



ADB

Impact Stories from Cambodia

The Heart of Development

Asian Development Bank

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INTRODUCTION

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is the largest multilateral development partner for Cambodia's 14 million people. This collection gives voice to the stories of people whose lives it has helped improve—like Neang Sokha, who said she lives a “civilized life” thanks to reliable, affordable electricity; and taxi driver He Narath, who said he can now follow his dreams after road improvements helped boost his income.

Other stories illustrate that as ADB works to promote more inclusive growth to reduce dependence on farming and fisheries, efforts to raise incomes through alternative livelihood opportunities are as empowering and appreciated for improving lives as better roads and energy supplies.

ADB focuses much of its assistance on the provinces around the Tonle Sap, the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia, where many of the poorest people in Cambodia live. Under the Tonle Sap Initiative, ADB has helped communities better manage natural resources.

Millions of Cambodians depend on the unique ecosystem of the lake and its rivers for food, irrigation, and drinking water, but its rich resources are under threat from population growth, seasonal internal migration, and poor management techniques that have led to overfishing. ADB-funded fish breeding sanctuaries in the Tonle Sap and its tributaries, such as one set up by villagers in Phneat in Banteay Meanchey province, are being established to shore up declining stocks.

Neang Sokha benefited from an ADB investment that helped a private power company partner with state-owned Electricité du Cambodge to bring affordable electricity to rural villages—boosting productivity, incomes, and convenience for

people, and drastically reducing pollution from diesel-powered generators in three provinces.

Improvements to national highways within Cambodia and in neighboring countries through ADB's Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program (GMS Program) have boosted the economy by helping sellers access markets and by giving tourists easier passage to Cambodia's ancient sites, including the Angkor temple complex at Siem Reap. This has raised the incomes of many poor families through tourism and associated services. Between 2004 and 2008, the economy grew at an impressive average rate of 10.2% per year. The incidence of poverty declined from 35% in 2004 to 30% in 2007.

The experience of 6-year-old Chak Srey Keo, a sick child who had to travel by road for medical care, shows that better national highways also improve access to health care. Reduced journey times helped pave taxi driver He Narath's path to prosperity.

Impacts of improved water supply and sanitation are demonstrated in a story about a new community pond in rural Cambodia that has made clean water accessible, reduced illness among children, and lifted the burden of collecting water, especially for women.

The final article shows how women's development centers have enabled rural women, such as widow Thav Heat, to learn new business skills. By helping women generate income to feed their families and put their children through school, the centers provide women with the tools to overcome the daily struggle for income and—as with all ADB-supported initiatives—help Cambodians build a better future.

A photograph of a village on stilts over a body of water, with a large pile of orange fish in the foreground.

Protecting Cambodia's Watery Heart

Efforts to protect fish stocks are preserving a way of life along Cambodia's Tonle Sap lake and river system.

By Guy De Launey


KAMPONG PHLUK, SIEM REAP PROVINCE, CAMBODIA

The Tonle Sap is not only the geographical heart of Cambodia—as any satellite image taken at the height of the rainy season will confirm—but in some ways also its cultural and economic heart.

A combined lake and river system, it covers a vast area in the center of the country, its smaller rivers and tributaries converging on it like a system of veins and arteries. Protecting these waterways—upon which millions of Cambodians depend for food, soil fertility, and drinking water—is vital to the health of the country.

Some Cambodians even make their homes on the lake itself. The village of Kampong Phluk is a good half hour's boat ride from shore when the lake is at its highest. Visiting vessels must first pass through narrow corridors that wind their way through flooded forest, where many tiny fishing boats rock among the twisted roots and branches.

An expanse of open water follows before the village comes into view. Strictly speaking, the village does not float. Most of its buildings rest on stilts. Still, for the first-time visitor, it is an other-worldly sight.

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- Shrimp are a large part of livelihood in Kampong Phluk.

On Water as On Land

Everything that normally takes place on land has a floating equivalent. Goods and produce are bought and sold from boats bobbing between the rows of wooden houses. A group of white-shirted children walk down the steps of their school into a waiting “school boat.” Those too young for class amuse themselves by somersaulting into the water from ever more daring heights.

Muth Seak, a villager, has lived like this all her life. Now in her 30s, and having seen the way the

Tonle Sap has changed over the decades, she is worried that Kampong Phluk’s unique way of life may be at risk.

“There are many communities around the Tonle Sap, and if they build something that affects the environment then the natural resources like the fish or the forest could disappear,” she explains. “We Tonle Sap people are very concerned because in the future there may be fewer and fewer fish. Our living depends on them. With less fish it would be difficult for us to survive.”



“We Tonle Sap people are very concerned because in the future there may be fewer and fewer fish. Our living depends on them. With less fish it would be difficult for us to survive.”

—Muth Seak, resident of Kampong Phluk

They would not be the only ones in trouble; the whole country stands to lose. Fish caught in the Tonle Sap provide four-fifths of the average Cambodian’s protein intake. It is a food source they simply cannot do without.

The Tonle Sap’s unusual ebb and flow is the key to its bounty. Twice a year, it reverses its direction—swelling the portion that forms the lake to the size of an inland sea as the waters from the Mekong flow in during the rainy season, then draining back into the Mekong in the dry months. As the waters recede, they reveal highly fertile farming land. Migratory fish depend on the river’s changing flow so they can reproduce.

Vulnerable on Several Fronts

But the unpalatable truth is that the lake and its tributaries are vulnerable on several fronts.

