

Cambodia Essay Competition 2007

Winning Essays

education | HIV / AIDS | domestic violence | agriculture

How Do You Contribute to Solving Community Problems?



The World Bank

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the Cambodia Essay Competition.....	3
First Prize : A Walk to a Better Community: Nothing is a Miracle.....	7
Second Prize : Youth and Development	19
Third Prize: Agricultural Productivity Improvement: Seeing a Practical Solution.....	39
Fourth Prize : My Experience with Operation Hope Foundation.....	51
Fifth Prize : Domestic Violence.....	67

ABOUT THE CAMBODIA ESSAY COMPETITION

Young people are not only the future, they are the now in Cambodia. Youth are key agents of change, but too often the nature and impact of their contributions is not recognized or documented as it should be, and youth face difficulties being heard and engaging more directly in civic life.

To learn from youth how they can make a difference in reducing poverty, the World Bank Cambodia Country Office in collaboration with a youth organization called the Youth Resource Development Program (YRDP) launched the Youth Essay Competition 2007 with the topic: “**How do you contribute to solving community problems?**” Youth could write about their involvement with improving education and rural development, resolving conflict, limiting the spread of HIV-AIDs, or promoting youth employment. They could also write about their own work in the community and describe how young people can improve their impact in society and how they can work with their peers to solve community problems.

Cambodia Essay Competition was aligned with the International Essay Competition 2006 and implemented in partnership with YRDP. The International Essay 2006 was launched on February 1, 2006. It invited young people from all over the world to reflect on how they make a difference in poverty reduction by addressing community problems.

Facts and Figures

The Cambodia Essay Competition 2007 was launched in August 2006. It invited young people in the country to reflect on how they make a difference in poverty reduction by contributing to solving community problems.

After an extensive media campaign, with posters and leaflets in universities and youth clubs, 31 youth submitted their essays.

Review Process

In November 2006, The World Bank and YRDP formed a jury committee, composed of:

1. Ms Ouk Sothiara, Advocacy & Networking Manager, Gender and Development/ Cambodia;
2. Ms Chea Muoy Kry, Peace Building Program Manager, Catholic Relief Services;
3. Mr Cheang Sokha, Executive Director of YRDP;
4. Mr Beng Simeth, World Bank Human Development officer; and
4. Mr. Bou Saroeun, World Bank Communication Specialist and Youth Focal Point.

The committee set these additional criteria: 1) quality of proposal and content; 2) structure of essay; 3) style of essay; 4) use of source and evidence. Then the committee set up a sub-committee to select and short-list the applicants. Ten applicants were submitted by the sub-committee. The final jury committee met in December 2006 and chose five winners.

Essay Competition Calendar

<i>12 August, 2006</i>	Launch of the Essay Competition
<i>10 November, 2006</i>	Deadline for Submissions
<i>18 November, 2006</i>	Jury committee formed and criteria established
<i>20 November, 2006</i>	First round review and short-list drawn up
<i>19 December 2006</i>	Final selection by the jury committee
<i>15 March, 2007</i>	Award ceremony
<i>02 April 2007</i>	Winners give presentation to youth group

Awards

The winners will receive their awards during the World Development Report 2007 launch on March 15, 2007 from Senior Minister H.E. Kol Pheng, Minister of Education, Youth and Sport, and Ian Porter, World Bank Country Director for Cambodia.

Winners:

Winner of the 1 st Prize:	Mr. Nguon Pheakdey
Winner of the 2 nd Prize:	Mr. Chim Chamroeun
Winner of the 3 rd Prize:	Ms. Pisey Chea
Winner of the 4 th Prize:	Mr. Ka Chhorng
Winner of the 5 th Prize:	Mr. Seng Sangha

Awards:

1 st Prize:	1 200 000 riel
2 nd Prize:	1 000 000 riel
3 rd Prize:	800 000 riel
4 th Prize:	600 000 riel
5 th Prize:	400 000 riel

First Prize

**A Walk to a Better Community: Nothing
is a Miracle**

Mr. Nguon Pheakkdey

ABSTRACT

Not only is the definition of community varied according to contexts, the problems existing in a particular community might also be different from those of others. The high rate of HIV/AIDS infection, the confusion of gender responsibility, and the illegal use of weapons are examples of the problems found in Cambodian society. To contribute to solving these problems, I have been working as a volunteer for several organizations.

First of all, I worked with the Reproductive Health Association of Cambodia (RHAC) for two years. As a peer group educator, I participated in activities aimed at increasing the social understanding of gender roles, family planning and the prevention of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in the community. I was also one of the volunteers for the Control Arms Project, sponsored by Oxfam, Amnesty International and IANSA, which was campaigning to push for an international treaty on the trade in weapons in Cambodia and the world. In addition, some time before Christmas, I signed up as a volunteer for the Samaritan's Purse Organization's project called the Operation Christmas Child 2004. During that time, I helped out with the collection and wrapping of gifts received from the community, and sending them overseas, especially to developing countries. Currently, besides being a senior student at university, I am working as a volunteer for the Servants International Organization under the TASK/Project HALO as a curriculum facilitator and a teacher for the Children's Safety Project.

I face both challenges and success in my work. However, I cherish all the good and bad times that I have been through because I think that every challenge makes me stronger and helps me find my niche. In retrospect, I personally believe that it takes first of all individual enthusiasm and commitment to make our community, society, and the world a better place for ourselves, our children, and our children's children because nothing is a miracle.

A Walk to a Better Community: Nothing is a Miracle

Though the definition of community might vary according to contexts, the World Book of Community (2001) defines it as a group of people living in the same arena who share similar beliefs, customs, and a sense of belonging and feel an obligation toward other members of the group. Likewise, community, in a Cambodian context, refers to a group of people living together and sharing the same interests and traditions. There is no denying that every community has problems of its own. Some communities, for example, might have problems in getting access to modern technological appliances while others, such as Cambodia, might not even have access to basic healthcare services. In fact, as one of the poorest countries in the world, Cambodia has lots of problems, including a high rate of HIV/AIDS infections, discrimination against people infected and affected with HIV, misunderstanding of gender role, and the illegal use of guns.

Albert Einstein once said “There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though everything is a miracle. The other is as though nothing is a miracle.” I personally prefer the second option because if we are just hoping, without actually doing something, that for example, all the problems in Cambodia and other developing countries will one day eradicated, the end result is that nothing may improve. Therefore, this essay describes my experiences as a volunteer for individuals in the community, especially for those who are alienated because they have or are affected by AIDS. I will first of all list the names of the associations and organizations that I have worked for, followed by the people who I have helped, the achievements and the challenges that I have faced, and the measurement of the results of my work respectively. This essay also provides reasons why I think the work that I am doing is innovative. Finally, it looks at possible strategies that would help improve my impact on reducing the

HIV/AIDS infection rate, and the advice that I would give to young people who want to replicate my experience.

It all started when I was in high school. From 2000 to 2002, I worked as a Peer Group Educator at the Reproductive Health Association of Cambodia (RHAC). I participated in activities aimed at increasing the social understanding of gender roles, family planning and the prevention of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in the community. First of all, after the RHAC's selection procedures, I along with other students from different high schools, were given special training at the organization about the methodology of how to share with our fellow students and people in our community the information we received regarding the prevention of HIV/AIDS, STDs, family planning, and gender roles. Having completed our training, each of us was sent back to our own high school to share with students in our school what we had learned. Firstly we requested the permission from the school principal and the timetable of the entire 10, 11, and 12 grades. We then had to figure out the period that the students were free so that we could go and teach them. It took fifty minutes to present one of the above mentioned topics. The class normally started with a thirty-minute presentation followed by the question and answer time. We then had to keep record of each class so as to not to teach the same topic next time.

On top of that, RHAC in associations with other organizations had arranged lots of opportunity for us to go and talk with people in our own community about the aforementioned topics. For example, in 2002, RHAC with its partners held an educational concert at my very own high school, and I was the master of ceremony. The theme was Youth and HIV/AIDS. In addition, on the 1st of December, RHAC and its partners annually sponsored an educational tour to provinces in Cambodia. For instance, on December 1st 2001, we went on a trip to

Kampong Charm, one of Cambodia's largest provinces. It was great fun because we stopped at lots of villages along the way to our destination and asked village people questions about such topics as HIV, STDs, gender role, and family planning. The answers that we got were shocking as few people know what gender role or family planning was. Fortunately, most people were aware of HIV and STDs and their consequences.

