

A close-up photograph of a man with dark hair and a blue shirt, smiling and holding a green dragon fruit to his nose. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green. The text 'WE EFFECT CAMBODIA' is overlaid in white at the bottom.

WE EFFECT CAMBODIA





Venang Chamreun. Photo: Nick Sells

WE EFFECT CAMBODIA

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We Effect Cambodia

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We Effect is a development organization, with no political or religious affiliation, established in 1958 by Swedish cooperative organizations with the vision of "promoting a just and sustainable world without poverty". Its mission is to strengthen the capacity of democratic and member based organizations to enable low-income women and men to improve their living conditions, defend their rights and contribute to a just society.

We Effect subscribes to the cooperative values of mutual aid, responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity and works with those organizations that practice and promote them. The support is mainly aimed at organizations in the social and solidarity economy sector that associate and represent grassroots groups in different areas of each country and technical organizations specialized in the topics it promotes.

With this publication We Effect wants to share its successful cooperation with organisations in Cambodia and honor the hard work of individuals, families, communities and organizations who have made a difference in fighting poverty and building a better future. It has been as much learning for the Swedish participants as it has for our valued partners. We have made friends and seen business blossom, and we are sure that the future for cooperative organisations is bright.

Thank you.

"Vision: promoting a just and sustainable world without poverty"

TAKING PRIDE IN WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED

We Effect started working in Cambodia in 2010 after coming in to contact with important civil society organisations. One of them is MLup Baitong, that works with democratic development. I had the privilege of visiting in 2016 and remember sitting in their office, drinking tea and eating fruit, listening to the rain hammer on the roof and to the history of the organisation; where it had come from and where it was today. Despite the many challenges along the way, there was no doubt of the pride in what had been achieved over the years.

Our partners in Cambodia, MLup Baitong, Community Transalation Organisation, and Farmer and Nature Net, were also part of a regional South East Asian program and got to exchange experience with other farmers' organisations in Myanmar and Vietnam. We hope that this fruitful collaboration can continue in the future.

In 2019, We Effect decided to close its operations in Cambodia. Although this was a painful decision, we feel great satisfaction when we look upon the important results achieved by our partner organisations. We know that you stand stronger and wish you the best of luck in your future work. We will also carry with us the pride that you shared.

It is also with the greatest pride that we thank our We Effect colleagues for years of hard work and commitment. We will remember you for what you have achieved, but also as our friends.



A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'A. Tibblin'.

Anna Tibblin,
Secretary General of We Effect



Bin Sina. Photo: Marcus Lundstedt

WE EFFECT IN CAMBODIA

After the historical focus on business development with KF Project Center in the Asia region, the development of grassroots organisations, sustainable livelihoods and poverty reduction became more in focus for our partnerships. Today, We Effect supports partner organisations in their work for democratic development, business development and social responsibility.

We Effect started its program in Cambodia in 2010. A country program was set up to support farmers' organisations and cooperative organisations. It then became a part of the South East Asia Programme, including Vietnam, Myanmar and Cambodia.

The strategic working areas, rural development and housing, aim to promote and support a rights-based approach and specifically:

- **Equal rights** for women and men, girls and boys,
- **The right** to land,
- **The right** to financial inclusion and access to financial services, and
- **The right** to a sustainable environment and ecological balance.

We Effect works with a rights-based approach, which means all our programs are developed in dialogue and collaboration with partner organisations. Programs are based on the principles of transparency, meaningful participation, accountability and non-discrimination. This approach focuses on the remedy of structural causes of poverty and injustices, not only their symptoms. Only when people are active participants in the work do they have the opportunity to increase their autonomy and strength and thereby improve their living conditions and their opportunities to influence society. In practice, this means that women and men living in poverty are active subjects who push themselves to improve their own lives. This can be done, for example, by increasing

people's knowledge of their rights and supporting their organization to influence decisions. But it is also about demanding responsibility from those who are obliged to respect, promote, protect and fulfill these rights (duty bearers). Therefore, many of our efforts are about strengthening the rights holders to jointly demand this responsibility, as well as running advocacy campaigns. The agricultural cooperative model is the centre of the community business development, empowers community socio-economic and political aspects as well as the promotion of grass-root democracy included gender promotion.

OUR MAIN STRATEGIES IN THE SOUTH EAST ASIA PROGRAM:

- ▶ **Promote** sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture production
- ▶ **Improve** access to gender-sensitive and inclusive financial services
- ▶ **Promote** women entrepreneurship
- ▶ **Strengthen** farmers' organisations in market linkage and representing member rights
- ▶ **Farmers' rights** protected by an enabling policy environment
- ▶ **Strengthen** local partner organisations to be active human rights based actors and agents of change

STRENGTHENING FAMILY ECONOMY BY VILLAGE SAVINGS AND LOANS ASSOCIATIONS (VSLA)

Creating small savings and loans groups, VSLAs, is a method that has spread throughout WE Effect programs in the world. Introducing this fairly simple way of improving farmer families' economy, including training on economy, has become a success. Almost 97% VSLA members, of which 73% are women, reported having benefit from their membership. This again proves that the programme is on the right track when spreading the

VSLA model to local communities. This model fits well with the farmers.



The VSLA model has proved its outstanding role in the local communities with the fact that 83 new VSLAs were formed during 2018 to facilitate the needs of saving and getting loans of the target farmers, especially female farmers. The spread of VSLA model has contributed to the impressive results obtained in the South East Asia programme.

WORKING WITH ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUES AND PROMOTE DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Conducting capacity building activities for farmers has been necessary in the program for rural development; all agricultural technical trainings, which were provided to farmers, included environment improvement (e.g. waste made by human being and production) and good agriculture practice (GAP). The projects also provided training on climate change concepts including causes, impact, and adaptation of climate change to farmers.

