

# PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN KOHTHOM, KANG MEAS, SA'ANG, THE COUNTY OF NEWELL AND THE TOWN OF BEAUMONT

## SUPPORTING AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

### 1. Overview of the project

#### 1.1. Summary

The Municipal Partners for Economic Development Program (MPED) is working with the National League of Local Councils of the Kingdom of Cambodia (NLC) to promote the role of local governments (LGs) in local economic development (LED) in Cambodia. A key component of MPED is the implementation of demonstration projects through which communes/sangkats and districts/municipalities spearhead new models, new practices and new tools to advance economic development in their communities. In March 2011, two Cambodian LGs were selected through a competitive process between all districts and municipalities within the two provinces of Kampong Cham and Kandal. As a result of the selection process, Kampong Cham's Kang Meas district was paired with the County of Newell in Alberta, while Kandal's Koh Thom district was paired with the Town of Beaumont in Alberta, Canada.

The overall objective of the demonstration project in the two districts was to reduce poverty of local farmers and to increase income of the agricultural producers through increased knowledge and good practices in agriculture production, as well as to access market information. The program is financially supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development of the Government of Canada (DFATD) through MPED. The program is implemented in Cambodia by NLC and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM).

The two target districts in Cambodia are located along the Mekong and Bassac Rivers. They share similar geography and economy, especially their major economic potentials of agriculture. More than 80 percent of the population are farmers who generate their family's income from agriculture production, such as crop cultivation, livestock farming, product processing and agro-business marketing. Rainfall and floods have a major impact on agricultural businesses in the two districts. Though the land is fertile, farmers continue to grow crops and raise livestock in very traditional ways that result in low yield and prevent the advancement of family incomes through the marketing of excess production. Limited human and financial resources hinder the development of any major project possibilities. The councils of the two districts, indirectly elected in 2009, have limited experience and resources in building

up the local economy, although they have a three-year rolling investment plan and a five-year strategic plan.

The initial strategy was to start with a LED strategic planning process in both districts and to pilot some of the priorities identified in the plans with technical support from Beaumont and Newell in Alberta. The LED demonstration projects were designed to strengthen the capacity of district authorities in order to promote agriculture productivity and agriculture-related business opportunities in the two target districts. Building on the success of the initial project, the project was replicated in Kandal's Saang district in 2013 with the technical support of Beaumont and the lessons and experiences of Koh Thom and Kang Meas in promoting LED. Saang, which is located along the Bassac River, also shares a similar geography and economy to Kang Meas and Koh Thom districts.

#### 1.2. Project methodology

##### *LED strategic planning*

The first step in each district was the development of a LED strategic plan. The Canadian partners supported the districts in this process during an initial on-site visit and by providing remote support and guidance. A consultative workshop was organized in each district with participation from relevant stakeholders to identify economic priorities and define the vision, core activities, mechanisms and expected outputs. Each target district established a LED strategic plan, which laid out the main activities and indicators to promote agriculture production.



## **Champion farmers**

Once the plans were finalized and approved, capacity building of local farmers was the starting point of the LED project. The project chose the model of champion farmers. To that end, Koh Thom district identified five target communes of the district's 11 communes. Five champion farmers, each from the target communes, were identified and selected to join the project. Kang Meas district targeted 22 champion farmers from the 11 communes. One among of two farmers from each commune is female. Meanwhile, Saang district selected 12 farmers from six target communes. Saang has a total of 11 communes.

The selected champion farmers were trained in agricultural techniques. Topics included pig and chicken raising, rice planting techniques and safe vegetable growing, fertilizer use and land management, plant diseases and counter-measures, rice intensification systems, post-harvesting preservation, principles of better agriculture for vegetables and fruits, and legal procedures for community organizing. Through the project, farmers also went on study visits in and outside their provinces to learn successful practices in vegetable and rice planting, animal farming and agriculture marketing.

Selected champion farmers were financially supported to pilot new techniques in animal farming, vegetable and rice planting in demonstration projects. In Kang Meas, 16 farmers piloted new techniques in rice intensification (seven), vegetable growing (five) and chicken breeding (four). In Koh Thom, six farmers were supported financially to pilot new techniques in rice growing and two were supported in vegetable planting. In Saang district, two farmers were supported in vegetable growing and one in rice planting, receiving technical support from district agriculture officials and LED project coordinators. Each champion farmer receives around \$150 to spend on chicken raising, rice and vegetable seeds, petrol, field preparation and maintenance.