The rapid increase in Cambodia’s population has put fish stocks under strain—a problem exacerbated by destructive fishing techniques involving electric shock devices and even explosives removed from landmines and other ordnance left over from the country’s long civil war.

Development along the water’s edge has also resulted in greater pollution from both private and commercial sources. And external factors also loom: in particular, climate change and the construction of dams upstream.

There is a growing awareness among the government, its development partners, and Cambodians that conservation is essential. The villagers of Kampong Phluk know they will not be able to mitigate all the threats, but by



- Fishing is a way of life for people who live in villages along the Tonle Sap lake and river system.

starting close to home they may be able to make a difference. In partnership with the Fisheries Administration, and with financial support from ADB, they have established a community fisheries organization (CFO), and taken a significant stake in decisions affecting their environment.

Taking Action

The blue-painted CFO building perches on stilts a short distance from the main part of the village; residents arrive by boat to discuss what they need to do to protect fish stocks and the flooded forest.

They sit around a long table as CFO leaders elected by the community point to a map of their watery neighborhood that illustrates where fishing is allowed or restricted and where villagers can gather wood without damaging the forest. Dissenting voices are conspicuous by their absence; community members know the stakes are high.

Mom Choeun breaks off from the whiteboard to explain his role at the CFO. "I am in charge of telling people not to cut down flooded trees illegally or in the wrong way," he said. "They follow my advice. People are aware of how important this is, and they trust in what we are doing."

The deputy head of the CFO, Ouk Lum, reinforced the point. "People support the CFO when they see the benefit to the community. We are trying to create more fish sanctuaries for fish to breed and live. We have fishing, ecotourism—lots of activities that support people's livelihoods."

Enforcing Environmental Protection

As their meeting ends, most of the villagers return home. But some CFO members jump into a boat to patrol the flooded forest to make sure the community is cooperating in deed as well as in word.

As deputy director of the Fisheries Administration, Eng Cheasan has been watching the proceedings at the CFO with interest. He too believes the Tonle Sap is facing considerable challenges, and that communities must work together to make sure their most important resource has a future.

"Before the CFO was set up, there was a problem with natural resource management. People did not know how to carry out planning and coordination or manage conservation. Creating the CFO makes for equitable, sustainable, and democratic benefits to all the people on the lake, and reduces conflict among the fishing community."

The conservation work has to go beyond the lake itself. As Eng Cheasan guides a small motorboat along the waterways of Battambang Province, he explains that the lake and its fisheries products are under threat, not only from many dams upstream but also from its tributaries, since construction projects are polluting the waters that feed the lake.

The Fisheries Administration and local authorities have employed a "carrot-and-stick" approach. They have clamped down on destructive fishing methods, but they have also been working with development partners to help local people develop alternative livelihoods.

Preserving a Legacy

Eng Cheasan stops the boat at places where people have received training and funding, including an eel farm at the side of the river. Writhing in a squirming, squeaking mass, the creatures repeatedly poke their heads out of the water to grab a bite, as the farm owner lowers a grid piled with small fish into the tank.

"They give me a much better lifestyle," the man said with a smile. "With the extra income, my children can go to school and I do not have to leave home to work."

**“With the extra income,
my children can go to school
and I do not have to leave
home to work.”**

—An eel farmer, on the value
of his ADB-supported eel farm

Other projects include fish farms, home gardens, and a fish-processing factory run by a women's cooperative that gives a portion of its profits to local fishery protection efforts. They all play their part in allowing fish stocks to recover, while providing locals with a better standard of living than they had before.

The message—that Cambodians have to act to preserve the Tonle Sap—appears to be

getting across. Back on the great lake, Muth Seak is cautiously optimistic.

“I was born in this area, and I can see the environment is getting better. People here know the value of the water and the forest so they preserve it; without it we would have no fish.”

Many of the older generation talk about the Tonle Sap forming part of their legacy to their children. It is a heavy responsibility, but at least they seem willing to rise to the challenge. ■

Project Information

Tonle Sap Environmental Management Project
(2006–2009)

Financing: \$10.9 million, Asian Development Fund
(ADB)



- A student waves from a “school boat.”

Nurturing Nature

One midwife shepherds life aquatic.

PHNEAT, BANTEAY MEANCHEY PROVINCE, CAMBODIA

Tan Kim Ouy knows all about bringing new life into the world. As the community midwife in Phneat, she has perhaps one of the most important jobs in this village in the northwestern province of Banteay Meanchey.

But Tan Kim Ouy is not only responsible for the safe delivery of human babies. She is also in charge of making sure that aquatic life thrives without being disturbed by overzealous fishing.

As community members became concerned at the falling fish catch, they agreed to set up a sanctuary—an area of the river where fishing would be banned and breeding could take place in safety. And as a nurturing, widely trusted figure, Tan Kim Ouy was the obvious choice to oversee the project.

Now, as long as there are no calls on her official services, she can be found in a shady concrete pavilion overhanging the river next to the village pagoda. She sits behind a semicircle of baskets of breads and cakes, some to be devoured by hungry visitors, others by the fish in her care.

A group of young women take their children to the edge of the pavilion overlooking the water, tossing in morsels to the dozens of fish whipping up bubbles below as they battle for position.

Renaissance

For Tan Kim Ouy, however, the sanctuary is much more than just extra income, a tourist attraction, or a leisure activity. It has been responsible, she said, for a rebirth of the local fish population.