We Effect also supported the development of eco-friendly agricultural methods, limiting the use of pesticides and

pesticides; projects introduced botanical pesticide and fertilizers (organic based agriculture practices) or good agriculture practice (GAP) to farmers; to protect forest by applying agro-forestry techniques, which might maintain forest to stock carbon or to minimize greenhouse gases. Besides, projects instructed and facilitated for the farmers to expand organic vegetable models that follow criteria of eco-friendly, non-toxic and good for health. Furthermore, the projects guided farmers classifying organic and non-organic wastes at sources. Organic garbage is used to make organic fertilizer, saving cost on fertilizer and discharging garbage into the environment. On the other hand, the projects instructed farmers, who raise pigs and chickens, to manage livestock waste and follow up them to make sure their businesses did not negatively impact the household and community environment (air and water pollution). The positive results achieved in short time have shown that the climate resilient agriculture has been consolidated for the target farmers. Climate change is a big challenge in our world, especially for farmers in the South-east Asia countries. The programme together with its projects have tried to consolidate the target farmers in facing this big challenge as much as it can.

Training on climate change and disaster risk reduction has been conducted for beneficiaries. When people understand the cause and effect of their daily behaviours and the disasters, it will help to positively improve their awareness and behaviours.

GENDER EQUALITY

In later years, the gender equality component in We Effect partnership has been strongly promoted and supported. There are so many success factors connected to equal rights and women's empowerment – it couldn't be ignored any longer. During the years, we can see very concrete results like increased family income and better economy, lower rates of gender based violence and more sustainable farming, all resulting from the inclusion of women in decision making, business training and capacity building on farming techniques and marketing of agricultural products.

Some of our areas of work with partners:**Support to womens' access to entrepreneurial capacity development programs**

Thousands of women have accessed capacity development programmes during the operational years in Vietnam. They have improved capacity and proactively participated in relevant agricultural value chains, were trained in smart agriculture techniques; trained and/or educated on enterprise development using manual of ILO and Oxfam. Also, training in organizational development and Business Plan Development has been highly appreciated. In Kampong Thom province, Cambodia, 36 women were introduced on enterprise start up, value chain development, entrepreneurship; 25 women received financial literacy training and family cash flow management in 2018.

We Effect supported female members' business development and women empowerment initiatives

During the programme years, hundreds of business initiatives led by women were set up. We Effect also supported initiatives for developing a comprehensive gender/ women empowerment action plan including women access to entrepreneurial capacity development programmes, women empowerment initiatives recognized and implemented by Farmers' Organisations and community.

Our programs have actively sought out local duty bearers (men, community & local authorities) to improve their promoting women leadership and gender equality

This includes promoting gender-responsive policies weighing in benefits for women. We have, together with partners increased awareness and skills to prevent genderbased violence (GBV) at home and in the community. During the year 2018, the partners provided training and meetings for 749 farmers (343 female farmers) to raise their awareness on the gender equality issue and GBV in local communities. This will still be a long journey for the partners and local beneficiaries to achieve the target and make a better place for both genders in their local communities.

Women need stronger voice in decision making and control over economic resources in household and community (Women leadership in Farmers' Organisations promoted)

Hundreds of women participating in the We Effect supported projects reported their active participation in decision making in their farmer organisations, farmers groups, local communities and households.



Venang Chamreun. Photo: Nick Sells

COOPERATION IN CAMBODIA

In Cambodia, where We Effects' involvement was quite short-lived (2010–2020), the state is very dependent on international aid (61% of the government's budget). The largest donors are the UN and the EU, but Sweden, which has long been an important aid actor in Cambodia, is now phasing out its bilateral support.

Marcus Lundstedt, Director of Media and Advocacy at We Effect, hopes that activities in Cambodia can continue somehow. "Civil society really needs support in Cambodia.



Marcus Lundstedt.
Photo: We Effect

For their sake, Swedish development assistance should be able to continue. Many other aid organizations are active in Cambodia, but in the farmers' union area, We Effect was quite alone.

"During our time there, we worked with agricultural development: improved productivity, value chains, marketing and

sales," says Marcus Lundstedt. "The savings and loan groups were a success and one cooperative developed its own brand of high-quality rice. All projects had a strong focus on environmental sustainability and gender equality."

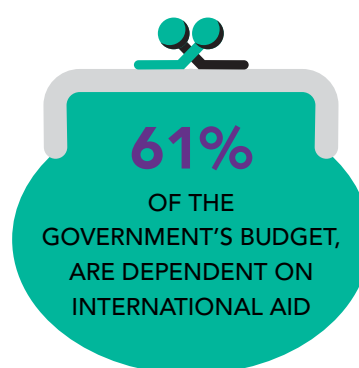
In Cambodia, farmers' organizations are not called "cooperatives" in the local Khmer language. "They are called 'economic associations' in Khmer," explains Marcus Lundstedt. "The word 'cooperative' has a very

negative connotation in Cambodia after the Pol Pot era's of concentration-like 'agricultural cooperatives' where the urban population was forced to work – and starve. In those days, everyone was supposed to become a farmer, regardless of background or education. The associations that exist today follow the cooperative principles, albeit on a small scale. People are more sceptical about joining associations at all because of the horrible history."



Magnus Persson.
Photo: We Effect

"Despite all this, we found that small-scale implementation of our model worked really well, promoting higher income, better cohesion and local democracy in the villages," says Magnus Persson, former Regional Director Asia. "It led to more and more members joining our movement."





Hay Maly. Photo: Mlup Baitong

MLUP BAITONG PROJECT IN CAMBODIA:

Grass roots civil society actors drive democratic development in Stung Treng province

A civil war starting in 1970 destroyed Cambodia's human capital, infrastructure and political system. The conflict completely ended only in 1999. Democratic development is promoted through decentralization and de-concentration policy reforms and is strengthened by an emerging civil society and a developing media. Democratic mechanisms are still developing at sub-national level, and human rights are not always upheld.

