into account too when planning for its IRC activities annually.

Currently IHRP has a strong connection to the Buddhist community of the south. This is a result of its 5-year intra-Buddhist dialogue project called '**Weaving Peace Together**' which aims to amplify voices of the Buddhists in the south and strengthen their roles as conflict transformers and peacebuilders. IHRP supports the group, also known as Weaving Peace Together group or WPT to act a bridge between local communities and the authorities. **Mr. Suchart Sathaboodee**, a key actor of WPT will join this project as a mentor and key consultant. He has the experience in the area of community enterprise and SMEs. When we planned for this project, we also asked some WPT members for information on how their community response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the current state of relationship between the Buddhists and Muslims.

Actions /Activities

The project's goal, objectives and approach are translated into a series of capacity-building/skill-enhancing workshops and/or field visits to learn from the successful community enterprises in

Yala or in provinces of the south. The activities will be **multi-religious and multi-partnership in nature**, using the already established connection between IRC Thailand, including its women and youth groups, and local agencies, organizations and individual key actors in the three southernmost provinces and Songkhla province. Mentor community enterprises will be of multi-religious characteristics and the invited speakers/experts should work with different religious groups and know the nature of multi-religious collaboration.

No.	Proposed action/activity	Participants/venue	Month
Targeted community/group: Youth group of Raman (Clothing Community Enterprise)			
Activity 1.1	1-day Capacity-building workshop on community enterprise, business planning, marketing and etc. + Field-visit to 2 mentor community enterprises	-20 Youths of Raman -2-3 IRC Thailand team -Mrs. Chitra Kulati, a member of Women of Faith for Peace, IRC Thailand and a garment business owner of Pattani and other speakers from Community enterprise agency -2 Leaders of <i>Si Maya</i> Community enterprise, Natham district, Yala Province*	October
Activity 1.2	Team-building and operational planning workshop (the youths plan among themselves and submit the plan to its mentors and IRC Thailand team)	20 Youths of Raman	October
Activity 1.3	First trail production	20 Youth of Raman	Late October or November
Activity 1.4	Reflection and Plan for Next Step workshop	20 Youth of Raman, 2 mentors and 2-3 IRC Thailand team	December
Targeted community/group: Women group of Yaha (Bakery Community Enterprise)			
Activity 2.1	1-day Capacity-building workshop on community enterprise, business planning, marketing and etc. + Field-visit to 2 mentor community enterprises	20 Youths of Raman 2-3 IRC Thailand team 2 leaders of <i>Patan</i> Bakery Community Enterprise of Mueng district, Yala and 2 leaders of <i>Limut</i> Bakery Community Enterprise of Mueng district, Yala*	October

No.	Proposed action/activity	Participants/venue	Month
Activity 2.2	Team-building and operational planning workshop (the women plan among themselves and submit the plan to its mentors and IRC Thailand team)	20 Women of Yaha	October
Activity 2.3	First trail production	20 women of Yaha	Late October or November
Activity 2.4	Reflection and Plan for Next Step workshop	Women of Yaha, 2 mentors and 2-3 IRC Thailand team	December
Targeted community/group: Folks of Mueng Yala (Farming Community Enterprise)			
Activity 3.1	1-day Capacity-building workshop on community enterprise, business planning, marketing and etc. + Field-visit to 2 mentor community enterprises	10-15 folks of Mueng Yala 2-3 IRC Thailand team 2 Leaders of Piya MU Mang farming community or other community enterprise Mr. Suchat Sathabordee, leader of <i>Natham</i> Herbal Community Enterprise, Yala	October
Activity 3.2	Team-building and operational planning workshop (the folks plan among themselves and submit the plan to the mentors and IRC Thailand team)	10-15 folks of Mueng Yala	October
Activity 3.3	First trail production (cultivation)	10-15 folks of Mueng Yala	Late October (start farming) November (crops yield)
Activity 3.4	Reflection and Plan for Next Step workshop	10-15 folks of Mueng Yala, 2 mentors and 2-3 IRC Thailand team	December