During my time with RHAC, I was generally working with people my own age or older. However, there were both achievements and challenges. For instance, regarding the age factor people at school, especially those of my own age group, were comfortable talking with me about their personal problems, while older people in my community were reluctant to share their problems with me. Therefore, it was very hard for me to really understand their problems so as to give advice. This is understandable because of our conservative culture. In fact, this culture also gave me challenges. The problem was that some people, old people to be specific, did not really listen to my advice because they might have thought that I was too young to tell them solutions to these kinds of problems. Some people even thought of me as a sexually active teenager, which was not good. Realizing these obstacles, the RHAC produced another kind of peer group educator by selecting some middle age people from the community to have them work with older people in their own community and others. As a consequence, other young volunteers and I were only working with people our own age group both in the community and school. In the end, after two years of hard work, we were very pleased that the percentage of people infected with HIV in Cambodia was gradually decreasing.

Although, I stopped working with RHAC once I commenced university, I was still involved with other kinds of volunteer work. In October 2003, I joined the Control Arms campaign, which was

sponsored by Oxfam in association with Amnesty International and IANSA. The aim of the campaign was to push for an international treaty to control the arms trade which stimulates conflict, poverty, and human rights abuse all over the world. The campaign called for effective arms control to make people authentically safer from the threat of armed violence. To carry out the task, volunteers were assigned to go around Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital city, and ask people to sign the petition in the form of drawing a face on a piece of paper in support of stopping the use of weapon in Cambodia and the world as a whole. Surprisingly, it turned out to be a great success because not only thousands of citizens agreed that we should put an end to the problem, but the Cambodian governments also pledged their support for an international Arms Trade Treaty. This milestone announcement came just two months after the Control Arms campaign was launched. High Excellency Sar Kheng, Deputy Prime Minister of Cambodia said "as a country that has been severely affected by weapons, Cambodia will support the international Arms Trade Treaty. The Royal Government of Cambodia is committed to controlling weapons which have such a great impact on humanity, society, the economy and peace."

In 2004, I was awarded, as the first Cambodian recipient, the International Development Program's (IDP) Peace Scholarship Program to study for two semesters at the University of Tasmania, Australia. During my stay there, I was not only doing the academic work at my faculty, but I was also involved with volunteer work. In November 2004, I volunteered for the Forever Women Conference held at City Gate, Hobart. My job during that conference involved catering, ushering, and cleaning. The main theme of that conference was for women to help bring up their children to walk with Jesus Christ. Although, it was a Christian conference and I have been brought up a very strong Buddhist, I still did my thing. Many people criticized me, but I took little notice because I am an open-minded

person. I believe that every religion is good provided that it leads people to live their lives happily and morally correct according to the norms in society.

During my stay in Australia, I was lucky enough to be invited to Oxfam's formal dinner at the Tasmanian Parliament House. From the president of the Oxfam organization report, I realized how people, especially children, in other parts of the world manage to survive through harsh periods such as wars or natural disasters. Suddenly, an idea sprung to mind, the idea that we are not alone in this seem-to-be very lonely universe. Someone, somewhere far away is thinking of us, taking care of us and loving us. I believe this is the greatest message of all. This is demonstrated by the projects that Oxfam carry out to help people in developing countries improve their living conditions through enormous support from communities across the globe.

I was in fact able to personally participate in this concept through the Samaritan's Purse Organization. Some time before Christmas, I was informed that there was a project called Operation Christmas Child 2004 organized by the Samaritan's Purse Organization. The program aimed to send Christmas gifts to the world's hurting children in developing countries. The simple message for those children was, as I mentioned earlier, that someone from somewhere in the world is watching over them and loves them. Therefore, I signed up as a volunteer and collected and wrapped the gifts received from the community, put them in shoeboxes, and sent them overseas. I donated a shoebox myself hoping it would at least make one child somewhere on this planet happy.

To my surprise, during the Franklin Graham Festival in Tasmania, I discovered that some of the shoeboxes were also sent to Cambodia. I was overwhelmed by emotion and cried of happiness when watching the video report and seeing all the happy faces of my people as well as

other children around the world. I never imagined that the shoeboxes would be sent to Cambodia. I hope someone here received my box because I wrote a letter in Khmer sending the recipient my love and best wishes for Christmas.

So far, most of the work that I had done concerned HIV and children. I am actually very passionate about working with children who are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. Therefore, upon my return home from Australia and since October 2005, besides being a senior student at university, I also work as a volunteer for the Servants International Organization under the TASK/Project HALO, as a curriculum facilitator and a teacher for the Children's Safety Project. There are four classes consisting of 25 to 30 students that I am teaching now. The four classes are divided into two groups according to the students' age. The first two groups are made up of children from seven to eleven years. The other two consist of children between twelve and seventeen. Each class takes place once a week on Thursdays; thus one theme is introduced per month. My main responsibility is to design a curriculum for the themes that the organization wants to get across to the children and teach them. Some of the topics are for example concerned with the dangers of drug use, discrimination, disability, HIV/AIDS, and sexual abuse towards children.

One thing that really upsets me about my class is that all the children's parents who come to my class are HIV positives. Some of them have already passed away leaving the children with their relatives or no one at all. Even some of the children are HIV positives themselves. It really breaks my heart every time I see them. As far as I am concerned, the biggest challenge for me doing this work is that I am not sure. For instance, I sometimes am unsure of the effectiveness, usefulness of my teaching. Most of the time, I am anxious, aggravated, intimidated, and terrified. For example, sometimes I am very exasperated with the thought of the parents ruining their children's lives with AIDS. There

are also times that I sit down and ask myself how the information that I am presenting to the children will be of any usefulness to them because they are already infected. In addition, some of the people I know, knowing that I am working with children infected and/or affected with HIV, tell me that my work is useless because the children will sooner or later pass away like their parents. However, I have to really thank my family, friends, and colleagues for their encouragement to keep me running this race. They told me that acknowledging the fact that some of the children are positive, it would be great that I could teach them how to live with HIV/AIDS.

Fortunately, the good news is that the program is working very smoothly because all the students are really involved in the learning process. They are very energetic and enthusiastic now, though they were very shy at first because of our traditional culture. In fact, I am very pleased to see that the children can now understand that it is fun to work and learn together as a group. To measure my teaching success and also to check how much information the students have obtained so far, the first progress test will be conducted in April. Then after another six themes, which is going to take approximately six months, there will be a second progress test followed by the final examination.

What the organization and I myself as a teacher want to achieve is to build the children's confidence and show them that they do have the same value as other children in their community and that they deserve to be loved and treated fairly. They need to believe that the fact that they are poor and their parents are infected by HIV/AIDS does not make them different. In addition, I would not hesitate to disregard an individual who discriminates against my students and other people infected with HIV because these children do deserve their dignity as other people in this country. I have to tell people, sometimes even some of my friends hundreds of times, to distance themselves from the virus not from those affected or infected. I think that poor and

unfortunate people in this country are just as smart and talented and hardworking as everybody else, and they have a right to make their voices heard. It was just that most people were unfortunate that they are infected. In some case, it is not even their mistakes at all that they have the disease. I also believe that all they need is a leader who can prove to other people in the community that they are also people as they can walk, talk, use their brain and dare to speak their minds to make informed decisions. That is my ultimate and hidden goal for each and every student in my four classes.

There are many problems in Cambodia for which I may not be able to contribute a solution. However, if any one asked me how I feel about the work that I have done, I would say that it is innovative as it has two implications. The first one is that it would more or less change people's perspectives about youths from being obsessed with useless things to actually participating in building a better community. Moreover, I personally have grown a lot from my current teaching work because I can apply things that I am learning at school such as the principles of teaching, the psychology of learning, and the methods of testing, into the real world. I normally think of this job as an extra curricular activity that I enjoy doing. Secondly, I strongly believe that my work could be considered as a model for other youths, in particular Cambodian youth, showing them that they, too, could make a difference to their community. This is because in Cambodia, young people are regarded as inferior to older people lacking the power, for example to make their voices heard or to propose solutions to problems.