THE MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNES, ST PROVINCE IN PARTICULAR, POINT OUT THE FOLLOWING ISSUES:

- the need for effective implementation of the rule of law,
- lack of enforcement of forestry law and provision of economic concessions,
- lack of appropriate regulations leading to limited market access and expensive credit,
- poor governance with top-heavy decision-making despite a multi-tiered governance system
- a slow and inefficient decision-making process.

While the villages are governed by Community Councils, they did not have any Community based organisations to represent them in negotiations with the Council.

MB and We Effect partnered up in 2011. WE's fund was introduced to poor farmers through MB. The main purpose was to empower civil society organizations to advocate for their rights and to hold duty bearers

accountable to fulfil their roles and responsibilities.

The project established 22 SHGs with 431 members (289 are women), and two AC with 208 members (145 are women). After that, the project built the capacity of these civil society organizations' members on management, communication, leadership, planning, financial management, business development, RBA, and advocacy skills. Local authorities' capacities on RBA were strengthened in parallel. The project also supported network meetings and public forums for raising communities' needs and concerns to local authorities.

The project involved both rights holders and duty bearers' rights from the start during the project planning process: MB organized consultation meetings with community members to identify their needs and with the CC to clarify roles, responsibilities, and support for the project, among other things. During implementation, the project facilitated rights holders to participate in the CIP in order to raise their needs and concerns and get support from local authorities. The project also encouraged rights holders to invite representatives of authorities to community events for providing technical and administrative support. Furthermore, CBOs submitted requests to local authorities and technical departments, e.g. to officially recognize the ACs and a new local slaughterhouse, as well as complaints about illegal logging. The authorities and departments approved all proposals and provided financial support. As a result, the Council provided 3,000 square meters of land (worth US\$ 3,500) to PRK-AC for constructing buildings, and OMH-AC received 8,550 square meters of land, a donation of US\$ 500 from the governor of ST province in order to implement their ideas, and another donation from the Provincial Depart-

ment of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery (PDAFF). Other examples of fruitful communication are a signed CF agreement (316 hectares of forestland) and support with local business development through providing machines and infrastructure.

The positive developments are regarded by both local government and CBOs as their joint results. Both parties now support each other to achieve results that they are proud of. They are happy with their achievements so far and are looking forward to their future cooperation, CBO members said. The director of PDAFF also committed to cooperate with NGOs and support ACs to become strong and successful in ST province.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT RESULTS FROM PARTNER ORGANISATIONS IN CAMBODIA.

In 2018 one cooperative union (CU) was set up in Siem Reap, Cambodia, to support 10 member cooperatives. The CU bought 15 tons of paddy rice from its members

for milling and selling. Two potential output markets were identified.

Besides, about 165 tons of cashew were sold to the middlemen in Stung Treng province, Cambodia. Meanwhile, 4 cooperatives sold 300 tons of paddy to AMRU rice company and 2 rice seed producer groups in Kampong Thom province, Cambodia produced 130 tons of rice and sold out 40 tons. Besides, Chrolong Meanchey Agricultural Cooperative has signed contract with a Duck and Chicken Restaurant for supplying chicken by 50 heads per week and vegetable in Kampong Thom province, Cambodia.

During 2019, Community Translation Organisation (CTO) has participated in 5 multi-stakeholder dialogues at national level. Out of them, one dialogue was related to land rights and rights of ethnic minority, which was organised by NGO and CCC, and another dialogue was related to space of civil society organisations (CSOs) wor-



Photo: Nick Sells

king in Cambodia, which was organised by the Ministry of Interior.

Mlup Baitong participated in the national consultation workshop on Cambodia Agriculture Cooperative Alliance (CACA), NGO forum on natural resources management and livelihood improvement, REDD+ performance review, two workshops on natural resources conservation in Pakistan, one workshop on environment assessment in China, one ASEAN workshop on Public and Private Partnership. MB also facilitated Farmers' Organisation executives to participate in sub-national workshops/ meetings on AC implementation assessment with PDAFF and Commune Councillors.

At national level, Farmer and Nature Net (FNN) is a member of the NGO Forum on Cambodia. At regional level, FNN is a member of Asian Farmer Association for Sustainable Development (AFA) since 2008, member of AsiaDHRRA, member of LVC, and ILC. As members of these networks, FNN has opportunities to engage several stakeholders across the country and region. In addition, FNN is the National Implementing Agency (NIA) for MTCP2 Cambodia which includes 5 national farmer organisations of FNN, FWN, FCFD, FAEC, and CFAP.



With We Effect support, a synergy workshop was held in Udda Meanchey province – Cambodia with the participation of our partners in Cambodia, AC executives, governance agencies and other stakeholders. They shared experiences, discussed and prepared workplan for phase out period, and raised their concerns. The workshop was the bridge for partners and their members to engage and connect with governance agencies, private companies and other stakeholders, especially provincial department of women affair, provincial department of agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and the AMRU rice company.



Hun Nak Hue. Photo: FNN

HUN NAK – BETTER WITH AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE

“Before I joined the cooperative, I failed twice in raising chickens. I had hundreds of chickens, but most of them died. I didn’t know any chicken farming techniques; I just followed other chicken farmers in the village. I didn’t know how to treat sick chickens”

Hun Nak, a 38 years old, married man with 4 children recalled how he struggled with his chickens before joining Chrolorng Punleu Chorkchey Agricultural Cooperative (AC) in early 2017. Chrolorng Punleu Chorkchey Agricultural Cooperative located in Trapaing Chroneang Village, Chrolorng commune Taingkork district, Kampong Thom province. The main business of cooperative covers from agricultural credit, agriculture input supply, collective paddy selling, and agri-food processing (banana chips, sweet potato chips and tamarind jam). The AC also formulates and strengthens farmer groups under its umbrella including rice seed, rice, vegetables, and chicken producer groups.

