

CASE STUDY

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT IN AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS

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GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE

Agriculture is the foundation of the Cambodian economy, with roughly 75% of the population working in this sector, and 80% of women make up most of the workforce for improving farm management and animal husbandry.

This Case Study will look at the **Cheab Santipheap Satrei Klahan Agricultural Cooperative** in Chiep Commune, Teuk Phos District, Kampong Chhnang Province, Central Cambodia. Of the 251 members, 214 are women working in agriculture, producing palm sugar, selling and purchasing agricultural fertilizers, and caring for livestock.



STAKEHOLDERS

Cheab Santipheap Satrei Klahan Agricultural Cooperative was registered at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in 2012 with Life With Dignity (LWD) assistance, including the preparation of crucial documents and requirements.

The General Assembly of the Agricultural Cooperative (AC) chose **Mrs. Chan Sophal, 43**, as its president. She is one of many women in the neighborhood elected to that position. A community leadership council comprised of eight women and six men were later facilitated by Life With Dignity (LWD) when it first established a women's savings group. LWD is a local NGO serving vulnerable communities in Cambodia through development work prioritizing human dignity.

Since its establishment, the AC has received technical and funding support from stakeholders, including LWD, FNN, CambodHRRRA, Phnom Neang Karey association, the Provincial Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (PD AFF), and so forth. For example, LWD and FNN have trained the agricultural cooperative board of directors and committees on business planning, supply chains, and gender in agriculture. In addition, the Farmer and Nature Net Association (FNN), in collaboration with CambodHRRRA, has facilitated AC to implement organic rice contract farming with Cambodian Agricultural Cooperative Corporation (CACC) to help AC improve its ability to access the market with a premium price.

The AC capacitated the internal control system, organic standards, and organic rice production through contract

farming implementation. Lastly, AC received AGRAI training and packaged and labeled agricultural products for sale in the markets from CambodHRRRA. It is important to note that LWD, FNN, and CACC are members of CambodHRRRA.

Furthermore, the AC also received support from the Provincial Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (PDAFF) of Kampong Chhnang province and Phnom Neang Kangri Association, then strengthened the capacity of local committees by teaching them management, business planning, and financial management skills. They also trained producer group members on planting and animal husbandry techniques.

CONTEXT

Before the founding of the AC, most of the community's women had no other job outside farming. Some of the women would sell agricultural goods, but there seems to be a small demand for them in the neighborhood, and occasionally, the traders will drop the price without purchasing. As a result, the women depended primarily on their husbands' income, who worked as laborers. Due to this, their children's education was neglected and not prioritized.

Recognizing these issues, Mrs. Chan Sophal led the AC in conducting economic activities like credit, the purchase and sale of agricultural inputs, the sale of vegetables, and the purchase and sale of organic rice.

By cultivating vegetables and raising animals, the cooperative aims to raise its members' living standards while promoting agricultural products and providing jobs for community members, particularly women. Women in the AC are ready to shift their thinking and start raising their livestock and growing crops instead of depending on their husbands' income.

TARGET BENEFICIARIES

There are 251 people who make up the AC, with 214 women and 37 men between the ages of 25 and 60.

There are only 10 to 15 people above 60, and some of them work as farmers and animal raisers. Others produce palm sugar, cultivate vegetables, and sell or purchase agricultural fertilizers.



OBJECTIVE

The AC's primary goal is to ensure that farmers have definite employment, a reasonable standard of living, and access to a market. They hope that by joining production groups, learning about farming practices, and having their products sold in supermarkets, all members of the farming community will increase their income.

In addition, farmers also have the right to bargain for a better price regarding supply.

PROCESS / METHODOLOGY

Women in the AC are trained in gender programs, agricultural practices (vegetable growing, animal husbandry, and organic farming), and digital marketing strategies through the PDAFF and the LWD, members of the Peaceful Chiep Agricultural Community of Brave Women (selling agricultural products online).

These methods have assisted the local farmers' cooperative members in transitioning from traditional farming to modern technology, mainly digital marketing, a recent development that enables community farmers to market their agricultural products independently.

While this was happening, the FNN, a CamboDHRRA member, also trained two groups of women farmers in standard production methods, organic vegetables, and how to package vegetables for the supermarket. Of the trained farmers, 10% were young female farmers, and other young women were employed in nearby garment factories.



RESULTS / PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Women's involvement in farming helps fill food shortages by supplying safe food to domestic and international consumers, helping to reduce food insecurity. The community and some brokers gather all agricultural products, including vegetables, palm sugar, eggs, and poultry. The community is divided into regional marketplaces and markets in Phnom Penh, such as the primary handicraft supermarket, Khmer Organic Cooperative (KOC) Shop, and the organic rice supplier CACC/Amru Rice, a global rice exporter.