Looking ahead, if I could improve my impact on reducing problems in the Cambodian community, the first thing that I would choose to reduce would be the spread of HIV/AIDS infection rate. I would encourage non-government organizations to have special workshops or training courses for parents to understand that their children,

especially girls, need to know basic information about how to protect themselves from the virus. I would also suggest another program that helps girls build their confidence and skills in negotiating safe sex with their boyfriends or partners, because just knowing about HIV/AIDS or how devastating the results might be, is not sufficient to change the way they behave. Furthermore, I strongly believe that this disease preys most on those who lack power, and girls are the most susceptible, because they are often forced or pressured into having sex, or are deprived of information they need to help them make conversant decisions. They also lack the skills to negotiate with boys or men and the confidence to challenge them to practice safe sex. Finally, I would propose another project for youth and parents living in the slum areas in Phnom Penh to be aware of HIV/AIDS and its consequences. They need to know that the consequences are not only affecting them but also their children.

In retrospect, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the RHAC, Oxfam, IDP's Peace Scholarship Program, Energizer Life Church in Hobart, Samaritan's Purse Organization, and the Servants International Organization for letting me be a part of their tremendous work, because it has lead me to where and what I am doing now. I believe that a better and more peaceful world is not too far ahead of us, if each and every one of us stand up and fight for it. I also believe that we are like snow flakes, unique, and thus have a special gift that we can offer to our community, society, and country. Finally, if I was to give a piece of advice to people on how to be more active and involved in their community, it would be to grasp any opportunity that comes along offering you chances to work with other people because you never know where it leads or what to expect. Just like Forest Gump said in the film with the same name "Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're going to get." We are all needed because nothing is a miracle.

Second Prize

Youth and Development

Mr. Chim Chamroeun

ABSTRACT

This essay is both a sharing and an inspiration for youth to serve communities in fighting social challenges. It looks at development from an innovative view – self perspective – in addition to economical and political viewpoints.

Starting with identifying the current position of youth, this piece of writing shares my personal experience and ideas on working on self empowerment, volunteering in existing organizations, initiating developmental projects, and encouraging more participation through peer education. Information shared is also taken from classes, reading and electronic materials, and personal conversations.

Moreover, it suggests a proactive direction on which community developers should focus, to help ensure a less troubled society. It argues that some development works, though it improves living standard, does not necessarily solves all the social problems, and that **value-based education** can collaborate and help a great deal for positive changes. Therefore, the aspect of values is emphasized and recommended to be incorporated into other aspects of development whether it is economical, political, environmental, etc.

Because of some discouraging situations (like political, economical, and educational issues), many young people have little willingness or hope to bring about new developmental initiatives. This essays contains messages of hope to inspire youth to believe that they can be the change rather than waiting for the change.

This piece of writing, in addition to sharing practical ideas, will help increase the youth's momentum to come together and heal the nation.

YOUTHS AND DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Some parts of the world are so advanced while other parts are being diminished. Somewhere on earth are highly technologically developed, while somewhere in the atmosphere is being spoilt. Some people are working hard for the betterment of their lives and their future generation's. Some are doing harshly for wealth, recognition, or power for themselves, their own religion, or their own country, regardless of others. Some people live wealthy lives, while majority of people live in poverty. There is a significantly high rate of unequal distribution of economic status among people of the world; and there are many other social challenges.

Who can help solve these challenges?

*“Young people are the most precious resources our planet possesses,”*¹ said Kofi Annan. Youth are enthusiastic, courageous, and willing to try new things. Youth have much potential to help deal with all those challenging problems.

But so far, most often, we are seen as trouble makers. Or our senior citizens would look at us as if we were innocent kids. Sometimes, we by ourselves also do not value ourselves, and some of us put ourselves into vulnerable zones involving drugs, crimes, etc.

¹ The 3rd World Youth Congress 2005. Nothing for us without us: Youth-Led Development Starter Kit, p.4

Nevertheless, we need to realize that we can do better jobs which contribute of the society; and we also need encouragement from the society.

In this piece of writing, I would like to share, particularly with other young people, both personal experiences and ideas relevant to how we can contribute to solving community problems. They include personal empowerment, voluntary activities, and encouraging participation from others. I am going start by presenting current situations of the country, and some inspiring thoughts to encourage other fellow youths to contribute to making positive changes.

CURRENT SITUATION

Living in an extended family where...

*the older generation is not in harmony,
some children are in discord because they take sides of
different elders,
bigger children bully the smaller ones to get candies,
many have little access to schooling as they are needed to work
on the family's farm,
the hungry kids are waiting for and expecting from the author-
itative elders, and
those who oppose to the parents' opinions would be blamed,
slapped, or even dismissed from home, ...*

*many would feel rather insecure and discouraged to initiate something
for betterment of the family. After fear, many start to believe that there*

is nothing else they can do other than seek personal security and benefit, regardless of others'.

Many people probably find themselves in a situation similar to the family just described. Children who are the future of the nation, and youth who are the core pillars of the nation are not being supported and encouraged to a reasonable extent as valuable resources.² These pillars become too weak to even support themselves. With pessimism and despair, some express: *“Well, it’s impossible to change the situation of country. I’m just an ordinary person. It’s meaningless if I start alone without others.”* Then they expect that government be responsible for and blamed for the poverty, crimes, drugs, etc which make the country suffer a lot. Many seem to have such a concept that they can hardly help solve problems. What they can easily do is to dream: *“If I were a high ranking officer, I would change this, and I would do that...”*

BUT YOUTH CAN MAKE THINGS POSSIBLE

Dadi Janki, co-director of Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, gave this positive message of hope to youth:

“They need to feel that they can help; that they don’t just have to ask why and what and comment on what should or

² According to COMFREL’s observation, although the government declared that children are future of the nation and that children development and poverty reduction are absolutely important, the declaration remains words of wisdom, without any noticeable change. (COMFREL: Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia)

(Retrieved from: http://www.cambodiatic.org/articledetail.asp?req_id=9433&loc_id=393)

Even worse, more negative trends are increasing. “Thousands of people, many of them children, wander the streets and garbage dumps of Phnom Penh each day looking for food, or scavenging for garbage to recycle for a bit of money.” D. Gilliland. Youth in ruin: the other side of Angkor. (Retrieved from: http://www.thingsasian.com/goto_article/article.2414.html)

shouldn't be, but that they can actually do something to make the situation better... The task of youth is to have courage; not to fight, but to stop the fighting. The world needs such young people today - those who have hope."

We should realize that we can always do something for our country and the world, and that something does not have to be a big, heroic thing. With this simple realization, big things can happen.

WE SHOULD FOCUS ON OURSELVES

Much more support and assistance are provided to reinforce economical and political systems of a developing country, to promote higher living standards, social stability, and, to some extent, a peaceful society. However, when problems still arise, people usually react to things by looking from perspectives like economical, political, etc.

Follow youth, we usually forget to pay attention to this least-look-at *self aspect* which is about emphasizing on one's own self rather than the whole system. It is neither about blaming others nor ourselves. But it is about focusing on our personal growth and the idea of 'what I can do' rather than 'what they should do'. It is about responding to situations with enthusiasm rather than reacting with resentment. This view is best supported by this saying of John F. Kennedy, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country", and M. Gandhi, "Be the change that you would like to see in the world."

START WITH THE INDIVIDUAL

The quality of the society depends on the quality of each individual. As a national and global citizen, we should be committed to work for personal growth and act as a role model for others. First of all, we need to have this awareness that we are starters in making our dreams (of a peaceful and prosperous society) come true, and we do not have to wait for anyone else. But one may ask “why should I care?” “*Because the world is out of balance.*”³ From self perspective, I would say it is *because individuals are out of balance.* To go deeper into this answer, let me show you today tendency of some people.

As seen in the previous analogy, people, with pessimism and despair, gradually divert their attention from saving the nation to gaining their own comforts. Certainly, it is normal for people to look for comforts. However, some diversion should be at least a little bit more value-based and set a good model for the future generation. People, attached to materials, think it does not matter to be corrupt and to exploit others. In Cambodia, corruption is followed and practiced at all levels that it almost becomes a daily habit. According to a research done by CSD⁴, citizens are exposed to corruption in their daily lives, in communication settings with polices, markets, schools, transportation agents, health clinics, customs authorities, birth-registration and judicial officers. More than that, I have often heard some elders

³ <http://youthink.worldbank.org/issues/development/>

⁴ Center for Social Development Newsletter (October 2004). Two case studies on the habit of daily corruption practice in Cambodia, p1.

say to the younger, *“If you care too much for the nation, if you don’t do corruption, your stomach will remain empty, and you won’t have the comfort of having a car or a villa. It is rather foolish to be honest these days.”*

Many people who are honest at the first place later find themselves falling into the trap of bribery and corruption. This shows a decrease in personal values (e.g. honesty and respect for others), when the society seems to give more value to materials.