When Hun Nak joined the AC, his motivation was clear: to improve his family livelihoods. The AC provided Hun Nak with proper agriculture techniques from how to raise chickens, how to grow vegetables, how to hatch chicken eggs to how to process agri-food and how to do book-keeping along with financial literacy. The AC even gave him more than that, Hun Nak was able to borrow money from AC with reasonable interest rate to invest in his chicken and vegetable production.

And he got what he wanted. With better know-how, to Hun Nak chickens are now not difficult to raise anymore. Hun Nak now can sell a volume of 500 chicks per month and another volume of 320 chickens per year. With better techniques, Hun Nak also grows vegetables around homestead and mix with rice bran, broken rice and animal feed for his chicken. This saves the expenditure from using solely animal feed. Thanks to that,

Profits came instead of failure. His income now is at least KH-riel 2,180,000 or UD\$ 545 per month. After paying for the feed and interests, his family still save for their own at least KH-riel 979,000 or UD\$244.75 per month. And he does not want to work anywhere else than his home. His full-time is now for the backyard chicken farm.

The AC also helped him to sell his rice. In 2019, Hun Nak sold in total 1,000 kg of paddy rice to AMRU Rice Cambodia Co Ltd through AC and earned 1,165,000 KH-riel or US\$ 291.25. Through AC, he got 20 KH-riel higher per kilo than through middleman. In a positive mood, Hun Nak hopes to increase his future selling volume up to 10,000 kg.



Trainings, workshops and engagement with new people have turned Hun Nak’s life better. At present, Hun Nak is a secretary of the AC where he works hard to assist the financial and cash flow management as well as book-keeping. From what he learned from the AC, Hun Nak now pays back by spending time training other members within the AC on chicken raising and vaccination. He also actively mobilizes members to participate in any activities of the AC.



Hun Nak Hue. Photo: FNN

LEM SOEUT – THE POWER OF VILLAGE SAVINGS AND LOAN ASSOCIATES (VSLA) GROUP

Mrs. Lem Soeut is living in Kamphem Village, Keo Poar commune, Pouk district. With seasonal fishing is the main livelihood of the family, the main motivation for Lem Soeut to join VSLA group when she attended the training on saving scheme and VSLA in March 2016 was only to save a small amount of money for her 5 children. Named Sahakum 058, her group concludes 25 members, mostly women in the neighborhood.

Since becoming a member, Lem Soeut have been participated in activities with her teammates from trainings on small business, study-circle meetings to HRBA sessions. Regular discussions with other women members in her VSLA group gradually encouraged Lem Soeut to feel that she could do something to improve her family income. She took the KHR 200,000 (about USD 50 loan from her

VSLA group and started her rice cake business to sell at local tourism boat piers and vegetable garden to supply to local restaurants, while using a portion from that for pig rising at home. Hard work paid off, Lem Soeut now can make about KHR 800,000 (about USD 200) a month. Her children now can keep going to high school and possibly to university. She also recently renovates her house thanks to the income she made.

“There is not one single training or learning that can improve our income, women have to keep learning, learning as much as they can.

Meanwhile, she was also elected to become the leader of VSLA group in her village. With an open and outgoing characteristic, she has been actively supporting other

members as well as women in her village. Now, it is told that Lem Soeut is widely recognized in her community as an outstanding woman for her hard work to improve her family income and for her helping hand to other women. Before, Lem Soeut always thought of where and how to get the capital to do business, but after joining VSLA, she learned that capital is available if women work together

and help each other.

“There is not one single training or learning that can improve our income, women have to keep learning, learning as much as they can. From that women start to empower to act and try, keep trying and keep moving, then women can see how far they have changed”, she concluded.



Photo: CTO



Photo: Nick Sells

MEAS VAI – THE CAPACITY TO EXPAND

Mr. Meas Vai, aged 40 and lives in Tbaeng Lech Village, Tbaeng Commune, Banteay Srei District, Siem Reap Province. In 2019, Maes Vai was among the first members of the local chicken producer group with other 18 farmers, of which 14 were women, initiated by CTO. This was a part of CTO's work to support Tbaeng Lech Agricultural Cooperative in business plan development and capacity building of leaders since 2016.

Since being granted the membership, Meas Vai has received numerous trainings in local chicken farming such as techniques to build chicken cages, vaccination, food mixing and disease control, etc. These trainings made Meas Vai confident to scale up his flock. Starting with a pilot test with 75 chickens, every month he added another 100 chicks and expanded his farm using the KHR 8 million (around USD 1,972) loan. Another KHR 640,000 was spent on the feedings for the chicks while Meas Vai himself produced feedings for the grown chickens. With this model, he can sell regularly 150-200 kgs every 2 or 3 months at KHR 17,000 per kilo. Up to now, from a small flock of around 20 chickens, Meas Vai raises around 300 chickens and has his stocks increased with 100 chicks every month.

In addition to the chicken farming techniques, Meas Vai was involved in the development of his producer group, from developing the group strategic plan to setting regulations to build the group's capacity. His group set a monthly meeting to discuss and exchange knowledge, experience as well as joint actions to deal with key

challenges within the group. Besides, the group also established the core fund collected from the membership fee and other external donation to help member access small loans with low interest rates. This enabled them to solve their financial shortage on chicken farming. Personally, Meas Vai received KHR 400,000 from the group to buy chicks for his model farm. Being a member also benefited Meas Vai in gaining access to appropriate existing market and access to chicken breed stock with a collective incubator. Recently, the group has successfully contracted with buyers in Siem Reap which are resorts and restaurant to provide them 50 kilograms of chicken daily.

“Meas Vai has become a farmer with strong knowledge and experience on chicken farming.

“I really happy that CTO introduced this group formulation and all kind of support to keep the group active and fulfilled the capacity to increase significantly the number of farmers raising chicken in this commune”, Meas Vai expressed.

