

Village-based Development

Ending isolation



CWS-CAMBODIA



Members of the District Council of Chaom Khsant, Preah Vihear reacted with surprise and skepticism when CWS-Cambodia asked for their assistance to work in villages there in July 2007.

“The villages are very remote. No other NGO is working in them,” one said. “Some of them are inaccessible during the rainy season,” another cautioned.

In the year and a half since then, CWS fieldworkers have trained 43 Village Health Volunteers and 22 Traditional Birth Attendants in 12 villages of Choam Khsant Commune and 6 villages in Yeang Commune (which is even more remote); started 8 adult literacy classes in 8 villages; helped residents of 2 villages set up Self Help Groups; and selected and trained 29 Red Cross and 19 Community Peace volunteers.

They have also helped establish 1 demonstration farm in each village; helped 90 vulnerable households implement household planning;

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enhanced the management and leadership capacity of community-based organizations; helped integrate village development plans into annual Commune Council plans; distributed food and nutritional supplements to 608 children under 2 years of age, 134 pregnant women and 147 lactating mothers; installed 9 open wells and 16 hand-pump wells; and distributed 83 bio-sand filters.

They have also provided school supplies to 150 children from the poorest families; provided material for building 3 bridges; and trained members of both Commune Councils on restorative justice, peace building and conflict resolution.

Chaom Khsant Commune Council member Mrs. Pav Vanney is full of praise for the 5-day workshop on peace building and conflict resolution she participated in. “It helps me get to the root causes of conflict,” she explained.

Most disputes in her commune are related to

domestic violence or land. The latter is a major barrier in Cambodia, which is still struggling to create an effective and just land-titling system 3 decades after private ownership was banned by the Khmer Rouge.

“Before residents fought over land, now they talk,” Mrs.

Phav said. Last year she intervened in 3 land disputes in her commune. Her first step, she said, was to visit the conflict area and then open discussions between those involved in the dispute. The disputes were settled peacefully. Before last year, residents involved in such disputes never asked for her help, she said.

Widow's River

The success of CWS-Cambodia's village-based community development model hinges on the ability of fieldworkers to adapt it to the needs defined by the residents of the villages they work in. The residents of each village direct the development process; fieldworkers facilitate and encourage it by explaining what worked in other villages and for other families, and what failed.

Due to its remoteness, the program in Preah Vihear operates differently from the one in Kompong Thom. The office (in Chaom Khsant town) is also the home of the fieldworkers, who work 7 days a week for 3 weeks a month (they are required to work 6 but choose to work 7). They take turns cooking meals and cleaning up. The yard around their house is filled with metal moulds for constructing culverts, concrete rings for open wells, and septic tanks for latrines.

They do not have a fax, landline or Internet connection,

and use a memory stick to transfer information from the Kompong Thom office to their single desk top computer.

In Kompong Thom, CWS has a more developed office, but the yard around it has been turned into a fruit-tree nursery and the seedlings are distributed to the villages where it works. Staff there work 5 days a week every week. The villages are as remote as the ones in Preah Vihear: it can take up to 3 hours to reach 1. But in Yeang Commune, Preah Vihear, there are no roads, just trails. During the rainy season several villages are completely inaccessible.

In particular, 3 villages are cut off for up to 5 months of the year by Widow's River, which rises more than a meter above the narrow wooden bridge that is their only connection to the rest of the commune. This area was also one of the final battlegrounds between the Khmer Rouge and Cambodian government forces



CWS fieldworker Chey Peseth and residents of Yeang Commune on the bridge above Widow's River.

during the 1990s. Residents of the villages were relocated to camps during the battles, then repatriated when the Khmer Rouge were finally defeated. One of the 3, Choam Srae village, is only a few hundred meters from a former military base and the minefield that surrounds it. The field has been marked off but not cleared.

Besides their isolation, residents of these villages are also disconnected from their history. Most had even forgotten the story, passed down orally from one generation to the next, which tells how Widow's River got its name. Even Choam Srae village leader (and village health volunteer) Mr. Sath Khim, 33, could not recall the story. "It's very old," was all he could say.