Coming back to the question why I should care, let us consider these questions: ‘Why should I follow the negative examples? Should I add up to the negativity? Or should I raise up the good? Should I be part of the problem or solution? Isn’t it my dream to see prosperity in my nation?’

Let us be the change!

COMMUNITIES ARE IN NEED OF US. BE READY TO HELP

Low education is one of the big issues in developing countries. In Cambodia, many people are not well educated.⁵ Additionally, some who have gone through the year Zero, Pol Pot Genocide Regime, are still embedded with fears and culture of violence. Passing through

⁵ According to the National Institute of Statistic, the literacy rate is 62.8% in 1998, and 74.4% in 2004. (Retrieved from: <http://www.nis.gov.kh/SURVEYS/cips2004/table4.htm>) However, the ministry of education and the UNESCO launched a study in 1999, with a random sampling of 6,548 people, found that: only 37.1% are functional literate while 26.6% are just able to read and write very little things and 36.3% are completely illiterate. (Retrieved from: http://www.cambodiacic.org/article/detail.asp?req_id=2394&loc_id=550)

from a parent to a child, from a neighbor to another, in the world of the poor and uneducated, this long-lasting impact has been contributing to many of the problems today. Violence is most probably a common way to solve conflicts. “*Violence made me orphaned*”⁶, a case told by a child whose father committed domestic violence on mother, is not a strange title of newspaper articles in Cambodia. Many other issues are ruining social harmony; they include drugs, child abuse, land dispute, employment, trafficking, HIV/AIDS, etc.

Geographical remoteness, in Cambodia, is a factor that discourages people from working in communities. Through interaction with people, I found out that many of the educated people would prefer to stay and work in cities rather than rural provinces. People are not motivated to work in rural areas because living in the city is more comfortable, while education, health, electricity, and many other services are hardly available in the rural.

However, as mentioned earlier, the world is currently in need of hopeful and courageous youth to deal with those challenges. Hence, why not focus on ‘saving my community’ instead of losing energy on blaming others and complaining about the situations? As youth, we should not be the last to do or initiate something to save this nation and the global village. If we do not start, who will?

⁶ Title of local news article, retrieved from:
http://www.cambodiatic.org/articledetail.asp?req_id=10389&loc_id=def_01

We can volunteer...

Through my personal experience, aside from my main career, I would go for voluntary services. I used to teach part-time English in an organization providing free classes for the public in which many come from poor families in rural areas. I am just happy to share with those who are not capable enough to afford private schools.

Believing that people need food for their mind in the same way as they need food for their stomach, my friends and I have cooperated with existing organizations to provide trainings including ‘Living Values’⁷ to their target groups. One particular example is our cooperation with Project Aids Khmer which provides basic help such as rice and study materials to a group of poor orphans whose families affected by HIV/AIDS. With permission from the project officers, we visited target community and provided them the training.

I have also been serving in a community in Preahnet Preah district of Banteay Meanchey province. With coordination from Organization for Peace and Development in Cambodia, and related local authorities, I spent around a month or more, to share through trainings on goal-settings, leadership, values, positive thinking, ESL-teaching methodologies, and computer with some young adults and monks. I also had some classes (on drawings, puzzle games, sanity, etc) with kids under 5 years old.

⁷ Living Values is a value-based educational program. For more information, visit www.livingvalues.net

I do not consider what I have done to be effective because I could not keep those activities going. However, it's just what I can start at individual level. I can just do whatever is possible, as I am non-experienced in community development. Such activities, if carried out together in the long run, will contribute to sustainability.

Your own initiatives can help them...

Personally, I lack experience in running projects. But this is just for your information. Volunteerism can also be done through our own initiatives. Running a project will not only help solve community problems, but also provide an employment opportunity for the initiators themselves and others, and they will learn to be active job creators rather than passive career seekers. This will also set a good example for others. This is a challenging task. But, I have some encouraging news.

According to the policy document of the *World Youth Congress Scotland 2005*, the congress invited youth to commit to empower themselves through seeking supports from the experienced and initiating development projects. Moreover, it also calls on various relevant organizations and civil society to partner with youth; for example, it is recommended that 0.7% resources of all overseas development assistance to be allocated to Youth-Led Development (YLD) initiatives, and that 0.7% of international NGO development funding also be invested in YLD.

I think there are many organizations around the world are initiated by

youth. You can also do it. If you are very enthusiastic in helping your communities, seek help from experienced people on how to run a development project. Other resources including books are most useful and helpful. I have seen a book titled ‘Nothing for us without us: Youth-Led Development Starter Kit’. It was prepared by the 3rd World Youth Congress Scotland 2005. It can probably help you to run your projects successfully.

Looking into the future

“*The aim of development is to help people become more productive and to improve the quality of life for individuals, families, communities and countries as a whole.*”⁸ To ensure effective implementation of work, we should understand that the root cause of changes basically comes from **values** (e.g. compassion, cooperation, willingness to participate, helpfulness, etc). This can be supported by a Task Manager Survey done by the World Bank (1999)⁹. The study shows that 74% of the task managers believed that cooperative participation from direct beneficiaries has brought about improvement in preparation, design and implementation of projects.

However, in some circumstances, gaining participation is not easy. According to S. Sary & H. Thou, community development workers of the World Vision Cambodia in Kampong Speu, *a major challenge to*

⁸ <http://youthink.worldbank.org/issues/development/>

⁹ S. Tikare, K. McClean, J. Edgerton, P.Shah & C. Robb. Participatory Processes in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Technical Notes, p.2.

our development work is that people lack willingness and cooperation to participate in the work. They do not really understand the benefits of their participation, and they like to expect some little gifts such as clothing, soap, meeting fees, etc, or other things which directly benefit their own family rather than the whole community (personal communication, April 21, 2005).

Traditionally, Cambodian communities were known for the values the people have for one another. For examples, they would **share** food; they would give each other a **helping** hand; etc; with their **compassion hearts**. However, today, such value-based living style is collapsing. Material things are being developed, while values are being faded away from people's heart. And this should be a major focus to which developers pay attention.

A lot of problems also happen in other parts of the world, and it can be proved that the major cause is the **lack of values**. Technically educated people, sometimes, do not act virtuously and contribute to creating social problems. Listen to these voices of two youth from India and Japan.

“[HIV and AIDS]: “Actually the root cause is negligence.....in a country like India **doctors neglect [AIDS] patients...why???** bcoz they knew that they are to die.....” by Nehu [15, India]”¹⁰

“In Japan, most people imagine domestic violence when we hear the word “violence against children”.... **Why do violence against**

¹⁰ http://www.unicef.org/voy/speakout/speakout_568.html

children happen? We think that is because children don't have the power to stop.... Besides we think another reason is that **it is break-down of law and order....**" by Shizuka Yamanouchiey [20, Japan] ¹¹

Such cases are quite the same in Cambodian context.

Education on technical level, though it helps recover economic situation, cannot deal with problems effectively. It is important to look at another aspect of education. As Tillman & Columina (2000) mention, growing numbers of educators around the world and non-governmental organizations have been working on ways to introduce values-based education in response to concern about the children living in the world lacking social cohesion, and the increase of social problems like violence, suicide, addiction and abuse (p.30).

Therefore, my suggestion to other youth who will be working in the field of development is: value-based education should go along with any kind of projects. Though, according to Maslow's hierarchy of human need, the physiological need is basically important, the emphasis of values should be placed accordingly to ensure a less troubled society.

But be cautious! The aspect of teaching principles of values, in an inappropriate way, can lead to hatred. A. Asim, first prize winner of the International Essay Competition 2005, mentioned how young Indian and Pakistanis are taught not to tolerate the British; and how religions

¹¹ http://www.unicef.org/voy/speakout/speakout_2655.html

are biased towards their teaching, and create hatred and intolerance for one another. She said “*The curriculum being taught and followed in many countries is biased in its representation of facts... when the events that took place are presented in an extremely partial manner the child naturally ends up developing hatred for the ‘bad guys’.*”¹² Thus, values introduced into teaching curriculum have to be universal, and not in favor of only a particular race, culture, or religion.