For him, the benefits from CTO helped him earn more income from to support his family. He has become a farmer with strong knowledge and experience on chicken farming. Along with other members, the entire group now has strong motivation to expand the model size and inspires other people in the neighbourhood who also want to start this model.



NIN PHAN – A BENEFITED WIDOWED GRANDMOTHER

Ms. Nin Phan is 66 years old. She is widowed and living with two parentless grandsons in Kandal village, Preah Rukel Commune, Borey Ou Svay district, Stung Treng province. In late 2010, Mlup Baitong came to her village and established the Self-Help Group (SHG) and Agricultural Cooperatives (AC). She decided to join the SHG as a member with other 25 members. The SHG has become an AC after its members agreed to form AC. At the moment, Nin Phan is sharing her membership with another 112 people in Preah Rumkel AC (PRK-AC).

Her incentive to join SHG and then AC is simple, her family was poor and she had to feed two parentless grandsons. Her livelihoods depended on a small farm and mono-cropping. She thought what Mlup Baitong introduced her about the benefits are reasonable enough to give it a try to change her situation.

After the SHG/AC was founded, Mlup Baitong encouraged Nin Phan to participate in trainings and study cycle on

vegetable and chicken raising while giving her a loan to buy equipment and material for her farm, which valued US\$400. She also borrowed US\$1,000 from AC with low interest to invest in new chicken flocks and new vegetable seeds.

Those starting loans, along with techniques on poultry raising and veggies planting made her decision in 2010 worthy. Nin Phan is now farming about 300 chicken per year to sell to local markets, in addition to a variety of vegetables (e.g. long bean, okra, water convolvulus, ridge gourd and dragon fruits), which brings to the woman who used to be listed in the list of poor family around USD 1,500 per year in average. The loan was already paid and the grandmother is able to support her grandsons to access high school education.

Last but not least, her farm became the role model for PRK-AC to introduce to visitors of We Effect partners and local students to learn.



Nin Phan. Photo: Mlup Baitong



Yen Socheat and Serm Sokphalla. Photo: Mlup Baitong

YEN SOCHEAT – CONFIDENCE THANKS TO THE AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE

“I thought that my family was poor. I had no chance to improve my living condition.” These were what in the mind of Yen Socheat before she encountered Mlup Baitong. Socheat is 30 years old. She has family with 4 children. They are living in Ou Rusey Kandal village, Orusey Kandal Commune, Siembok district, Stung Treng province, northeast of Cambodia.

“One day, I attended the meeting organized by Mlup Baitong. They introduced the project objectives and in-

terventions such as the establishment of Self-Help Group (SHG) and Agricultural Cooperatives (AC). This made me interested. After that I discussed the membership of SHG/AC with my family, especially with my husband. Finally, we made up our mind and I became the member. I thought if I was a member, I would get some knowledge and skills about agriculture, livestock raising and business development. On the other hand, I hoped SHG/AC would provide money saving, credit scheme and market opportunities for me.”

So Socheat joined the SHG as a member with other 16 people. She hoped the SHG and the future AC could help her solve the challenges she was having: low quality of chicken eggs with 40% did not hatch, limited skills on chick farming, and limited capital to expand her business. And the SHG did not disappoint her. Socheat was supported with both knowledge and capital. With the help of Mlup Baitong, she received some loans from the Agriculture and Rural Development Bank (ARDB) to invest, an egg incubator and materials to build chicken cages while regularly attended trainings on agricultural techniques when she learned proper methods to raise chickens and grow veggies. Trainings were the technical support from Provincial Department of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery (PD AFF) of Stung Treng as requested from her SHG with the help from Mlup Baitong.



Proper techniques gradually solved the challenges. Socheat at present produces about 100 chicks per week as well as other vegetables such as eggplant, chili, tomato, cow pea, cucumber, spinach, etc. To ensure egg quality, she made contract farming with chicken egg producer as suggested by experts after she learnt about market linking, especially contract farming with other producer groups to supply her production. The chicks are plenty enough for her to sell to other SHG members and non-members. Socheat perhaps does not think she is poor now when she made about USD 250 (one mil-

lion riel) per month in average from the business. Now she is able to support her four children's education to access high schools. She does not feel bad about herself anymore.

"Before, my life relied on my husband's income, now I have good business and make profit of about USD 250 per month for family. On the other hand, the family is happier than before, because family income increase, work and make decision together. "

“Before, my life relied on my husband's income

But a happy family is not the only achievement that Socheat got. More than that, she also went to trainings on business development planning, value chain analysis, women rights and so on. As elected by her SHG members to hold the bookkeeper vacancy, Socheat learned financial management from invited experts to conduct value chain analysis for developing market-oriented business and manage the financial issues in her group. She also had chances to learn how to work together among community members as well as government officers and local authorities when participated in SHG monthly meetings plus provincial and national network meetings. What Socheat learnt was actively shared back to her companies during study circles at her SHG. The confident Socheat, moreover, also participated in commune and PD AFF meetings for fundraising, technical and administrative support, especially when SHG members agreed to form the agricultural cooperative with 43 members up to October 2020. They have just recently obtained the land to build the AC headquarter.

Seeing Socheat became more confident, the feedback from her family and community was encouraging:

"All family members are satisfied and supported my business. They always encouraged me to continue business as well as the accountant job at the AC. I am also proud that community and authorities recognized my efforts."



Pan Sopheap. Photo: Private

FNN – A DIFFERENT APPROACH WITH WE EFFECT

Farmer and Nature Net (FNN) is a local, non-profit and non-political organization in Cambodia. FNN was established in 2003 and officially registered with the Ministry of Interior in March 10, 2006. It represents a network of village-based farmer associations. FNN acts as an umbrella for the farmers' associations, providing representation, technical training and capacity building. Members of FNN are farmers and other rural people. To date, FNN has 38,720 rural Cambodians as members, out of which 25,487 are female (66%). Since 2014, We Effect and FNN have been in a close partnership to promote sustainable and climate resilient agriculture production for target beneficiaries, enable women to have better access to gender sensitive financial services and resources as well as more leadership positions and enterprise initiatives in both domestic and public spaces, strengthen member organizations in all types, ranging from farmer groups, cooperatives, association to networks and forums; and enable policy environment for better protection for target beneficiaries.