## **LED working group**

A district-level working group was established to move forward the LED plan. The group plays an important role in formulating quarterly and yearly activity plans and budgets, conducting monitoring and evaluation, and seeking solutions to problems. The group, which meets every three months, includes district councillors, and representatives of the board of governors, commune councils and district line offices.

## **Business information exchange committee**

In parallel to the introduction of new agriculture and farming techniques, a business information exchange committee was formed to discuss challenges and seek solutions regarding agricultural businesses. The committee

is composed of district councillors, representatives from the district board of governors, district administration, agriculture office, target commune councils and business groups. The committee meets regularly to provide updates on their businesses, which promote local transactions and expand the market outside their communities.

## **1.3. Partners and stakeholders**

The leadership of this project lies within the **LED working group**, headed by the district governor. Members of the group include district councillors, and representatives of the board of governors, commune councils and district line offices. The group plays an important role in formulating quarterly and yearly activity plans and budgets, conducting monitoring and evaluation, and seeking solutions to problems. The group meets on a quarterly basis.

The **champion famers** were the centre of this intervention, both as beneficiaries and capacity building agents for farmers in the communities. They actively participated in training and piloted new agricultural techniques through demonstration projects of growing rice and vegetables and raising livestock. The champion farmers shared their knowledge and know-how with fellow farmers in their community during formal sessions, but also by informally responding to farmers' inquiries and showing techniques in the demonstration fields, etc.

The **Commune councils** in the target areas have a crucial role in identifying and selecting champion farmers. The farmers' group comes to the council for help with challenges and concerns. The council can then communicate their needs to provincial and district-level bodies.

The **business information exchange committee** plays an important role in discussing challenges and seeking solutions regarding agricultural businesses. The committee is made up of important and relevant stakeholders in the district.

The **local coordinator** also plays an active role in providing technical supports regarding agricultural production and information sharing. In doing this work, he cooperated with people from the district's office of agriculture. Three local coordinators hired by the project supported implementation in each district, providing agriculture extension services to farmers and coordinating the various activities.

The **Canadian partners, Newell and Beaumont**, played a leadership and coaching role, accompanying district officials in the establishment of strategic objectives and methodology to achieve their goals. They hosted a study tour in Canada that also provided valuable ideas and inspiration for the local partners.

## 2. Project results

### 2.1. Expected versus actual results

#### *The main expected outputs of the LED project:*

1. Capacity and knowledge of the three target districts on the concept of LED are strengthened, leading to development of a LED strategy.
2. Capacity, knowledge, skills and experiences of local leaders and target groups are developed to sustainably promote agriculture productivity, business marketing and financing.
3. Capacity of leaders are developed and women motivated to become leaders and participate with target groups to create innovations and develop the economy of the family, community/village through agriculture, business and financing.

#### *The project has accomplished the following results:*

##### **Adoption of LED strategic plan**

The greatest achievement of the LED project is the development of the capacity, knowledge, skills and experiences of the leaders of three LGs to sustainably promote agriculture productivity and business marketing. To date, Kang Meas, Saang and Koh Thom districts have developed and adopted LED strategic plans and played an important role in making agriculture information more accessible to local farmers through training, exchange visits, extension services and the business information exchange committee. Commune councils have a clear idea on LED strategy and implement it through specific actions.

Many indicators show significant progress in the district LED strategic plans. The plan created models in leadership, in planning, in LED implementation and monitoring and evaluation. The models have been shared with other districts in Cambodia for replication.

LGs and line offices now work as a team and make joint decisions to promote agriculture and support farmers.

##### **Farmers have improved their agriculture techniques**

By participating in the project, farmers abandoned some traditional techniques for improved and more efficient ones. They gained new skills in agriculture such as land preparation, seed selection, use of chemical and natural fertilizers, and harvest techniques. For raising chickens, farmers learned how to feed, vaccinate and prepare chicken houses. With the new techniques, they reduced unnecessary spending on, for example, chemicals and seeds. They used more natural fertilizer and gained more income.