“People have started to understand the importance of conserving the fish in the river. Now, the numbers have increased and people can catch fish around here; before they had to travel a long way.”

The government’s Fisheries Administration is working with communities and development

partners to establish similar sanctuaries in the Tonle Sap and its tributaries, as part of an effort to shore up fish stocks before the situation becomes critical. There is some disagreement over how much the catch has declined over recent years, but local people have little doubt that fish numbers are falling.

Cambodians of a certain age are fond of fishy tales. In the old days, they said, you could just put your hands in the water and pull out fish after fish. But in recent times, surveys have found fishing communities across the country reporting declining catches.

One theory is that rapid population growth means there are simply fewer fish for each family to catch. In 2007, the World Wildlife Fund linked population growth, seasonal internal migration, and poor management techniques to overfishing and falling fish yields.

Community Partners

Community fishery projects like the one in Phneat are an important part of the response to the problems of the Tonle Sap and its tributaries. And because the villagers understand the importance of fish to their way of life as well as to their diet, they are usually keen to cooperate.

So Tan Kim Ouy finds her friends and neighbors are receptive as she and other members of the community fisheries group explain when and where fishing is allowed, and why it is restricted at other times and in other areas. Tan Kim Ouy believes that taking a long-term view may be the key to the Tonle Sap’s future.

“I would like to preserve the fish so the next generation and my children can see them,” she said. ■

Project Information

Tonle Sap Environmental Management Project
(2006–2009)

Financing: \$10.9 million, Asian Development Fund (ADB)

A Public–Private Partnership Brightens Lives

By Pamposh Dhar

A private power company in Cambodia is bringing cheap, reliable electricity to rural villages—boosting productivity, incomes, and comfort for poor people.

Impact Stories
from Cambodia
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EK PHNOM, BATTAMBANG PROVINCE, CAMBODIA

Neang Sokha said she is able to live a “civilized life” now that the electricity supply has improved so much in the village of EK Phnom, in Battambang Province. Her family of seven sleeps well every night under the breeze of a fan they leave on throughout the night. They can also afford to watch more TV now that it runs on electricity rather than expensive batteries.

“We use about 20 kilo a month now and pay only 20,000 riel (KR) (\$5),” she said, referring to kilowatt-

hours (kWh) of electricity. “Before, we used only 10 kilo because it was so expensive—even then we paid KR 50,000 (\$12.50).” The family slept without a fan even in the hot, dry season because they could not afford to use electricity all night.

Like others in the village, Neang Sokha is remarkably aware of the amount of electricity the family consumes and the money they pay for it. Perhaps this is because a steady supply of electricity is still a new pleasure here and just a few years ago the cost of electricity was prohibitively high.



- The project has drastically reduced pollution from diesel-powered generator sets in the provinces of Siem Reap, Banteay Meanchey, and Battambang.

A steady supply of electricity imported from Thailand, transmitting to urban and rural consumers at affordable rates under a project supported by an \$8 million ADB loan to a private company, is behind the transformation. The project has also drastically reduced pollution from diesel-powered generator sets in the provinces of Siem Reap, Banteay Meanchey, and Battambang.

Plenty of Power at the Right Price

Before the imports, a private electricity supplier was able to provide electricity only 4 hours a day, between 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. If the villagers wanted more, they were forced to buy from private operators who used small generators, or gensets as they are known all over Cambodia.

Now, electricity is available all the time. In 3 months, there have been only two power cuts, Neang Sokha said, and those were only for an hour or so. Earlier, there were cuts even during the 4 hours a day that the electricity board provided power.

The ADB loan to Cambodia Power Transmission Lines (CPTL) covers 25% of the cost of the project that brings power along a 115-kilovolt transmission line from Thailand. It supports a public-private partnership between the state-owned Electricité du Cambodge (EDC) and CPTL, a private company incorporated in Cambodia. ADB's assistance helped catalyze investment from private entities and additional loans from the Export-Import Bank of Thailand and local banks.

The project is supplying electricity to a growing number of customers at ever-decreasing rates, said Lim Bun Than, head of EDC in Battambang. The number of connections rose to 27,000 in February 2010 from 20,000 in 2008. With cheaper electricity available throughout the day, consumption jumped to 38 million kWh from about 28 million kWh in the same period. EDC, which only 10 years ago suffered power losses upward of 35% a year in Battambang, has now managed to cut that to less than 10% and expects to keep bringing that figure down.



- The Naga Guest House in Siem Reap is frequented by international visitors. Just a few years ago, power cuts forced the owner to use expensive, deafening generators that hurt his business. But now, there are no power cuts: electricity is cheaper and always available.



- “Our business depends on electricity,” said Chhy Kimyea, a salon owner who relies on hand-held blow dryers and electric lighting.

With lower costs, Chhy Kimyea now has more money to spend on her two sons, including paying for extra tuition for the older one, who is 15.

Power Cuts

Lim Bun Than notes that the biggest advantage to consumers is that affordable electricity is now available at all times, for both domestic and business uses. It is especially useful to small and medium-sized businesses that until recently depended mainly on expensive generator sets.

Chhy Kimyea and her husband Soeum Chhay have run a hairdressing business in Ek Phnom since 2003. Their customers come from within their village of 3,000 households. Between them, they attend to up to 10 customers a day.