Village elder Mr. Mou Soi, 74, however, recalled a few details of the story. "They had just married," he said. "And then went to sleep along the side of the river. There was a flash flood and when the wife woke up her husband was gone."

What is happening in many areas of rural Cambodia is a slow and cautious reconnection with an oral history that was almost erased by decades of civil

conflict (much of which was fuelled and prolonged by decisions made in distant capitals). The physical and social infrastructure that CWS-Cambodia is helping to build in these villages is a necessary component of their development, independence and connection with commune councils, district officials, national government agencies and other humanitarian organizations.

For Mr. Sath, Widow's River remains his village's main constraint. His deepest concern is that the maternal and child health program implemented by CWS-Cambodia and the World Food Programme cannot reach his village for 5 months of the year. He, and other residents, have seen the dramatic improvement this has brought in the health of their children, and they are searching and talking amongst themselves (and with CWS) about how they can end their isolation.

During the dry season, his village faces another constraint: no access to safe water. The open wells that had been installed in his village 3 years ago are only useful when they are not needed (during the rainy season), he said. Soon after the rains end, they run dry because they are not deep enough, he explained.

Right: Choam Srae village leader Mr. Sath Khim. During the rainy season his village is inaccessible. During the dry season, residents have no access to safe water. The open wells that had been installed in his village 3 years ago are only useful when they are not needed (during the rainy season). Soon after the rains end, they run dry because they are not deep enough.

Below: The home of a family of 5 in Yeang village, Yeang Commune, Preah Vihear.



Kompong Thom Activities for 2009

13 villages in Tipou and Sraeung communes*

- Organize regular meetings at both communes for 24 councillors, police officers, and project staff
- Conduct a training course on Accountability and Anti-Corruption for 14 councillors and 13 village leaders
- Provide 2 training courses on domestic violence to Village Development Committees (VDCs), village leaders, and Community Peace Volunteers (98 participants)
- 2 training courses on Local Capacity for Peace (LCP) to VDCs, village leaders and peace volunteers
- Quarterly meetings with 26 VDCs and both commune councils
- Conduct 4 Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation training courses for 26 VDCs, 13 village leaders and both commune councils
- Conduct quarterly meetings for 8 literacy teachers and provide refresher training
- Provide training courses on fish raising, fruit tree nurseries, and improving rice yields to 80 residents
- Continue providing monitoring and support to 12 Self Help Groups
- Quarterly meetings with 26 Village Health Volunteers and 26 Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) from 13 villages
- Help health volunteers raise awareness about sanitation, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases to 500 residents of 13 villages
- Support TBAs in providing birth spacing and mother/child health awareness to 500 residents
- Support Health Center staff to conduct sanitation and hygiene awareness campaigns in 7 schools
- Support the construction of 50 household latrines, 25 community open wells, 25 platforms around existing wells, and distribute 100 water filters to vulnerable households
- Help 24 Red Cross Volunteers conduct hazard vulnerability community assessments in and implement disaster mitigation projects
- Support Red Cross Volunteers to provide training on disaster preparation to 180 residents and VDCs
- Continue assessing vulnerable households and assist 60 with planning
- Provide 1 refresher class for 8 literacy teachers from 8 villages and continue to provide material support to their classes
- Continue supporting income generation activities for 40 vulnerable families in 12 villages
- Continue to provide training on conflict resolution and peace building to 14 Commune Council members and 80 members of community-based organizations
- Support commune councils to develop and implement 5 disaster mitigation projects in 12 villages.

* One village was added to the target area last year at the request of its leader.



CWS Fieldworker Ms. Path Chhavivorn (right) on a home visit in Boeng Khvek village, Kompong Thom province. In the CWS-Cambodia development model, field staff live a few days a week in the villages where they work, so they can experience firsthand the unique constraints and opportunities each village faces.