The community sells twenty (20) tons of organic rice, 2 tons of palm sugar, 1 to 1.5 tons of vegetables, and more than one ton of chicken annually. To balance the demands of traders and the number of community members, the community wishes to export 200 to 300 tons of rice annually and 200 to 300 kg of vegetables daily. However, the supply of these agricultural products still needs to be higher than the community expects. We found that out of 251 community members, 50% now had an average income between 300,000 and 400,000 riels when they previously had no income. The neighborhood anticipates each member making between 1 million and 1.5 million riels.



IMPACT

We can see a long-term positive impact on the AC members through the stakeholders' assistance. By learning agricultural techniques and using materials like greenhouses, fertilizers, and markets through various training and learning exchanges, the AC can produce higher production yields, particularly for organic rice, vegetables, and chicken, and then sell those products to markets at reasonable prices.

Organic farming practices help the community reduce environmental pollution, increase soil fertility and biodiversity, and provide safe food to consumers. At the same time, AC also creates a job for its members by getting them involved in AC's business.



SUCCESS / FACILITATING FACTORS

The AC's achievement demonstrates the capacity of female committee heads and leaders of other community organizations to support and mentor community members in starting a business such as poultry and vegetable farming.

The members of the AC use sustainable agricultural practices and offer funds and tools to help community farmers raise their standard of living. The findings indicate that more cooperative members now work in agriculture and earn a living.



CONSTRAINTS / CHALLENGES

The AC saw both success and setbacks, including a few members who needed help to repay their loans. The community worked with village and commune authorities to find solutions but saw that those who had taken out loans had made wrong decisions and actions that forced them into poverty and led them to migrate. Lessons were learned from this experience, and the cooperative stopped understanding and giving credit to delinquent members.

The cooperative, instead, diverted the remaining funds to establish community businesses like buying and selling rice, chickens, and vegetables. This strategy helped the production team expand agricultural products following market demand and increase income for members.

The organization's lack of funds to purchase rice from cooperative members is another difficulty, making it challenging to compete with brokers. This problem leads AC to be unable to supply organic rice to companies with agreed volume. According to Mrs. Sophal, the payment method used by brokers is direct payment. While the AC pays when paddy rice sells out, AC needs more capital to give farmers who need money immediately.

In addition, according to Mrs. Sophal, AC will no longer offer loans with low interest rates because doing business in the community is difficult due to a lack of cash, and the partner organization has stopped seed grant support. The Credit Committee's capabilities are likewise constrained.



TESTIMONY

Mrs. Long Chhun Leang, 34, is one of many female members who switched from being a stay-at-home mom without a job or money to tending poultry and growing mushrooms. "At first, I lived on a small plot of property that my parents divided into sections that were 15 meters broad and 30 meters long," she recalled.

Then, thanks to community loans, I started raising chickens and was successful at it. Then, by enlarging chicken coops and cultivating mushrooms, I began purchasing more land.

Mrs. Chhun Leang added that she had previously achieved success and had taken several training courses offered by the AC, including those on how to raise chickens, fish, and mushrooms.

The income from selling chickens, broilers, and eggs is approximately \$700 to \$800 per month, she continued. "Today, I grow 500 to 700 hens to incubate for sale and 100 broilers. This money enables me to pay for the college tuition for my kids.

"Thanks to community loans, I started raising chickens and was successful at it. And by enlarging chicken coops and cultivating mushrooms, I began purchasing more land".

“Then I began rearing hens and planting vegetables.” My monthly income is from 400,000 to 500,000 riels (US\$100 to US\$125). I’m glad I have other ways to get money besides farming.”

Mrs. Chan Sophat, 36, a member of the Agricultural cooperative’s vegetable and chicken production group, has a husband and four children and previously had no income and could barely support the family. Now, she farms and grows vegetables and raises chickens, selling 20 to 30 chickens and 50 kilograms of vegetables per month every three days.

She said, “Then I began rearing hens and planting vegetables.” My monthly income is from 400,000 to 500,000 riels (US\$100 to US\$125).

“Before joining the community, growing and raising chickens was not very productive because of the lack of technology, especially since there was no market to sell to”.

Mrs. Soy Saruon, 41, is a farmer who raises poultry, cattle, and vegetables. Her husband is a lumberjack; she has three children and has only been a member of the AC for over a year. She stated, “Before joining the community, growing and raising chickens was not very productive because of the lack of technology, especially since there was no market to sell to.



“My productivity rose after I joined the group since all of my hens and vegetables were purchased in the community, and I had no trouble finding a market.” According to Mrs. Saruon, the monthly revenue from selling vegetables and chicks is from 300,000 (\$75) to 400,000 riels (US 100). Because it is illegal to take down trees, Saruon’s husband came back to assist her after learning that she was producing vegetables and keeping poultry.

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