“Our business depends on electricity,” said Chhy Kimyea. She uses hand-held blow dryers and the simple salon needs to be lit during business hours. The decrease in electricity prices has been a boon for the business. Electricity is so much cheaper than the gensets of the past, Soeum Chhay uses

electric cutters rather than scissors for cutting men’s hair. “It is easier and faster,” he said.

The family uses between 20 kWh and 30 kWh of electricity every day, perhaps a bit more in the hot season, said Chhy Kimyea. With lower costs, she now has more money to spend on her two sons, including paying for extra tuition for the older one, who is 15.

Down the road from Chhy Kimyea and Soeum Chhay is a small steel-cutting shop. Sin Bunkhoeun cuts steel rods used in construction. Since his work requires electricity throughout the day, he bought his own genset some years ago. It was expensive.

“I spent anywhere from KR 4,000 to KR 12,000 a day (\$1–\$3) per day on diesel.” Now, he spends KR 50,000 (\$12.50) in a whole month, or an average of \$0.41 a day and does not bother to use his genset.

The steady supply of electricity has also benefited a pharmacy that Sao Yukun owns since he sells medications that need to be refrigerated.

Treating Travelers to Power

Powering businesses is equally important in the neighboring province of Siem Reap, home to the magnificent temples of Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom, and other historical sites that have made this province a tourist hub. Angkor Wat graces the Cambodian flag, a symbol of the country itself. A steady supply of electricity is essential to run hotels, restaurants, and other establishments that cater to tourists.

In the city of Siem Reap, the provincial capital, Sao Yukun runs the budget Naga Guest House, frequented by visitors from France, Germany, Spain, the United States, and other countries. Just a few years ago, frequent power cuts forced him to use expensive and deafening gensets. “The gensets were so deafening that some of my guests would leave—they couldn’t stand the noise,” he said. Sao Yukun also had to rely on the gensets to refrigerate food for

- Sin Bunkhoeun cuts steel rods used in construction. The new supply of electricity is much cheaper than the power he got from the generator he used before.

the guest house restaurant. Even in the hours when EDC supplied electricity, there were frequent power cuts. But now there are no power cuts, no need for expensive, noisy, and polluting gensets. Electricity is much cheaper and always available.

Sao Yukun has also benefited from an ADB-supported roads improvement project. "All roads in the city and into the city are better now, making it easier to get around." He believes this has encouraged more tourists. And he said that business is booming. Even the recent global recession has had no impact on budget accommodation and he is now building an extension to the guest house.

The steady supply of electricity, meanwhile, has benefited a pharmacy that he owns. He sells

vaccinations and some medicines that need to be refrigerated, so steady power is critical.

Electricity for a Brighter Future

The project is powering the transmission grid for northwest Cambodia and is set to become part of the national power grid.

"The towns and cities of northwest Cambodia are brighter because of the CPTL Power Transmission Project," said CPTL Executive Director Wang Yeong Khang. ■

Project Information

(Cambodia) Power Transmission Lines (CPTL) Co., Ltd., Power Transmission Project (2006–2009)

Financing: \$7.0 million, private sector loan (ADB)



Roads to

Hospitals, Markets, Temples

By Pamposh Dhar

Upgrades to Cambodia's national highway have not only made health care more accessible, they have boosted trade and tourism.

SEREI SAOPHOAN, BANTEAY MEANCHEY PROVINCE, CAMBODIA

Six-year-old Chak Srey Keo is ill. The little girl has an intravenous drip attached to her arm—the top of the stand sticks out of one of the windows as her family squeezes into Vann Vuthy's private taxi.

Road to Health Care

With her mother and five other passengers, Chak Srey Keo is on her way to a hospital with good facilities where her illness can be properly diagnosed and treated.

The doctors in her home province, Pailin, have been unable to diagnose the problem. Doctors in Battambang Province are not sure either, so they have referred her to a hospital in Siem Reap, in the next province, on the other side of the Tonle Sap.

The road ahead of them is long. They will traverse almost 170 kilometers (km) to get to the

hospital, which is run by a charitable foundation and offers free treatment to the poor.

Her mother is tense, but thankful that they are able to travel quickly. They can now reach their destination in just 2.5 hours, said Vann Vuthy. Before the national highway was upgraded under the GMS Cambodia Road Improvement Project funded by ADB, it would have taken more than twice as long.

And the girl will not have to suffer through the agonizing bumps of the old road.

Truckloads of Benefits

In nearby Banteay Meanchey Province, in the town of the same name, Yonn Van hires out his mini-truck and his own services to those wishing to transport goods to the district town from surrounding villages. He has been doing this work for 10 years. His job has become much easier since



- To the benefit of vendors, the highway has made the temples of Angkor accessible by road, not only to domestic but also to foreign visitors.

the roads were upgraded. He has just finished a journey of 55 km in an hour and a half. In the past, this would have been a 4-hour, bone-rattling trip.

With travel times down so much, he can do more trips in a day and earn more money. However, he faces more competition than before. “There are more people in the road transport business now that the road is so much better,” he said ruefully.

Temples and Tourism

Phum Salob and Ya Kim Sour both sell statues along the highway that connects the tourist town of Siem Reap to the Thai border on one side and the Cambodian cities of Phnom Penh and Battambang on the other.

Both women have benefited from the road, which is bringing more domestic and foreign tourists since it was completed in mid-2009. The stone is quarried nearby, so the statues are special to this region.