Looking back to the entire 6 years of partnership, Him Noeun, the Project Manager of FNN, considers the big difference of We Effect from other partners of FNN is the approach of We Effect to their partner. There were a lot of exchanges and learning between the two partners within the framework of project implementation and monitoring. We Effect closely followed and provided numerous advices and technical support which FNN could learn and keep their work on track. Pan Sopheap, FNN's Executive Director, was impressed with how We Effect staff quickly kept in touch with his organization using various communication tools to give timely assistance. Additionally, We Effect also plays an active mediator role to connect FNN with other partners and stakeholders in Cambodia to share challenges and help each other overcome obstacles.

Another difference in the approach of We Effect is the demand for women participation threshold in project implementation. Given the requirements of women in every activity within the project framework, there were more trainings for women on agricultural techniques, business management, food processing and so on. Moreover, women participation was hardly a compulsory requirement in the operation or "really pushed about numbers in the process", as Him Noeun described. Since We Effect came, with the permanent demand on women participation, for the first time FNN seriously pushed women leadership internally and externally, there have been more activities whose beneficiaries are women.

This different approach has brought significant outcomes. For FNN, beside the enhanced competence of farmers in their member cooperatives and more diverse livelihoods, one of the most important changes is the capacity to facilitate contract farming among member cooperatives and companies for their products. FNN now has more cooperatives joining their union and a better relationship with other stakeholders. Especially a national agriculture network has been established by FNN thanks to the mobilization of NGOs, companies and other development partners. Until now, although the project is in its phase-out period, FNN has established a collaboration with Provincial Department of Agriculture and Provincial Department of Women Affairs in Kampong Thom province, the project site. There will be surely a continuous support from local government agencies to local women entrepreneurs thanks to the relationship FNN has established here during the 6-year partnership between FNN and We Effect.

Therefore, FNN is satisfied with this approach although it is different from other partners.



CTO – “WITHOUT WE EFFECT, WE CAN’T BE PROFESSIONAL”

Community Translation Organisation (CTO) was established in 2006 by international (US-based) NGO “Human Translation”. In 2009 CTO became an independent local organization. It is a local organization registered with Ministry of interior of Cambodia. The head office is based in Siem Reap. CTO is working with farming-based communities focusing on agriculture, natural resources and building farmers-based cooperatives and organizations. CTO has been in partnership with We Effect since 2012.

When Vinh Ya was promoted as the Executive Director of Community Translation Organisation (CTO), that was

his first time to be in charge of such a big role with many responsibilities. Vinh Ya was nervous. He was afraid that he could not fulfill the expectations from the Board of Directors (BOD). Vinh Ya knew he needed to learn a lot...

Now, in 2020, after almost 2 terms in this position and 8 years working together with We Effect, Vinh Ya does not self-doubt anymore. He is now able to lead CTO professionally, he knows how to take care of everything within the organization, he sees leadership inside himself. Vinh Ya said he learned a lot from We Effect, so did CTO. To Vinh Ya, there would not be today CTO if there

were not the partnership with We Effect. We Effect did play a vital role during the localization process of CTO from 2012. At that time, after 3 years since becoming an independent local organization, CTO was facing various difficulties as a young local non-government organization: lacking a management structure, in short of internal policy and insufficient administration. The partnership with We Effect came in time and helped CTO exist with the values the BOD wanted to build: advance, transparency and accountability. It is always hard for a young local NGO like CTO to find out exactly what they are lacking. But with the assessments from experts hired by We Effect, CTO was shown which they need and received further assistance from those experts to fix the problems. There was always a close monitoring of We Effect in financial management and project implementation to ensure the compliance with requirements from We Effect Head Office in Sweden. Whenever an issue arose, the two partners always discussed to figure out possible solutions and turned into action afterwards.

For instance, at the beginning, CTO staff was lacked in business knowledge to help their target farmers, experts and We Effect interfered to help them modify the budget to avoid unnecessary expenses as well as gave appropriate trainings to enhance their capacity. Some CTO's challenges such as requirements from donors in financial management or fundraising capacity were also taken into mutual discussion. When main issues were identified, We Effect would allocate budget to hire proper experts to assist and train CTO staff. This constructive support between two partners, to Vinh Ya, helped build CTO into an independent and professional organization, instead of increasing dependence on the donor which is an "abusive" relationship to him.

Moreover, to Vinh Ya and CTO, We Effect offered a good model to work with local communities in Cambodia. This is the greatest impact that made We Effect "one of the great donors in Cambodia". Unlike other NGOs, the cooperative model introduced by We Effect touched the community at the "grassroot level" and showed them the sustainability instead of the self-help and saving group model. The cooperative model with additional capacity building inputs from We Effect has changed the prejudi-

ce of Cambodians for the insufficient historical model, brought them a whole new approach and encouraged farmers to start working together again when they see a model that enable them to do business, a model that is good for women and adaptable to both rural and urban areas.

Furthermore, Vinh Ya believes the cooperative model solved the math for local NGOs in choosing their approach because this is also what the Cambodian government supports. While self-help group and saving group model cannot be a legal entity in the Cambodian law, which prevents them from officially recognized and supported by the state, the cooperative model distinguishes itself with its own particular legal foundation, the Law of Agriculture Cooperatives. How CTO benefited from this model proved this statement: CTO's organizational beneficiaries – agricultural cooperatives, have enjoyed a fivefold rise from 10 to 50 during 8 years of the partnership with We Effect. Similar donors like We Effect from Denmark, Germany, Belgium and other European countries gradually came to Siem Reap and supported cooperatives. And last but not least, from a young local NGO without adequate capacity 11 years ago, CTO now is a NGO with high reputation in supporting agricultural cooperatives in Siem Reap among international donors.