Also, as I learnt from an agricultural consultant, community developers should have this principle in mind: “*We should help them not to depend on ourselves, but on themselves; we should not work for them, but with them.*” (V. Lim, personal communication, February 2006).

CALL FOR MORE COLLABORATION FROM PEERS

To build a better future, we need cooperation from as many people as possible; then we need to call for participation. It should be one of our tasks to help divert other youth’s attention from the vices, and inspire them to volunteer for communities. We can do it through peer education.

Our friends, just like us, need to be reminded and inspired and to feel that they have people around who will be working together. We can get our messages to them through personal conversation, group chat, organized discussion, forum, etc. Gradually, more and more people will understand the concept of ‘giving for a better world’ rather than ‘taking for myself’.

¹² World Bank. Winning Essays: International Essay Competition 2005, p.22, 111-28.

My friends and I who were participants of the 32nd Ship for South East Asian Youth Program and two other friends from the World Youth Congress 2005 have been working collaboratively to organize forums and presentations for youth. We go to universities and ask for permission and space for free to do our presentation or workshops. Also, we even spend our own pocket money for workshop materials and transportation.

Our objectives are to help other youth to understand their roles in development, to share our abroad experience in terms of development issues, to encourage them to join developmental programs and voluntary activities, and to inspire them to work for their dream. Many are inspired by our presentation.

CONCLUSION

I would like to remind this saying of Kofi Annan: “*young people are the most precious resources our planet possesses.*” Hence, fellow youth, we have to make this sentence true to ourselves and make ourselves reliable to the nation.

As youths, we are responsible for our personal growth; and it is our duties to cooperate with our peers and to serve our communities. Our active participation means a lot to ensure an effective result of development work. And together we can contribute to make a friendlier social atmosphere and cleaner natural environment.

In the mean time, we do need support and encouragement from the elders.

May Cambodia be prosperous!

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Third Prize

**Agricultural Productivity Improvement:
Seeing a Practical Solution**

Ms. Chea Pisey

ABSTRACT

Since the lack of food security is their major problem their immediate and basic need is to get adequate food for consumption throughout the year. For Cambodia's indigenous peoples the majority of whom live in north-east upland areas of the country, sources for their food security include agricultural production and harvest of non-timber forest products (NTFPs). Therefore, to address food insecurity issue of the indigenous peoples, activities related to improvement of their agricultural production, need to be implemented, taking into consideration local communities' preference and tradition and culture.

To improve shifting cultivation practice and management the project has provided capacity building to representatives the target villages in improved crops management and production practices, e.g. improved planting, crops cares and weeding, field sanitation, etc. to get rid of diseases and pests and to improve yields. On-farm demonstration will be conducted and managed by these representatives. The representative has acted as agent to transfer their knowledge to their fellow community members. This has been made through agricultural extension, information sharing forums and field exposure visits. Production and use of organic materials (OM) and effective microorganisms (EM) to maintain and improve soil fertility will be introduced and promoted. The OM and EM techniques and improved existing cultivation system will allow local communities to continue to rely on themselves without needing external inputs, and by ensuring chemical-free and sustainable agriculture development. In addition, we have also procured and distribute some vegetable for home gardening. Communities have been encouraged to maintain family pond for planting vegetable and perhaps for aquaculture.

According to the above strategies, food insecurity can be solved and farmer can also have surplus product for selling. It also improves

farmers' knowledge and relationship in the villages. The target indigenous communities will be able to ensure sustainable development and natural resource conservation.

I. State of Problem

For Cambodia's indigenous people who live in Mondulkiri province, are tribes. Most of them practice traditional shifting cultivation that let the plant grows naturally without caring. In traditional shifting cultivation, apart from not using well selected seeds, field management is very poor and appropriate inputs are low or not used. For example, after planting seeds, weeding is never done leaving the crops vulnerable to pests and diseases. Under such condition, crops have to also struggle with weeds for nutrients to deliver. Furthermore, crops, after planting, never receive any fertilization to enhance yields. While yields are low, e.g. rice never exceeds 1.1 tons/ha, post-harvest loss is high due to improper post-harvest handling and care.

Indigenous communities never fertilize their agricultural land as they rely on shifting cultivation practice. They always believe that after years of leaving their land to natural re-growth and regeneration before turning it back into agricultural production the soil fertility would be improved because the decomposition of leaves of the re-growing and re-establishing trees and plants. This is partly true but their shifting cultivation, or simply put, slash-and-burn practice is not favorable for good agricultural production.

The problem with the slash-and-burn system is that the burning process in fact kills not just only disease-inducing microorganisms in the soils but also useful microorganisms that good soils must have in order to ensure good agricultural production. Soils need good microorganisms to decompose organic materials useful for plant

growth and development and to aerate the sub-soil layer to allow for the penetration of oxygen which is required by plant roots for respiration. Even in flooded condition, plant roots, for example roots of paddy rice, always need oxygen for productive growth and development.

Since the indigenous communities in the target villages rarely add any fertility to their agricultural land coupling with the practice of burning the field soil fertility of their fields is severely affected and degraded. Animal droppings of e.g. cattle, buffaloes and elephants, are among the good organic fertilizers. However, they are left uncollected spreading everywhere across the villages. This incurs the loss of useful resources for crops production. Animal manure generally contains high content of nitrogen, which is the most important element of plant nutrient. Nitrogen is also very volatile in its organic form. When the manure is not well kept or stored, nitrogen loss to the air is very fast, rendering the manure almost barren.

II. Solution

1. Introduction of Suitable Varieties of Crop

After finding out about the area's condition of weather, rain and type of soil, we have introduced new seed, Senpidao which need only 115 days from sowing until harvesting. With the new seed farmer can plant twice in raining season, while local seed can grow only one time. Also, the new seed can provide better yield than traditional seed. As the new seed needs shorter time than traditional seed, farmer can save their time to do other job which can offer other income. Besides exporting the new seed, we also introduce good local seed to farmer and how select good seeds of their local varieties for their production.

2. Conducted Training Course

The training courses on production technique and crop selection have been conducted to help farmer in obtaining improved and good seeds of their local varieties for their agricultural production.

To improve shifting cultivation practice and management we have provided capacity building to representatives the target villages in improved crops management and production practices, e.g. improved planting, crops cares and weeding, field sanitation, etc. to get rid of diseases and pests and to improve yields. We also have introduce and promoted the using of organic material and effective microorganisms to maintain and improve soil fertility. The training course on Organic fertilizer and pesticide is conducted to save people's money and preserve the environment as well. Practicing to do organic fertilizer and pesticide, farmer will start to collect cow and buffalo manure and tree's leaves and other material which they had left it spreading everywhere in their villages. By ding do the village's environment is also clean and fresh. Moreover, using organic fertilizer can ensure the use of land sustainable. Organic pesticide does not have a bad affect on the environment and human' health, while chemical pesticide does. To increase yield dissemination of method planting rice is not enough, it has to include crop selection, crop care and weeding, organic fertilizer and organic pesticide. Just providing a farmer with new seed and training course is like giving him a piece of cloth with some tread and needle without sowing showing how to sow a modern dress. Therefore, to make farmers implement what they have learned and to show evidence that new technology provide them high yield, after conducting training course, we have selected farmers who had take part in the training as representative to implement what they had learned. On-farm demonstration has been conducted and managed by these representatives. Furthermore, we also have focus on better harvesting procedures and better post harvest handing to reduce poet-

harvest losses. Improve harvesting technique and post-harvesting care and handing will be demonstrated. Local resources will be used.

3. Selection Model Farmer/ Village Extension Agent

We have selected 80 representatives of community member of 20 villages and most of them are indigenous group. We have provided the representatives with training course on technique production. The representatives have given new seeds and they were asked to implement the technique production which has been taught. During their growing, we have sent technician to take part in and follow up farmers in order to make them have confidence and make sure that farmers did as we have taught.

Through the implementation of the new technique, the representatives have transferred knowledge they received to their community members through community extension sessions, information sharing forums and demonstration plots. The representatives have also become village agricultural extension agents working closely with their commune councils. Having practiced new technology by the representatives in each village with high yield, other farmer in the villages will also want to do as well. The extension who farmer acts as agent to transfer their knowledge to the other farmer is effective and efficiency and also less money.