New rice-growing techniques yielded six tons per ha, compared to the old techniques that produced only four tons per ha. Number of rice seeds used also decreased

from 300–350 kg/ha to between 180–200 kg/ha. Moreover, 80 percent of grasses in rice fields have been reduced.

Farmers can plant rice twice per year whereas they were planting only once annually before the project. In fact, ambitious farmers in Koh Thom are working out ways to plant rice three times per year by seeking support from the national government to rehabilitate canals so water can be pumped to irrigate their rice fields.

##### **Self-help farmers' groups established**

Eight farmers' groups were organized to share the piloting of agriculture techniques that had produced such positive results. The farmers' groups aim to promote information-sharing on agricultural techniques and livestock-raising among agrarian producers in each commune.

Each group, which consists of 30–50 members, meets every three months to share their experiences. The farmers' groups also meet with agricultural business-people to scope out market demand. In Kang Meas, two self-help farmers' groups were established with a total membership of 40 farmers. So far, more than 155 farming families have started to implement the successfully piloted agricultural techniques. Among them, 55 families plant rice; 65 grow vegetables and 35 raise chickens.

Three self-help farmers' groups were formed in both Koh Thom and Saang districts to share experiences and information on agricultural techniques. Membership of the groups keeps increasing as local farmers see the benefits. The groups meet on a monthly basis to discuss their experiences, challenges and opportunities. In the long term, they wish to establish a farmers' cooperative for bulk buying of inputs, storage and joint marketing of agriculture products.

##### **Initiative to form a savings group**

In 2013, after successfully piloting agricultural techniques, champion farmer Sriang Meng in Koh Thom's Kampong Kong commune formed a savings group based on his



study visits in Kampot and Takeo provinces. The savings group enables farmers to help each other when they are in need of money, whether to buy seeds or maintain their equipment. Each member contributes 10,000 riel (around \$2.50) per month. The group has 41 members with deposits of more than 12.2 million riel (around \$3,000). Each member can borrow between 100,000 riel (around \$25) to 1 million (\$250), with an interest rate of 2.5 per cent per month.

### **Establishment of farmers' libraries**

District authorities initiated establishment and operation of a farmers' libraries, which store books and documents related to agriculture. Two farmer libraries have been put in place in Kang Meas district with a collection of 135 books. Six libraries have been established in Koh Thom and in Saang districts, each housing 81 books.

The farmers' libraries are set up at a commune office or at a champion farmer's house. As well as providing a place for farmers to meet and read documents related to agriculture, the libraries are also a space for farmers to share information and their experiences in agriculture production. Farmers can also lend and borrow books or documents for others to read at home.

Knowledge and experience of farmers have been enhanced by these libraries. At the same time, champion farmers have also changed their attitude by exchanging some traditional practices for more efficient ones. Previously, for example, farmers were spending more money on seeds, and did not know how to select rice seeds or use chemicals correctly. Thanks to the libraries, they now harvest more yields for greater benefit. They were also indebted to moneylenders.

### ***Business information exchange committee***

Koh Thom district established a committee to facilitate the exchange of business information to discuss challenges and seek solutions regarding businesses active in the area of agriculture (transport, seeds and fertilizer, tools and equipment, packaging, etc). The

committee has helped the district support local businesspeople with business opportunities. Previously, local businesspeople in Koh Thom were not willing to share information, and tended to compete with one another. Through the project intervention, two business groups were established in Koh Thom districts. The main purpose of the groups is to share information and report on agricultural business activities to the committee. To do so, they meet on a monthly basis.

The capacity of the established business groups has been developed through study visits outside the province to learn about the experiences of organizing business groups in Battambang, Takeo and Kampot provinces. The committee of business groups, which has 34 participants (13 female), has also been trained on market management of agricultural products. Members discuss challenges related to quality, quantity and the price of goods in their monthly meetings. The meetings also provide an opportunity to exchange agriculture-related products and businesses between businesspeople and farmers.

### **2.2. Compatibility with program crosscutting goals**

Women's participation is important and has been highly promoted in project implementation. The role and responsibility of women as leaders is considered in the local government structure and local community. Their presence has influenced decision making and service delivery.