"For us, We Effect is a true partner, not a donor." – Vinh Ya concludes.



Vinh Ya. Photo: Private



Hai Mali. Photo: Mlup Baitong

MLUP BAITONG – GOOD PRACTICES STAY ALIVE

Mlup Baitong (MB) is an Environmental NGO in Cambodia. Its mission is to increase environmental awareness and conservation, seeking solutions for sustainable and equitable use of natural resources through education, training, advocacy, community-based natural resource management, and eco-tourism activities... The organization was established in 1998 as a project of an International NGO and in August 2003, the Ministry of Interior officially recognized Mlup Baitong as a national NGO. Currently, Mlup Baitong is implementing 9 projects in 8 provinces: Kampong Speu, Kampong Thom, Stung Treng, Kampot, Kampong Chhnang, Pursat, Battambang, and Siem Reap. MB has been in the partnership with We Effect since October 2010.

During the 10-year partnership as one of the first two partners of We Effect in Cambodia, the Cambodian organization has benefited from the financial support, capacity building activities as well as exchange opportunities with other partners under the coordination of We Effect, especially the companion of the Swedish side in

the implementation of the project Community Livelihood Enhancement and Women Empowerment (CLEWE), which started in January, 2019.

“The targeted farmers have improved their capacity in terms of improving their livelihood and also the technique. Because at the beginning, when we started implementing the project, the targeted farmers were doing their business in a very small-scale, traditional way. For example, when they raise a pig, they just tie it under a tree. The pig just moved around and did not have any proper food, which is a very traditional way. When the program started, we introduced a new, a little bit updated, modern technique so they can have a healthier pig. And the gardening as well, they can have a better plant and generate better income”

“ The targeted farmers have improved their capacity in terms of improving their livelihood



Training on chicken raising and vaccination at ORK. Photo: Mlup Baitong

This is just an example of a handful of positive impacts from the support of We Effect to Mlup Baitong according to Om Sophana, Executive Director of Mlup Baitong. He also praised how enhanced the capacity of MB staff has been after 10 years receiving trainings from We Effect:

“Related to the program implementation, at the beginning, most of our staff were very new to the project when we recruited them. So, the staff lacked capacity to manage the project. From time to time, when they got more trainings and practical experience, they could improve their capacity step by step. Finally, they can manage the project much better compared to the beginning. In financial management, the system and documentation has been modified and improved from a very complicated process. In internal monitoring, our system has improved regarding reporting and documentation. Our project implementation and relevant trainings have been documented much better than before. Before, we did not care much about this, documents were not properly arranged. When We Effect supported, we started to improve this.”



To Sophana, when being asked about the most important impact from this collaboration, “Good practices” is the key word that mentioned many times. Good practices learnt from We Effect are now used by MB to apply in other projects. Steps in implementation, monitoring, evaluation and module training have been documented properly for staff and other beneficiaries. Besides the practice of documentation, internal policies and guidelines have been reviewed and modified to suit the practical context of Cambodia. On the other hand, MB now recruits more female staff and offers more opportunities to them. More and more female staff are allocated with priorities into financial and administration units along with proper training instead of time- and physical-demanding on-site positions. Female staff are also prioritized in participating in meetings with partners from other countries to exchange their ideas. Good practices were also applied to female beneficiaries, especially in the support mechanism and women empowerment for greater leadership in local communities.

MB staff now work closely with local farmers with a step-by-step coaching method to find out a proper planning for their business while encouraging women to speak their voice in confidence during community gatherings, an initial step to their further involvement in provincial and national meetings where they have their chance to contribute to the policy advocacy stage by raising their concerns. This practice of involving both local and national levels of policy makers such as Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Women’s Affairs and other institutions is a new practice thanks to the mediating role We Effect played at the beginning. Up to now, more than 60 percent of target beneficiaries are women, accounting for nearly 1700 direct and indirect beneficiaries in 3 communes where CLEWE was implemented.

“I think without the support of We Effect, we could not have such kind of achievements.” – Sophana concluded.



Practice chicken food at home at ORK. Photo: Mlup Baitong



THE RESTAURANT THAT SAVES LIVES

Siem Reap, Cambodia – “This is what I lived off every day,” says Chan Sam Oun, holding up a spoonful of rice. The 51-year-old is a living witness to one of humanity’s most horrific periods in time.

She was just a child in 1975 when the Khmer Rouge government took control of Cambodia. Like others living in urban settings back then, she was forced to leave her home and march many miles for a new life in the countryside. In a labour camp far from home, she would help create Pol Pot’s communist ideal state. The only thing she was allowed to bring with her was the clothes she was wearing.

“I was so scared,” she recalls. “The military kept shouting that they would shoot us all if we didn’t hurry up. Those who couldn’t walk were murdered or left on the road to die.”

Chan Sam Oun worked as a slave in the rice fields from early morning to late in the evening. She was not even allowed to see her brother or father.

“I had to dig ditches and collect cow dung. I was not allowed to talk to anyone or have friends,” she says.

Several of Chan Sam Oun’s relatives were killed. One relative who wore glasses was considered to be an intellectual and thus a threat to the regime. Her sister was accused of stealing a potato. The punishment? She was sent on for “re-education”. Everyone knew that that “re-education” meant certain death.

Our thoughts go back to the gas chambers of Nazi Germany. In nondescript, look-alike buildings, in the middle of a field or at the edge of a forest, people were fastened together to be “educated.” Then the soldiers locked the doors and opened a hatch in the floor so that the

“students” fell into an underground chamber where they were burned alive. When Pol Pot’s brutal regime was overthrown after four years, three million people had been murdered or died of starvation and disease – in a country with a population of just eight million.