4. Motivation Farmers to Grow Vegetable

Since rice is the stable food for Cambodian people, 85% of the people cultivation rice. Although rice needs long time to grow, it doesn't need people farmer to look after it everyday, so farmer can take this time to plant vegetables. In drying season, farmers who live near the pond or

near the source of water, we encourage them to plant vegetables, while they are free from growing rice and do not have other job to do. We had encouraged farmer to build and maintain family pound for this purpose and perhaps for aquaculture. Planting vegetable provides local people with addition source of nutrition and protein as well as in come.

5. The achievement

After the project run for 8 months ago, we have conducted many training course and also selected 90 model farmers to transfer their knowledge to other farmer. Some model farmers can get 3.5 ton/ ha which they never get high yield like this before. Other farmer in village they known that model farmer can get high yield, they asked model farmer to exchange new seed in order to plant as well. Moreover, after having interviewing the farmers about the impact on environment and social, they said “Since we have implemented technique productivity, our environment seem to be clean”. They have college cow and buffalo manure and leaves of trees and other material that can make organic fertilize. Also, the farmer can improve their knowledge through attend training courses. They are more active, creative and set off a culture of discussion and sharing other experiences. When villagers are more active and creative, the village will develop rapidly.

III. Future Aspect

- **Improved upland rice varieties** and improved varieties of pluses, especially, soy bean will be introduced and piloted. The representatives of each target village will be provided with improved upland rice and soy bean varieties for pilot testing and demonstration in their home

gardens and far on-farm trials. The seeds obtained the plots will be selected, maintains, saved and distributed to interested menders of the communities. Soy bean will provide local people with additional source of nutrition and protein as well as income. Rice bank will be also promoted, when rice surplus could be obtained, to ensure food security.

IV. Long- term Development Program for High yield.

The long-term program of increasing rice production is envisioned to comprise an accelerated basic and adaptive rice research program, and a gradual mechanization of farming operations including pos-harvest processing.

1. Accelerated Rice Research Program

Given the heterogeneous environment in the delta, the rice research program must be aimed at maximizing grain yields in various soil and water conditions. At present, rice research in Cambodia is fragmented and not fully understood. Hence, it lacks enthusiastic support from the government. To be successful, scattered rice research efforts should receive strong and genuine support under a unified body in order to take the following aspects:

a) Adaptive Research

- Evaluation of promising high yield rice breeding lines from other countries under normal local condition conditions with moderate fertilizer application, and without using insecticide. This evaluation must be carried out under controlled water, rain-fed, and the following characteristic:

Tolerance to adverse water condition
Resistance to specified insect pests
Resistance to specified diseases
Tolerance to low N-P fertilizer level and
High yield ability.

- Evaluation of promising weedicides for transplanted as well as direct seeded rice under wet and dry conditions.

b) Basic Research

- Identification of various organic fertilizing materials and their application to both local and high yield rice. This is, in fact, an urgent topic for research to solve part of current problems of the energy crisis.

- Evaluation of the fertility status of each soil type in the provinces of the delta in order to provide more accurate recommendation to local farmers.

- Breeding for drought tolerant high yield rice to be planted without, or with minimum, irrigation in the floating rice region after floating rice had been harvested.

- Breeding for salt tolerant high yield rice and acid sulfate soil while water control devices are still not available.

- Studying on rice ecology and population dynamics, and set up and effective rice pest forecast network throughout the delta.

2. Mechanization of Rice Production

Mechanized farm operation from transplanting to harvest and drying should be encouraged. More attention should be given to preparation equipment to ensure better soil tillage. Each of the soil working implement should be thoroughly tested, and redesigned if needed, to suit the general heavy clay soil condition in the delta, some lowland and upland regions.

Integrated system of rice drying-milling-storage should be installed to save appreciable losses by rice spoilage. The best ways to obtain more quality and better milled rice to the consumers is not to reject already spoiled rice, but to prevent it from getting spoiled.

On the other hand, the Royal Government of Cambodia has implemented several medium and long-term rural restructuring policy packages to tackle agricultural problems that have arisen during the fast competitiveness through modernization and mechanization has been implemented since 1992. This plan stresses the revitalization of rural communities, the development of the market-oriented agriculture and the diversification of crops in order to reduce the risk.

3. Marketing Market

Marketing processes are those business activities concerning the flow of good and services from production (producers) to consumption (consumers). Actually, in a subsistence agriculture-based economy-like the present Cambodia- the flow of agricultural produce or good from the points of production to consumers who live far away from the production site involves unacceptable difficulties, especially, in the very first phase of development whilst economic infrastructures are still weak and damaged by decades of warfare. Marketing, therefore, is very problematic in part due to the absence of good infrastructures.

Despite the lack of marketing infrastructures, issues associated with agricultural products and marketing functions and services are also unresolved for contemporary Cambodia. These issues are prevailing throughout the country; and the most serious cases are observed in the countryside.

Farm products are seasonal (for weather-dependent and traditional agriculture), perishable, and tend to be bulky. After harvest agricultural produce have to go through various processes before reaching final consumers residing far away from the production location. If, hence, these processes were lacking of absent or badly managed agricultural practice will remain at the subsistence level. These processes have been referred to as marketing functions and services.

- Finding buyers and transferring ownership;
- Assembly and storage;
- Sorting, packing and processing;
- Providing the finance for marketing and taking the risk;
- Assortment and presentation to consumers.

In the absence of marketing infrastructures, functions and services farmers will produce only for their home consumption and for barter within the frontiers of the villages. As a consequence, this—in addition to climatic conditions, water and land resources—strongly influences and draws the line for farming production.

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Fourth Prize

My Experience with Operation Hope Foundation

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ABSTRACT

The essay is about my understanding of Cambodia society, and experience with Operation Hope Foundation (OHF), an orphan organization, located in Prey Veng Province, where I spent one month doing community service. Cambodia used to be an empire in South East Asia. After the empire, the country went into many wars which destroyed everything it had built, especially during the Khmer Rough. Endless wars resulted in tons of social problems. Today, Children are the casualty of the wars. Orphan and children living in poverty are very sensitive to commit crime and work in the dangerous place to earn a living. So, they don't have much chance to study, which could potentially increases the number of social problems when they grow up.

I did my community service work with OHF during my school holiday. I was an interpreter for the founder and manager who are Singaporean. Robert Kee, one of OHF founders, has showed his love, generosity and kindness to the children by opening OHF. He also has his own future plan for the children in the case the children still need his help when they are grown up. He taught me about the idea of "give a man a fish, you feed him one day; teach him how to fish, you feed him for life". During the service, I was amazed by the children work commitment and work as a group spirit to achieve things that they set. But, I was also sad because the children have low self-esteem and don't have much confident. Most of them have different sad life stories to tell. I was also embarrassed about the receivers receiving behavior. It turned out the giver worked so work to transfer her skill to receivers, who don't bother much about learn new skill.

Although donation is a good helping hand, I still argue for the investment as a means to increase economy growth and reduce poverty, and eventually could give those unfortunate children a hope

for their life. By multiplier effect, one dollar that invests on poor people could generate more than one dollar in return. If not, the money will still be well-spent and benefit to the economy as a whole

\The Cambodia education system doesn't teach us about the spirit of community works. Therefore, most of us just don't care much about the important of the work. The policymakers have significant role to reduce poverty. To choose good policymakers it's the people decision.

Introduction

I was born in Phnom Penh, Capital of Cambodia. Cambodia used to be prosperous empire in the history of South East Asia. Angkor Empire was the period that most Cambodian can not forget and pray that the country would return to be a strong nation again. Angkor Wat and other temples are the symbol of strong Cambodia. Unfortunately, after the Angkor Empire, the country went through countless hard times, the invasions from neighbor countries, and internal wrestling for power, to name a few. In 1863, the country fell under French colonization, which helped ending the internal conflicts, but raised the tensions between the Cambodian people and the French colonizers, who unjustly controlled the country. Having struggling many years for independent, the country at last got independent from France in November 9th 1953. Since then until 1970, the country was given the name of "Peaceful Island". After 1970, the War with hidden enemy, War with ideology and War for power made the peaceful island became unstable, war-torn and no-man land. Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, unconsciously was given "ghost city" name during Khmer Rough, 1975-1979. Approximately 1.7 millions innocent people were killed during the genocide regime, and the world didn't give any attention or pressure to the regime. Although the genocide regime was overthrown in early 1979, civil war or internal war still existed, and

people were still dying because of wars and hunger. The Cambodian people were divided into different parts which controlled by different parties, who in reality struggle for power but used the name of liberation to encourage people to join or fight for them. The conflicts of all the parties were resolved by United Nation intervention in early 1990s. All the parties, except the Khmer Rouge party, agreed to set up a free and fair election in 1993. The internal conflicts hadn't been totally solved yet after the election. However, internal conflicts seemed to decrease and resolved after the political turmoil in 1997. Then after, the political situation started to show sign of change from violence to peace. People in the country once again can established their hope and build a good future for next generations.