Half of the 12 selected champion farmers in Kang Meas district were women. In Koh Thom and Saang districts, female champion farmers have actively participated in piloting new agriculture techniques. In Saang, four of 12 champion farmers are women. Women have been quite active in sharing their knowledge in a number of ways: individually, in group discussions, meetings, workshops and on study visits. In Kang Meas, women have been actively involved in project activities, and three women farmers were supported to pilot techniques of rice planting, chicken raising and vegetable growing.



Through their participation in the project, women have been empowered and gained knowledge, skills and experience in organizing and leading farmers' groups, as well as access to information related to agriculture. As a result, their role and family's economy have been promoted.

Consideration for the environment and environmental sustainability has been taken into account at every stage of the project. Farmers have successfully reduced their environmental impact, while increasing sustainability by minimizing the use of chemicals and switching to natural fertilizers. Animal raising has also been improved in this respect and is now conducted with improved sanitation practices.

In Koh Thom and Saang districts, three training sessions were organized for champion farmers on topics related to the environment. These included land management and land use, plant diseases and counter-measures, and pre- and post-harvest techniques. Of 81 farmers in the training, 19 were female.

### 2.3. Success factors

Many factors contributed to the success of the project in the three districts. First, technical and financial support from Canadian city partners was important because the capacity and resources of the three target administrations are limited. Without support from Canadian partners, the LED strategic plans would not have been developed and priorities and demands to promote the local economy in each district would not have been identified.

Second, the implementing mechanism also played an important role. In this sense, the establishment of the district's LED working group pushed the strategic plan forward; this group actively formulated activities and budgets. It also conducted monitoring and evaluation of LED activities.

Third, broader information dissemination on LED projects is a key to success. Relevant stakeholders are fully aware of, and actively engaged in, the LED project. With full knowledge of the project's importance, the leaders of the districts and commune councils have firmly committed to its implementation. Similarly, selected champion farmers and business groups willingly and actively participated in project activities.

Fourth, the knowledge transfer mechanism used by the project was very efficient. Farmers learn by seeing and doing. The champion farmers, who saw the results of proposed techniques during study tours, were coached by the LED coordinator to apply them. They were thus able to transfer this new knowledge to their peers — farmers from their community — in a relationship based on trust and openness.

Finally, the LED project coordinator also plays a crucial role by bringing success to the project. The selected coordinators in the target districts are capable and have the right knowledge/experience in agriculture extension. They have worked closely with champion farmers and farmers' groups and advise them on agriculture cultivation. Moreover, the coordinators were able to set up appropriate training courses and workshops for the farmers' groups.

### 2.4. Sustainability of results

To sustain the results achieved by the LED project, the three districts have included LED activities in their development plan and are advocating for technical and financial support from relevant departments at provincial levels. The target districts are also lobbying the provincial department of agriculture to provide technical staff to support farmers in agriculture production. In addition, the districts are seeking development partners to provide further assistance and funding.

The districts have set up a clear policy to promote LED by using the district fund (core funding of the district budget). They also believe it is important to strengthen and expand farmers' groups that have piloted demonstration projects. The district will also coordinate meetings of farmers' groups and businesspeople groups so they can share information.

The districts remain committed to providing know-how, knowledge and training to existing farmers' groups. Study visits are also important for farmers to learn new experiences. And the districts intend to find credit partners that can provide loans with low interest rates to poor farmers. Both women and men have actively and equally participated in the LED project.



### **3. Sharing the experience: What did stakeholders learn from the experience that could be adapted by other municipalities?**

#### **3.1. Lessons**

First, LED working groups should be strong, creative and self-motivated.

Second, the champion farmers selected should have resources and motivation to participate in the project. It is important to bring in neighbouring farmers to see and learn from successful piloting techniques.

Third, the LED project coordinator should have strong experiences in promoting agriculture.

Fourth, training topics for farmers should be based on the interests of stakeholders. And also, the districts shall keep strengthening and supporting farmers' groups to pilot new techniques.

Fifth, forming farmers' libraries is important because they are a venue to share information and experiences.