Please see the attached budget Excel file for more details and be noted that the total budget will include another amount set as **central budget for project management expenses**. This amount will be used for IRC Thailand team expenses when they visit Yala to oversee the activity

Anticipated result of the project (Outputs, Outcomes, Impact):

Activity	Output	Outcome
Youths of Raman (clothing community enterprise)		
Activity 1.1	Brief report of activity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The youths of Raman gain/enhance their knowledge on business planning and operation. 2. Connection between youths of Raman group and 2 mentor community enterprise is established.
Activity 1.2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Operation plan by the targeted group 2) set of feedbacks on 1) from mentors and IRC Thailand team 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The youths of Raman are able to operate their small business with more confidence 2. Stronger relationship between the youths and their mentors as well as IRC Thailand team is created from the mentoring-feedback giving process.
Activity 1.3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Brief report of activity 2) Clothes (T-shirt, Shirts, etc) 3) Income 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The youths of Raman and their families are slightly relieved from financial problem. 2. Small business circle is created for youths of Raman group.
Activity 1.4	Action plan for the future	The youths of Raman use the action plan to advance for their formal community enterprise registration
Women of Yaha (bakery community enterprise)		
Activity 2.1	Brief report of activity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The women of Yaha gain/enhance their knowledge on business planning and operation. 2. Connection between women of Yaha group and 2 mentor community enterprise is established
Activity 2.2	Operation plan by the targeted group	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The women of Yaha are able to operate their small business with more confidence. 2. Stronger relationship between the women and their mentors as well as IRC Thailand team is created from the mentoring-feedback giving process.
Activity 2.3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Brief report of activity 2) Bakery products (cake, pie, etc) 3) Income 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The women of Yaha gain first-hand experience on how to bake and sell their bakery products. 2. The women of Yaha and their families are slightly relieved from financial problem. 3. Small business circle is created for women of Yaha group

Activity	Output	Outcome
Youths of Raman (clothing community enterprise)		
Activity 2.4.	Action plan for the future	The women of Yaha use the action plan to advance for their formal community enterprise registration.
Folks of Mueng Yala (farming community enterprise)		
Activity 3.1	Brief report of activity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The folks of Mueng Yala gain/enhance their knowledge on business planning and operation. 2. Connection between folks of Mueng Yala group and 2 mentor community enterprise is established.
Activity 3.2	Operation plan by the targeted group	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The folks of Mueng Yala are able to operate their production with more confidence. 2. Stronger relationship between the youths and their mentors as well as IRC Thailand team is created from the mentoring-feedback giving process.
Activity 3.3	1) Brief report of activity Late October	1. The folks of Mueng Yala gain first-hand experience on how to cultivate and take care of crops and vegetable.
	2) Agriculture produce (mainly vegetables) 3) Income Late November	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The folks of Mueng Yala and their families are slightly relieved from financial problem. 2. Small business circle is created for folks of Mueng Yala group
Activity 3.4	Action plan for the future	1. The folks of Mueng Yala use the action plan to advance for their formal community enterprise registration.

Overall impact of the project:

- 1) Communities sustain economically amid Covid-19 pandemic.
- 2) Communities are better prepared to handle pandemic situation if the second-wave of the pandemic emerges
- 3) Network of interreligious business enterprise in Yala is enhanced.
- 4) Interreligious collaboration is accepted as one of the ways bringing people together to overcome real-life challenges and create social cohesion.

Target Areas: 3 districts of Yala province, Thailand namely **Raman, Yaha and Mueng Yala.**

Beneficiaries


Direct Beneficiaries: approximately 50 people

Indirect Beneficiaries: $50 \times 2 = 100$ people (At least 2 family members of the direct beneficiaries will benefit from the project.)

Project Period(s) 3 months (from October 1st to December 31st)

Required Funding: Amount of **5,000 USD (approximately 150,000 Baht)**

Name and Signature of Responsible Official



Dr. Suphatmet Yunyasit

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