Social Problems

Several years of war and political unrest made the country become one of the poorest nation in the world, with 55 years of life expectancy, high mortality, poverty, and inequality rate, and the highest corruption rate in the regime. The wars resulted in loss of family members, especially fathers or brothers, who are the main economy production force. Consequently, Orphans have existed in everywhere in the country. Because of lacking of economy assistant, the orphans have no chance to get education, and most of them become the root of social problem, such as gangsters, beggars, sex-slaves, drug-smugglers, etc. To blame those orphans for committing criminal is unjust and unethical to them given their background, but not to blame them for causing those social problems is unfair to the society as a whole. Eventually, these orphans would loss their hope to live and the meaning of life. Therefore, crime committed by them would likely to increase if government and social organization doesn't help those poor orphans.

For the fortunate ones who either father or mother still alive doesn't mean that they could enjoy their family life. Because of poverty, some children, who have parent, are forced to drop out from school, and go to work either in the farms or industries, which have potential danger to them, to help their family economy. In some cases, those children go to work in dangerous work zone, and some of them were seriously injured by the work, such as losing of hand or leg. Some young girls become prostitution. Moreover, violence in family has psychologically affects to young generations. There are many other social problems, and these problems could spread to other part of the country and they could potentially have bad effect to next generation if there isn't any intervention from the policymakers to tackle the problems. Hopefully, in the future, the country will be better so that the next generations can grow up mentally and physically healthy.

My Experience with Operation Hope Foundation

During my school holiday in 2005, I did my community work with Operation Hope Foundation (OHF), an orphan Non-government organization, for one month. There were 84 orphans when I worked there. My purpose of volunteering was to get to understand more about the life of countryside, due to the fact that I have been living in the city since I was born, and hopefully I could contribute whatever abilities I have to the society. The founder of the organization is Mr. Robert Kee, a retired Singaporean, and the manager is also Singaporean. Initially, I wanted to be a teacher teaching English, but Robert wanted me to be interpreter because he said sometimes there were many misunderstandings between him or manager and the Khmer staff or children, moreover he needed more interpreters to assist the arrival of Singapore or other foreign teams who came to do oversea community service in his organization. So, I volunteered as an interpreter. Arriving at the organization, Robert immediately asked me to interpret for him

to the children and staff over there. I was please to do the work. I hope that my contribution could improve OHF communication, and work efficiency. Few days at work, I started to wonder what kind of work the children going to do after they are old enough to make a living for themselves, since there has not any children left the organization to work yet. I asked Robert about my questions. He said he has thought about it too. At the moment, he is trying to educate the children and teach their skills as much as he could, and by the time they finish their high school, he will allow them to leave; in meantime, he is also trying to look for scholarship for the children to continue their study in university from OHF members, who are Singaporean working adults and I met most of them during a gathering in one member's house. In the gathering, Robert shared a lot of his work experience to them and tried to seek more fund for his plan. The members had discussed about the children future issues and they were trying to find out a way to help the children to the end. He also plans that if the children could not either find a job or get any scholarship, he will try to create jobs for the children, like farming, or small industry, etc. In fact, he has started the plan as he had already bought some land to prepare. I am impressed by his vision, his kindness, and generosity to those who he has never known before. I am really appreciated of his unselfishness mind. Meantime, I am thinking about what the government is doing. Why those who trying to help, in fact have been helping, are non-government organizations. I am also puzzle why the local poor people could not stand up and fight for themselves, why we need help from foreigners. Robert reminded me of one old saying, "give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; teach him how to fish, you feed him for life". The meaning is so simple, I think everyone knows it, even primary school students. Yet when come to action, a lot of people back out because it takes strong commitment to achieve the goals, and requires unconditional love and patient. That's what Robert is trying to do.

The first team came to OHF consisting of three people. One of them, Sister A (I forgot her name) taught food reflexology skill to the staffs for two days. The main purpose was to train the staffs the skill first, then let the staffs transfer the skill to the children so that the children would be able to practice their skill on next teams. The others focused on teaching skill. They taught the staffs some techniques of teaching, especially the way to teach English and bible effectively. I was an interpreter for the foot reflexology. One good thing of being an interpreter was that I could learn the skill by my self. The experience from the work taught me about the difference level of working between the giver and receiver. I noticed that Sister A, as a giver, was so patient and hard-working to teach the staffs, while some staffs took the course as a kind of entertainment. I was so embarrassed of their careless behavior. In turn out that the giver worked hard to help, while the receivers didn't care much or just simply ignored the chance of learning new skill. As a result, out of 8 people there was only one person could transfer the skill to the children. The result from the teaching was considered as useless, from my perspective, since the receivers didn't take the offer seriously. I knew that Sister A felt so sad of the staffs' behavior either though she didn't say anything, yet she was happy because there was a person who could pass her skill to the children. I guess Sister A would be very happy if she knew that the children could more or less know the skill and made some money from doing foot reflexology for the second team.

The second team was mixed team from different secondary schools and charity organizations in Singapore. There were around 30 members in the team. Their purposes of the service were to paint the OHF fences, teach the children English, Geography, Music, and Science. Few days before their arrival, the children in OHF and staff, including me, were gathering many times to prepare for the team arrival. The topic of the meetings was how to make optimal benefit or raising fund from the team. The manager, Siew Lee, decided to

organize FunFair events, an event to raise fund, and she inspired all the children (younger and older) to take part in the events. To the children, the payoff of the participation was the dream of going to Kompong Som, a coastal place very far from their place, because they were informed that the Organization didn't have enough funds to sponsor the holiday. So, if they really wanted to go, they must work hard to make as much money as they could from the team, and the other coming teams. The children seemed enthusiastically to participate. During the process of selection, I could see that there were some disappointment faces from the children who were not selected because they were too young. Instead of not being involved in the raising fund event, they were fully participated in other events, performance, and help older children do housework while they were away to prepare for the FunFair. There were many stores organized by Children during the Funfair events. The stores name and activities were totally designed by the children, for instead, there was Cambodia Pancake store, Fried Banana, etc. The children put a lot of efforts to learn new skill, such as making pancake, and fried banana, etc. Mean time, the young children also put a lot of efforts to make all the organization was clean and practiced for performance. Prior to the day, besides preparing for the Funfair, some of the older children also helped the younger ones to prepare for the performance, especially teaching them to dance as an individual and dance as a group. Siew Lee also made some feedback, but she didn't advise what the young children should perform. Instead, she appointed a leader and assistant leader in each team, for those who know the dancing skill well was the leader and teacher to those who don't know. In general, all the children did work very hard to prepare for the events, and made it successful story of the organization. As a result, the fund they raised was much more than the amount they expected. It gave hope to the children, and I think they were more confident after the activity. I was really impressed by the children teamwork spirit. They showed their hard work, unselfishness, and work as a strong team. Besides the contribution from the children, the

works from the managers, the staffs, and one Singaporean volunteer, a friend of Siew Lee, did make the event happen and make it successfully. My role during the whole events was to help the flow of communication, transferring the children suggestions and doubts to the manager, and explained the answer from the manager to the children. In the meantime, I also contributed some ideas and suggestions to the children. At the end of the day, there was so much fun from the performance, and everyone liked it. Moreover, the founder of the organization, Robert who was in Singapore at that time was impressed with the manager and children's capability.

The next day, after the children normal school hours, they had chance to attend classes organized by the team. I was interpreter for the English class. Studying with children mirrored me when I was young. I guess I was luckier than the children but I'm not smarter than anyone of them although I have a great opportunity to be given Singapore Scholarship. English is not even similar to Khmer, but the children learnt it very fast. They like studying, I would say.