But Chan Sam Oun and her sister survived. Her sister’s execution was stopped within just hours by Vietnamese troops taking over the country from Pol Pot.

Chan Sam Oun recounts her remarkable life story in her daughter’s small, upstart restaurant in the village of Choam Bork He, 30 km outside the city of Siem Reap.



Chan Sam Oun. Photo: Marcus Lundstedt

Today Cambodia is one of Asia's poorest countries largely due to economic growth and development being severely hampered by its bloody past. The current challenges are especially difficult for women living in rural areas. Many are forced to take care of the home and children alone, are denied an education and rarely have a job that provides income.

“ I had to dig ditches and collect cow dung. I was not allowed to talk to anyone or have friends

Cham Sam Oun's daughter, Bin Sina, decided to change that. Two years ago, through a savings and loan group supported by We Effect, she took out a loan and started her own restaurant. “Before, I was only at home with the

children. But then I got involved in this savings and loan group. After a year, I took about a 500 kronor loan to buy kitchen materials, food and pay the first monthly rent for the restaurant,” says the 25-year-old restaurateur.

The restaurant is simple: a tarp to protect against the sun, some chairs and plastic tables. But it is ideally situated on the road between three villages and near a market where farmer sell their crops. A steady stream of guests arriving on motorcycles order one the three dishes: rice with chicken, fish soup or the signature dish “Banh Chav” – a large thin rice-based crepe with meat and vegetables.

The designation “family restaurant” has never been more appropriate. Bin Sina gets help from her sisters and her mother to look after her three sons, cook, serve, wash dis-



Photo: Marcus Lundstedt

hes and buy ingredients. The income of five to ten dollars a day allows seven people to survive.

“I was often worried that my children wouldn’t be able to eat their full share. But now I feel safer. And I can also help my mother and my sisters,” says Bin Sina.

There’s little doubt about who’s most proud of the restaurant. “I’m so happy for my daughter. Her sons would not have survived if they’d been forced to live like me as a child,” says Chan Sam Oun.

But Bin Sina’s journey has only just begun. Tomorrow she will expand her operations. She’s bought a stock of raw materials and food products that she intends to sell to the guests. It’s a long way to shops here and she thinks that the restaurant can also become a shop.

“The restaurant makes me stronger. I’ve gained self-confidence and can help my children grow up. I also show other women that it is possible to change their lives,” says Bin Sina.

FACT: SAVINGS AND LOAN GROUPS EMPOWER CAMBODIAN WOMEN

- ▶ **We Effect** supports the establishment of savings and loan groups in a number of locations in Cambodia.
- ▶ **The groups** are one of the most effective ways to combat poverty. Thanks to these village banks, people who are otherwise openly ridiculed at the regular banks, can save and borrow money. This way, they can start a business, build a safer house or develop their farms.
- ▶ **The savings** and loan groups also strengthen the position of women in society. A clear majority of the 160 savings and loan groups supported by We Effect are led by women.



Ben Sameth. Photo: Marcus Lundstedt

WITH A STEADY EYE ON THE FUTURE

She occasionally gets laughs or ironic comments from the local villagers: “Look, here comes the boss.” But it’s Be Sameth who gets in the last laugh. After all, she’s the one who makes the decisions.

“Women are often busy with home chores and taking care of the children,” she explains. “Attending training

session or being at the meetings required to be a leader is challenging for them.”

As a woman, it was far from obvious that she would be elected as Chairman of the Rungroeng Meanchey Agricultural Cooperative. Here in Kampong Thom, one of Cambodia’s poorest provinces, it is highly unusual for women to take on leadership roles. Of the 62 agricultural

cooperatives included in FNN, one of We Effect's partner organizations in Cambodia, only seven are led by women. Be Sameth would never have made it to the top alone.

"My husband works as a taxi driver in distant city, so he's not home that often. But my mother and father looked after our daughter when I was away at meetings."



Ben Sameth, Kun Sokuntheary, Kun Chansakada and Krim Sokhei.
Photo: Marcus Lundstedt

The cooperative was formed in 2017 with the support of We Effect and its partner organization FNN. When choosing the management team – usually seven people with different responsibilities – most people wanted Be Sameth to be the Chairman, the most important and challenging position.

"I think they chose me because they could trust me," she says. "I've always been engaged in the local community, active in various women's networks and a champion of children's issues. I've also worked to get more clean water in the village."

Today, she oversees activities for the cooperative's 315 members, who are rice farmers from seven surrounding villages. They save money and sell rice together. This way, they can afford to make investments in their farms and get paid better in the market. But the cooperative

has just started, and the challenges are many.

"Because there are very few jobs here, most women seek employment in the factories. But if the cooperative can create jobs, they will stay."

Although factory jobs are important, they account for a small portion of the country's total economy. As much as 60 percent of all Cambodians make their living from rice cultivation. Be Sameth could also apply for a factory job, but that would mean being away from her son, who suffers from a lung disease.

Instead she invests her time and energy wholeheartedly in the cooperative.

"I would also like us to start growing vegetables, raising chickens and producing our own rice seed together, but right now we buy that."

Do you believe that more women will follow your example and become leaders?

"I don't know. Many women are shy, but I think that if we can create the right conditions for women to be able to participate in education, it will be better. There you learn to speak in front of people and that is important."

This afternoon she is attending a meeting hosted by the local municipality. As usual, her daughter, Kun Sokuntheary will stay at home with her grandfather, who is starting up an old tractor. Driving it is another task only for men.

"I have a female friend who can drive a tractor. Personally, I'm afraid to drive one. But with training, yes maybe. It's all about education," she concludes.



We would like to acknowledge
and respectfully thank
our partners in Cambodia

Mlup Baitong

Community Translation Organisation (CTO)

Farmer and Nature Net (FNN)