Phum Salob sells small stone Buddhas and other statues. Foreign tourists driving along the national highway often stop to take home mementoes from Cambodia. Many of these are tourists who enter and leave Cambodia from Thailand, driving through the border crossing at Poipet. Ya Kim Sour sells larger-than-life statues, most of them Buddha images, to domestic tourists.

The highway has made the temples of Angkor accessible by road, not only to domestic but also to foreign visitors. Budget guesthouses like the Naga Guest House, less than 1 km from the national highway, have seen a steady stream of tourists who travel from Thailand by road.

Even the recent global recession did not put a dent in the number of visitors to his guesthouse, said owner Sao Yukun. Most of his guests are budget travelers from Europe or North America who come to Cambodia by road after visiting Thailand.



- Yonn Van hires out his mini-truck for deliveries. Better roads have decreased travel time and boosted his income.

The magnificent 12th-century temples of Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom attract tourists from all over the world, but until recently, poor infrastructure deterred many potential visitors. Roads were a particular drawback.

Nida Ouk, ADB’s senior project implementation officer for physical infrastructure, remembered many unexpected delays along the route from the Cambodian–Thai border at Poipet to Siem Reap. “Only a few years ago, we had to wait 3 hours for a bridge to be repaired along the national road,” he recalled. Even without such mishaps, the journey took 4 to 5 hours. “Now, it takes only 1.5 hours,” he said.

The improvements to the national roads leading to Siem Reap, in northwest Cambodia, follow an early

Chak Srey Keo’s mother is thankful that they are able to travel quickly. They can now reach the hospital in just 2.5 hours. It would have taken more than twice as long before the upgrade.



- This woman is taking her sick daughter to a hospital with good facilities, where her child's illness can be properly diagnosed and treated.

project under which ADB supported repairs to roads in the east going to Viet Nam.

National Road 1, completed in 2005, helped increase travel and trade, including bus services between the neighboring countries. Now, with a good network in both parts of the countries, tourists are also visiting Siem Reap from Viet Nam.

Looking ahead, the Government of Japan will support the construction of a bridge over the Mekong River at Neak Loeung to further improve links between Cambodia and Viet Nam. At the moment, the only way across is by ferry or by a road that follows a much longer route. The bridge will shorten the route and ease traffic on the old road.

Connecting Countries in the Region

ADB supports improvement to these national roads under its GMS program that brings together Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam, and Yunnan Province in the People's Republic of China.

The GMS program, which boosts regional cooperation for greater development impact, also supports border agreements that create a one-stop shop for all clearances at border crossings. Together, better roads and easier border crossings help support travel, trade, and tourism.

Aside from the national roads upgraded under the GMS program, ADB has also built or improved 600 km of rural roads in Cambodia, providing farmers with access to markets, and linking villagers to hospitals, schools, and other essential facilities. ■

Project Information

Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS): Cambodia Road Improvement Project (2002–2010)

Financing: \$50.0 million, Asian Development Fund (ADB); \$10.0 million, Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Fund for International Development; \$17.5 million, Government of Cambodia

Hope

Beyond the Road

By Olivia Sylvia Inciong

Road improvements have changed the life of one Cambodian cab driver.

SIEM REAP, CAMBODIA

Years back, the road connecting Cambodia's rapidly developing tourism center of Siem Reap and Angkor Wat with Thailand was impassable, especially during the rainy season. As tour guide, He Narath was always asked why the roads were in such a poor state.

"I had to make up stories to explain the bad road conditions," he laughed as he recalled his experiences traveling along the unpaved road between Siem Reap and Poipet, the Thai border town.

Troublesome Travel

He Narath described how he and two tourists bound for Cambodia's world-famous Angkor Wat had a long wait after a 10-wheel truck ahead of them broke down and became bogged down in





mud. Five other cars behind the lorry had nowhere to go. "I also got stuck!" he remembered. "We had to wait for 5 hours before the truck was removed."

When taking a group of tourists to the Thai border because flights in Siem Reap were cancelled, heavy rains added to the travel time and the tourists ended up missing their scheduled trip. In dry conditions, covering the distance from Siem Reap to Poipet took 4 to 5 hours of bumpy, dusty driving.

"I spent too much on car parts repair or replacement due to the bad roads," He Narath said. "Most of my earnings were spent on petrol due to the long drive."

Family Ties

With the reopening of National Roads 5 and 6, the 25-year-old driver now easily drives the

Poipet–Siem Reap road in 2 hours. The road, inaugurated by Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen in December 2009, was constructed with support from ADB.

"I am very happy with the completion of the new road network because this means reduction in travel time and decreased costs in gasoline," he said. "My life has changed."

Narath started to experience the benefits of good roads in 2009. There are days when he can drop by his home village of Khsach in Kralanh district on his way back to Siem Reap after driving a passenger to Poipet. He visits his younger brother, He Narong, who is in grade 12 and lives by himself. When not working, He Narath drives back to the village to go fishing, visit the rice fields, or just enjoy himself.

The Road to Prosperity

This free time gives He Narath the opportunity to reflect on his own personal journey from working as a bartender in a three-star Siem Reap hotel, struggling to support his family on monthly earnings of \$150 that barely paid for rent, food, and school expenses.

He would often see young Cambodians dining with tourists after visiting Angkor Wat, the city and temple complex of the ancient Khmer civilization.

“While preparing the drinks at the bar, I was hopeful that one day I would be able to sit and eat with the tourists at the same table,” He Narath recalled. These thoughts motivated He Narath to save to take the 3-month course to become a registered tourist guide.