Lastly, it is important to encourage participation of businesspeople in LED projects; cooperation between the public and businesspeople provides a stimulus to promoting economic activities because businesses have money to invest.

#### **3.2. Good Practices**

First: the increase of human capital. Champion farmers have developed continual and mutual learning, sharing and information and experiences in agriculture.

Second: the increase of social capital. Communication has been developed between district authority, commune council, local farmers and businesspeople.

Third: the transfer of knowledge. Champion farmers have shared information and experiences with fellow farmers. The formation of farmers' groups is promoting knowledge and sharing on new agriculture techniques.

Fourth: the district's agriculture office is playing a main role in disseminating information to local farmers.

Last: risk management. Local farmers have new capacity in resource management, specifically food security, in comparing risks versus returns.

#### **3.3. Success stories**

##### ***Farmer's library helps increase know-how of local farmers***

Sixty-three-year-old Lorn Hor lives in Lor Kboeung village in Prek Sdey commune. In December 2012, he was selected as a champion farmer and now is the head of the self-help farmers' group in Koh Thom's Kampong Sdey commune. Lorn Hor is considered to be honest, hard-working and very helpful. After being trained in the new techniques of rice planting, he piloted them on 0.50 ha of land. The average yield produced increased to 6 tons per ha, compared to the old techniques that produced only 4 tons per ha. With this success, he can plant rice twice a year.

"The new techniques produced more yield because I know how to prepare the land, how to select seeds and how to use fertilizers," said Mr. Lorn Hor.

Seeing his success, some neighbouring farmers asked him about the rice-growing techniques.

In August 2014, through the project intervention, a small-scale "farmers' library" was installed at Mr. Lorn Hor's house. The project provided a glass-frame bookshelf with 1.6 m x 1.8 m, an iron table and 10 plastic chairs. The farmers' library is a place where local farmers can come and read books about rice planting and vegetable growing. It's also a venue where local farmers can share experiences related to agricultural techniques.

In Koh Thom district, three farmers' libraries were set up at champion farmers' houses, whereas in Saang district, three libraries were placed at commune offices. Each library has collected 244 books and 240 leaflets, divided into 81 different kinds of books related to agricultural techniques. These include rice planting, vegetable growing, animal raising, fertilizer use and pest management, etc.



With the library, Mr. Lorn Hor says he has evidence to show and explain agricultural techniques to his fellow farmers. "Before I didn't have any documents to show them, but now I have. When people faced problems in rice planting such as rice diseases, they came and asked me. Then I took out the document and let them read. Those who cannot read, I read for them what pesticides should be used. And they go to buy them," he said.

So far, Mr. Lorn Hor confirms that he has introduced rice planting techniques to more than 50 families in his village. Farmers come to the library during the day or evening as they wish. "With the library, four to eight people [local farmers] usually come and have a chat about rice planting from 7 pm till 10 pm," he said. "Now many people come to ask me at home and I just spend some money on tea," Lorn Hor added.

From August 2014 to January 2015, 120 local farmers had come to the library, as Mr. Lorn Hor usually logs down the names of readers. Some farmers from nearby communes have come and made copies of some books.

More than 90 per cent of people in Lor Kboeung village are farmers, who depend on rice planting as their main source of income. Now the attitudes of local farmers have changed, and spending on rice production has been reduced. "Before they planted rice as they are used to. But when they start to follow agriculture techniques, they know how to prepare land, spend less money on seed and fertilizers," Lorn Hor said. Now, the average rice seeds used decreased to between 180–200 kg per ha, compared to the old techniques which used between 300–350 kg per ha, he said. Moreover, grasses in the rice field have been reduced from 100 per cent to 20 per cent, he added.

Meng Sophy, a 39-year-old farmer with four children, lives in the same village. Meng Sophy, who has 1 ha of land for rice growing, said he frequently goes to the library and chats with fellow farmers about rice planting and vegetable planting. "I think the library is very useful. We can share experiences and read books in which we can see pictures. I gained more knowledge on rice production. Before I spent more money on mixed pesticides, but now I know how to use right pesticides and spend less money," said Meng Sophy.

Mr. Lorn Hor, who is also head of Prek Sdey's water user group, said he and his fellow farmers are working out ways to plant rice three times per year.

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