

# MPED SUCCESS STORY — CAMBODIA

## Local Farmers' Libraries Help Cambodian Farmers Develop and Share Knowledge

Lorn Hor is 63 and lives in Lor Kboeung village, which is located in Prek Sdey commune, Cambodia. He has a reputation as an honest, hard-working, helpful farmer, who was selected as a “champion farmer” in December 2012. A champion farmer helps promote new practices and acts as a change leader with other farmers. Today, Lorn Hor is head of the farmers’ self-help group in Kampong Sdey commune in Koh Thom district.

Having received training in new techniques of rice planting from Canadian and local experts working through FCM’s Municipal Partners for Economic Development (MPED) Program, Lorn Hor started a pilot project to implement the new techniques on half a hectare of land in his village.

The new techniques gave him excellent results, and increased his average yield from four tons per hectare to six. And he plants rice twice a year. “I get more yield from the new techniques because I know how to prepare the land, select seeds, and use fertilizers,” says Lorn Hor.

Some neighbouring farmers saw how successful he had been and came to talk to him about the new rice cultivation techniques he had used. In August 2014, this led to a small library being set up in Lorn Hor’s house with support from the MPED project: it was called the “farmer’s library”.

The project provided Lorn Hor with a glass-frame bookshelf, an iron table, and ten plastic chairs. This new farmer’s library is a place where farmers can come to read books and share experience on rice cultivation and vegetable planting.

Unlike similar projects in Saang district, where three libraries were placed at commune offices, the three farmer’s libraries in Koh Thom district were set up in the houses of champion farmers. These small community libraries have collected 244 books and 240 leaflets, on various agricultural techniques relevant to local farmers. Topics include rice cultivation, growing vegetable crops, animal husbandry, the use of fertilizers, and pest management.

Lorn Hor says the library has given him ways of showing and explaining agricultural techniques to his fellow farmers. “Before, I didn’t have any documents to show them, I had no way of proving I knew what I was talking about. But now I have,” he says.

“If people have problems with their rice planting or if there are rice diseases, for example, they come and ask me. Then I take out the relevant document and let them read. If there is a farmer who cannot read, I will read it for him, and tell him what pesticides should be used. And then he’ll go out and buy them,” says Lorn Hor.

So far, Lorn Hor says he has introduced rice planting techniques to more than 50 families in his village. Farmers can visit the library during the day or in the evening, depending on what is most convenient for them. “With the library, four to eight people [local farmers] usually come and have a chat about rice planting between 7 p.m. and 10 p.m.,” he says. “Many people also come to ask me at home, and I just spend a little money on tea.”

Between August 2014 and January 2015, some 120 local farmers visited the library: Lorn Hor logs down the name of those who drop in. Some farmers had come from nearby communes to make copies of some of the books.

More than 90 per cent of the people in Lor Kboeung village are farmers who depend on rice planting as their main source of income. The attitudes of local farmers are changing, and they are now spending less money on rice production.



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“Before, they were planting rice the same way they had always done,” says Lorn Hor. “Now, however, they have started to adopt new techniques; they know how to prepare the land, and so are spending less money on seed and fertilizers.”

“The average quantity of rice seeds used has decreased to between 180-200 kg per hectare. Previously, using the old techniques, farmers would use 300-350 kg of seeds per hectare,” he says. “What’s more, the amount of grass in rice fields is about 20 per cent of what it used to be.”

“I think the library is very useful,” says Meng Sophy, a 39-year-old farmer with four children, who lives in the same village as Lorn Hor.

Meng Sophy has one hectare of land on which he grows rice, and says he frequently goes to the library and chats with fellow farmers about rice and vegetable cultivation. “We share experiences and read books with pictures that show clearly what we should be doing,” he says. “I am getting more knowledge of rice production. Before, I used to spend more money on mixed pesticides. Now I know how to use the right pesticides and am spending less money,” he says.

Lorn Hor, who is also head of Prek Sdey’s water user group, says he and his fellow farmers are currently working on ways to plant rice three times per year.