“It was difficult for me to save \$250 to pay for the training fee,” he said. “I had to do it because I couldn’t be a tourist guide if I do not have any license. I gave up watching

a movie, enjoying a Sunday ice cream, and even giving up on a new shirt.”

He now drives his own taxi by day, offering his services as a driver and tourist guide to guests at hotels in the city. On weeknights, He Narath takes classes in finance and banking at a private university. He hopes to become a banker one day. Already, with his income as a tourist guide, he is able to send his brother to a public school near their village.

The young driver, tourist guide, and night student also has dreams of traveling abroad and visiting other landmarks of Asian civilizations, such as the Great Wall in the People’s Republic of China, Sukothai and Ayutthaya in Thailand, and the tourist spots in Viet Nam. However, he takes great pride in having been able to travel all over Cambodia.

By the end of 2009, thanks to better income from his work, He Narath had almost paid off his student bank loan. He hopes to finish his degree



- Many businesses benefit from easy transport, the result of the ADB-supported road upgrade between Siem Reap and the border with Thailand.

and start work in a bank. “I have always wanted to work in a bank and in an air-conditioned office,” he said. He is hopeful that his younger brother He Narong will also be able to earn a university degree.

Success is in Sight

He Narath said his life has changed thanks to the improvement of the roads around Siem Reap. “When I look at the new road, I can see more,” he noted. “When the road was dusty, most of us could not open our eyes. I would close my eyes to avoid the dust and dirt.”

With clear horizons, He Narath sees the new road as an opportunity for a better life. ■

Project Information

Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS): Cambodia Road Improvement Project (2002–2010)

Financing: \$50.0 million, Asian Development Fund (ADB); \$10.0 million, Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Fund for International Development; \$17.5 million, Government of Cambodia

“While preparing the drinks at the bar, I was hopeful that one day I would be able to sit and eat with the tourists at the same table.”

—He Narath, taxi driver who profits from the road upgrade between Siem Reap and Thailand



- Taxi driver He Narath (in stripes) and his younger brother have benefitted from the new ADB-supported road.

Easing the Burden of Water

By Guy De Launey

A community pond in rural Cambodia has made clean water accessible, staved off illness, and allowed women to work and children to attend school.

- For Hong Yoeun, getting clean water is much easier as a result of the new community pond in her village of Tek La-ak.

TEK LA-AK, KAMPONG CHHNANG PROVINCE, CAMBODIA

Hong Yoeun's hands are covered with calluses—the unforgiving plastic handles of the water buckets have seen to that. Until now, she had never in her 35 years lived in a place with running water. Trudging to and from the nearest source has been part of the daily grind for as long as she can remember.

But now—for Hong Yoeun, at least—getting clean water is much easier. A large, rectangular pit that fills with rainwater has appeared in the middle of Tek La-ak, the leafy village in the Kampong Chhnang Province she calls home.

The Burden of Water

Before the community pond, Hong Yoeun, with two of her four children trailing behind her, would hike to the nearest source, then lug the dripping pails back to the house. Along the way, she might cast an envious glance at her neighbor, who used

a rusty bicycle to carry two old paint containers of water and her screaming infant.

Back at home, Hong Yoeun could finally unburden herself. She would pour the contents of her buckets into one of several large, earthenware jars in the grassy area at the front of the house. These hold the water the family uses for cooking, washing, and drinking—and they require regular replenishment. Hong Yoeun often had to repeat her trip three times a day.

There is nothing unusual about her plight. Around half of the people living in rural Cambodia have little access to clean water, let alone at their homes. With more than four-fifths of the population living in the countryside, millions of Cambodians face a daily struggle to get a vital resource that comes as easily as a twist of the tap to people in developed countries.

The impact on family life can be considerable. Just going to get water can take hours out of every day. It may take parents away from their families and children out of school.

A Simple Solution

Tek La-ak's new community pond may seem unprepossessing—and the water it contains may look a dismal, murky yellow-brown—but it has transformed the lives of everyone here.

Above the pond is a concrete platform. Two large, metal wheels with handles attached sit on top of either side of a dividing wall. When turned, they draw water up from the pond and through a sand filter, which does a strikingly effective cleaning job. The water that emerges from the blue plastic pipes is clear, although it will still need to be boiled before it is safe to drink.

Within easy walking distance of everyone in the community, the pond and pump seem to have become the focal point of the village. Young children laugh as they douse themselves and each other. Women scrub clothes in metal bowls full of water and suds. Buckets are lined up next to the pipes, ready to be filled and carried back home.

For Hong Yoeun, it is hard to overstate the benefits the new water supply has brought her family.

"In the past, I had to go a long way to get water three times a day," she explained, as she sat on the edge of the pumping platform. "I would get home and it would already be dark, but I would still have to cook rice for the children. Now, we have the pond nearby, and I can feel more relaxed. I've actually got time to do other things."

Measurable Benefits

Cambodia has developed remarkably quickly since the return of peace just over a decade ago. Economic growth has hit double digits in many years and infrastructure in urban centers has improved markedly. Citizens of Phnom Penh enjoy some of Southeast Asia's cleaner water mains.

But the dearth of accessibly clean water in rural areas has been a major drag on progress. The time spent toting buckets is costly to the economy, as are the illnesses caused by drinking contaminated water. One study suggested that the lack of clean water and sanitation cost Cambodia the equivalent of 7% of its gross domestic product every year.



- With clean water close at hand, women can spend newfound time developing small, home-based businesses.



“It is so different now. Before, it could take as much as 5 hours to get water. Now, the pump is right here, next to the house.”

—Oum Chanthoeun, Khleng Por village resident
and mother of seven

Children pay a particularly heavy price. Around 20 die every day in Cambodia because of diarrhea, a condition directly related to dirty water and poor sanitation.

Improving rural water supplies is one of the government’s steps to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and part of its “rectangular strategy” for development. Partners, including ADB, are helping to turn the words into reality.

Behind grand project names, the benefits of spending a little money on practical solutions—like the Tek La-ak pond and filter system—are clear: local residents report that they have already seen a dramatic fall in the number of illnesses among the community.

“Now, the filter is here, people’s lives will be improved. And because the pond is right next to their houses, it is very convenient,” said Minister for Rural Development Chea Sophara as he looked across the pond. “Children used to get to school late because they had to get water; now, they can get to school on time. If we can provide access to sanitation, then we will reduce sickness and medical bills, and improve people’s livelihoods.”

Surmounting the Seasons—Tonle Sap

A short drive from Tek La-ak, the scene at the provincial capital of Kampong Chhnang illustrates the irony of Cambodia’s situation. Boats of varying sizes and forms of propulsion bob at the edge of the Tonle Sap, a body of water that starts as a river in Phnom Penh before it becomes a great lake, covering enormous swathes of the center of the country. It is hard to imagine access to water being an issue in a place like this.

But a half-hour boat ride away, the people of the village Khleng Por paint a different picture. Water is indeed plentiful during the rainy season—so

much so that their village becomes an island. But during the dry months, the Tonle Sap beats a rapid retreat, leaving the villagers a long way from the nearest supply.

Just as in Tek La-ak, they tell tales of long hours spent traipsing with buckets in hand to get the water their families need. But with the installation of a well and pump, under the Tonle Sap Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project, those stories should soon become little more than folklore.

Oum Chanthoeun bathes her baby son Vattana under the pump. She laughed when asked how things have changed.

“It is so different now,” she said. “Before, it could take as much as 5 hours to get water. Now, the pump is right here, next to the house.”

The mother of seven carried the youngest of her children to an outhouse at the side of her stilted, wooden home to demonstrate another innovation. She held Vattana over a spotlessly clean squat toilet before dipping a plastic scoop into a nearby cistern to pour water into the bowl.

“Now, we have the latrine and the well,” she said. “We have hygiene.”

That opens up all sorts of possibilities for the people of Khleng Por. They should no longer need to spend their savings or sell land to treat illnesses related to sanitation. And with clean water close at hand, they can spend their newly released time developing small, home-based businesses, which will improve livelihoods and keep families together.

Simple measures have made all the difference for communities like Tek La-ak and Khleng Por. Now, the challenge is to repeat the story throughout rural Cambodia. ■

Project Information

Tonle Sap Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project (2005–2010)

Financing: \$18.0 million, Asian Development Fund (ADB); \$3.9 million, beneficiaries; \$2.1 million, Government of Cambodia

Women Learn to Earn

For many women across Cambodia, every day is a struggle for income. But at new women's development centers, they are learning how to make more money.

By Guy De Launey

- ADB-supported women's development centers help women earn a living close to home.


LEANG DEY, SIEM REAP PROVINCE, CAMBODIA

Thav Heat's home in the province of Siem Reap looks idyllic. Her stilted, wooden house looks out onto verdant rice paddies. Oxen lumber past, heavily laden carts trundling behind as they make their way down the tree-lined, red dirt road.

But life is not as rosy as it may seem, Thav Heat said. "It can be very tough to feed my four

children, especially in the rainy season. When the harvest season comes, we have food or rice to keep us going for just 5 months. But after that, we have to earn money to buy food."

As a widow, Thav Heat has to bring in enough cash to make sure nobody in the family goes hungry, as well as to put the children through school. Women across Cambodia are facing a similar challenge—with husbands absent

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- Spinning yarn is an income-generating activity for women at ADB-supported women's development centers.

because of death, divorce, or migration for work in other provinces or abroad.

But at new women's development centers, women like Thav Heat are learning how to earn more money, making life sweeter here in Cambodia's countryside.

Depending on Women

Many women in Cambodia find it hard to make the money they need. Poor education and a lack of skills are the obvious obstacles, while obligations at home may prevent women traveling to find work. They also face a struggle to get access to information that may help them set up a small business or get training to improve their employment prospects.

These are among the points that Ing Kantha Phavi is keen to drive home. The minister for

women's affairs cuts a no-nonsense figure as she walks around her Phnom Penh office, rattling off facts and figures, while pulling reports from shelves and digging out printed versions of PowerPoint presentations to back up her arguments. The documentation shows that without the contribution of women, the economy would be struggling.

"The informal sector is very important," said the minister. "It provides 60% of GDP [gross domestic product]—and employs more than 80% of working women."

"Women are also important in the garment sector," Ing Kantha Phavi said. "They need to be taken seriously."

A cursory look around the capital city puts flesh on the statistical bones. In a place where almost

every house doubles as a shop, women are often the face of the enterprise, if not the owners. Female involvement in business runs from the sole trader pushing a food cart around the streets, to the top level in the boardrooms of several of the country's largest companies.

Creating Compensation

It is a vibrant picture—yet, many of Cambodia's working women are struggling financially, with the situation at its most acute in rural areas. In

terms of employment possibilities, there is little outside of “blue jeans and grass”—that is, the production lines at the garment factories in and around Phnom Penh—or else agriculture. Domestic work in private households is one other option.

“The problem is poverty—and access to opportunities,” said Ing Kantha Phavi. Her ministry has been working on a number of projects to address the issues, among them, women's development centers. These

- Women at a women's development center dye reeds that they will weave into floor mats. The color adds value to the final product.





- Sewing is part of a portfolio of income-generating activities that women can learn at women's development centers.

Tomas Eric Sales

“The informal sector is very important. It provides 60% of GDP—and employs more than 80% of women.”

—Ing Kantha Pavi, minister for women's affairs

facilities—overseen by the ministry, and supported by partners including ADB and the International Labour Organization—train women in life skills and marketable skills such as entrepreneurship classes. They also offer easy access to microcredit.

This may have some impact on the situation depicted by a Ministry of Women's Affairs presentation on gender and the economy. It describes a state in which “very little attention” is paid to developing the informal economy, by either the government or international donors.

Women in particular have suffered because of a lack of business development and employment-promotion services. Many lack the confidence to move into nontraditional lines of work, or are

reluctant to take risks because of their family commitments. Without a support structure, it can be difficult for women to make changes—even if they stand to improve their lives as a result.

The women's development centers focused initially on enhancing existing skills to help their clients improve their livelihoods. The details of the approach vary from province to province to suit each area's circumstances; for example, in Kompong Chhnang, in the middle of the country, traditional mat weaving has been the vehicle for change.

“I have been doing this since I was 13,” said Un Keang, without looking up from the loom that sits between the wooden poles supporting her

“My family’s standard of living will be much better than before. And it is good to have a steady job close to home because I have my young children and elderly mother to look after.”

—Thav Heat, who received training from her local women’s development center.

house in Khleng Por village. She sat cross-legged in front of the hand-operated machine, as a red-and-cream mat emerged from the strands of straw stretched across the contraption.

Now 60 years old, Un Kean is living proof that age is no barrier to learning something new. The women’s development center, a half-hour boat ride away, has shown her how to adapt her skills to suit the contemporary market. The changes she has been able to make have had a significant impact on family finances.

“Since the women’s development center came to teach me, I have been able to use more colors and do different designs,” she said. “In the past, we sold mats cheaply, but with better design and color we can get a better price, and that really makes a difference to daily life. The extra money means I can help my children and grandchildren with their schooling, and anything else they need.”

Beyond Remuneration, Holistic Rewards

Thav Heat has also discovered that help is close at hand. The opening of a women’s development center in Leang Dey has brought the opportunity to learn not only mat-weaving skills, but how to produce bags and purses that can be sold in the souvenir shops of Siem Reap, the town.

On a rainy weekday afternoon, the center is full of activity—and an atmosphere of quiet concentration. Some women are sewing bags together, their treadle-powered machines making barely a sound. Even if there were a power cut, they would be able to carry on working. Another group is measuring material for bag linings, and a couple of small children watch as their mothers use rulers to straighten out the straw, ready for weaving.

“People used to spend up to 6 days making one mat—and then they would sell it for \$5. Lots of labor, to make very little money,”

said Uch Sarom, ADB management and training advisor at the center. “Now, they can make \$3 or \$4 a day depending on how fast they work. We are teaching them marketing and design at the same time, and also giving general business training.”

Her new skills mean that Thav Heat can stay close to home while earning the extra money her family needs. Even the raw material for the bags she makes, a grass known locally as *ronchek*, grows right on her doorstep.

“It has made a big difference,” she said. “My family’s standard of living will be much better than before. And it is good to have a steady job close to home because I have my young children and elderly mother to look after. If they need me, I can go to help immediately.”

Thav Heat hopes her daughter will be able to join in the work when she is old enough, instead of moving away to find a job. The women’s development center has made that a possibility, and if its encouraging early results continue, it will have performed an important service: giving Cambodian women the tools to make a sustainable living. ■

Project Information

Women’s Development Centers Project

Financing: \$1.8 million, Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (ADB); \$39,500, beneficiaries; \$360,500, Government of Cambodia



- A woman spins yarn at an ADB-supported women's development center.

The Heart of Development: Impact Stories from Cambodia

Cambodia is a land rich in natural resources, people, and culture. As the country's largest multilateral development partner, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) works to promote inclusive growth in Cambodia, particularly in the poorest rural areas. This collection shows the benefits of ADB support across major areas of assistance, by telling the stories of people whose lives have been transformed. Whether through the preservation of the unique ecosystem and fisheries in the Tonle Sap Basin, in the heart of Cambodia, or better roads that draw in tourists to the country's ancient sites and create more employment opportunities, ADB projects have touched lives and fueled economic growth for all.

About the Asian Development Bank

ADB's vision is an Asia and Pacific region free of poverty. Its mission is to help its developing member countries substantially reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of their people. Despite the region's many successes, it remains home to two-thirds of the world's poor: 1.8 billion people who live on less than \$2 a day, with 903 million struggling on less than \$1.25 a day. ADB is committed to reducing poverty through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration.

Based in Manila, ADB is owned by 67 members, including 48 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.

Cambodia Resident Mission

ADB's Cambodia Resident Mission opened in 1996 and provides the primary operations link between ADB and government, private sector and civil-society stakeholders in its activities. The resident mission engages in policy dialogue and acts as a knowledge base on development issues in Cambodia.