It's worth to talk about some of the children background and what they have been doing in OHF. Most of children in OHF are either loss their father or mother. Their family was so poor that they couldn't afford to go to school. Most of them living in remote area where there is hardly can find anything besides house, farm, land, and water. All the children had gone through a lot of hard times before they are fortunate to be accepted to stay in the OHF. Such hard times are violence, starving, drinking unclean water, etc. Rean, a kid in OHF, told me and the manager about his family and his life before joining OHF. He said when he was at home he behaved like a gangster. He used to fight with other kids, and was beaten up by others too. His life time at home was full of fighting, hanging around, doing things that he shouldn't do. One day, He witnessed a frightening event. He said that one day he saw his uncle, who was drunk, trying to murder his father, and his older

brother saw it, and intervened to protect his father. Unfortunately, his older brother was killed. He didn't say anything more after that. He is a helpful and intelligent kid, but half of his childhood was full of violence and fear. I hope that the times he spends in OHF could correct his behaviors and orient his future life to a better path.

I witnessed one event happened in OHF. One day, an orphan was informed from friends that his father came to visit him. Instead of being happily to welcome his father, the kid ran into his dorm and hid himself under a bed. Until the house parents, the staff in charge of taking care the orphans, came in and asked him to get out from there and greeted his father. His father was so drunk in the morning. The kid was so frighten and cry. He was scare of his father. Fortunately, the father didn't do anything bad to him. I was told from others kid that the kid scare of his father because his father always beat him when he was at home, maybe when he was drunk. In order to keep the kid safe, the other family member sent the kid to OHF, but his father always came to OHF and wanted to take him back home. Until recently that his father stopped bother his life, and allowed him to stay in OHF. The kid's life is better in OHF than at home, and he's enjoying staying in OHF with other children.

Vibol is around 15 years old, but he's in grade 3 or 4. Asking why he is only in grade 3 or 4, he said he's been studied grade 1 for five years. He said when he was at home no one advised him to study, so he enjoyed hanging around with other children instead of going to school. However, he has been started to focus on his study when he joined OHF. It is because that there is somebody in OHF guides him and monitors his study. When I asked him to have lunch with me in a small restaurant he refused to join because he said he didn't want to be showed off, and he's scare to go in. I was so upset by his behavior because he has already set low self-expectation and no confidence for himself.

In short, all the children in the OHF have difference stories to tell. They would tell you everything if they trust and believe that you are their brother or sister. Although they have difference stories to tell, one thing I am sure that their stories are sad, tragedy, and violence. They really need some body to understand them, and be their mentor. I guess they wish that they could have a warm family like other kids. Nonetheless, they are trying to change their destiny by grabbing all the chances they are given at the moment.

I feel guilty of myself that I couldn't provide any help to them. And, I feel so ashamed that local people don't give a hand to help as foreigners do. I would always remind myself of the lessons I learnt from them, and do my best to inspire young Cambodian adult to give helping hand to those who are unfortunate. I hope my presence to them could give them hope, and let them know that we, Cambodian, never give up each other.

The role I played during my community service was very small, and the contribution to the community was a drop of water in the big ocean.

The orphans in OHF are just a small picture of all Cambodia unfortunate children. There are lots of children who living in much worse conditions and having many nightmares, and who are also waiting for people to offer a hand to them so that they could pull themselves to a beautiful world. After much consideration about what is the ideal way to help poor people, specifically the unfortunate children, I don't think donation is the best way to help people. I am wondering why the capital flows into Cambodia are foreign donations, loans, and grants, etc. Why not foreign investment? Sometimes, I feel that we have too much foreign donation to the level that we are always waiting for it. "Teach a man how to fish" is not only the idea of giving, it's more than that. OHF, so far as I know, is the best Non-

governmental organization in helping the orphans, and do others community works. But, if ask whether I want to work for OHF, I would say “no”. As a Cambodian, instead of giving, I think investment is the way that could impact more on society and people life. I would rather spend time focusing on in what area I could contribute to the society by investing. There is no country in the world can develop by waiting for foreign donation. There are all the countries in the world that can be developed and improved living standard by means of investment. I would urge, if I have a voice, to all the foreign donors to Cambodia try to convert the donate money to investing capital because NGO is too inefficiency, and uncompetitive, plus there are too many ineffective NGO already existing in Cambodia. In fact, according to economics development theory, economy growth and poverty have negative correlation. The higher the economy growth, the more poverty could be decreased, and so the life of poor people and children would be improved. But, the root of economy growth doesn't come from donation; it is the saving and investment that boost the economy growth. From this perspective, “teach a man how to fish” is not just only teaches him survival skills, but also to invest in him and let him work. If you, as a donor, donate some amount of money to poor people, I guess the amount you help is the amount of the money you give. Instead of giving, if you give your money as a form of investment, the receiver will make use of your money efficiently and you might be able to get a return if he success on his business. For the return you get, you still can invest into other poor people, and like the previous one you might get back your return. Base on that, one dollar u invest could be multiply and increase to much more than one dollar depending on how success of your investment. For the case you couldn't get the return, the amount of money you invest is still be well-used in the economy, which is much better than give one dollar and get one dollar. The bottom line is that donation is inefficient because the person who manages the funds doesn't really care much how to manage the fund effectively since he could ask for more if he's

run out of money. Moreover, the donation fund could be the root of corruptions. It could turn out that the donation fund doesn't help but worsen the situation.

The other way to improve the society and people life is to challenge the policymakers, especially in the case of corruption. This way is more dangerous, and it is all about politics. Cambodia is blessed with the natural resources, and talents. Yet, the policymakers couldn't figure out those capacities. They let those untapped resources passed away without knowing its existing. It could be the policymakers are not qualified or they give priority to themselves and family. So, to solve the problem is either to change those who are not qualified or trying to persuade those who qualified to give them priority to the country. And, the person who could do it is the People. So, people should monitor the policymakers, and make a good decision. Otherwise, the history will keep repeating, and Cambodia in the future will be the same as Cambodia today.

Conclusion

Actually, there are many sad and heartening stories to tell about the children, not only orphans in the OHF, but all the children in Cambodia. The time with OHF was the best holiday I ever had. For middle and rich young Cambodians, especially university students, I would suggest that they should spend some times doing community service with poor people before they embark on working life. But, since in our education system, no one tells us about how important of doing community service is, most young Cambodian just ignores doing community works. And, we simply think that since foreign donors are rich, they should help us. For us, we should wait for them to come and help.

To improve confidence among all the children, the parent should try to give as much love as they can to the children because love is root of children self-esteem and confidence. If the family violence still exists, most children would be psychologically affected and would pass the violence to next generation if there isn't any formal education given to them. Once again, the policymaker is playing important role in solving social problem by implement laws against family violence, especially the violence against the children. Unfortunately, in the case of Cambodia, it would take a lot of time to change people mindset, and it also depends on how effectively of publics sector's work and willingness to work on the case.

In conclusion, I have many wishes that they will become true one day. I wish that:

- The policymakers will change their mindset and focus more on people.
- All Cambodian, young and old, come together, help each other, grow together with the help from foreign donors.
- Education will improve, and all the children have the chance to be educated.
- Social problems, such as family violence, human trafficking, smuggle, etc would be slowly decreased.
- The Country will be named a "Peaceful Island" again.

Fifth Prize

Domestic Violence

Mr. Seng Sangha

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is one of the most vital issues that most of the nations in the world are carefully eyeing on. Domestic violence does not happen only in the under develop countries or in the developing countries but also in some of the develop countries. Seeing so, the government of Cambodia, which is one of the developing countries in Southeast Asia, announced the use of the domestic violence on 16th of November 2005.

Makara and Sophea, who are my neighbors, have been married for five years. They both have two children, a boy and a girl. The last four years he was being a teacher of English in one private institution in Phnom Penh and he really loved his family. For example, everyday after having finished his job, Makara immediately went home in order to spend his left time with his family. However, last year he resigned from his job and got another job as a bank worker. Since then he seemed to ignore his family both his wife and his two children. In stead of very single habit that he used to do before, he, now, brings home only argument to his family. Everyday after he finishes his work, he always spends time with his friends to eat out by ignoring his family. There was a day in December 2005 around one o'clock in the morning after having had a party with his friends, Makara argued and hit his wife. Having known that Makara was biting his wife, my family and I helped her by separating Sophea from her husband. We also tell him that biting or hitting is not the solution to the problem. He argued that it was his family affair, and he did not want us to interfere at all. We, having taken no time, brought Sophea and her two children to our house and let them stayed at our house for a night because we wanted to wait until the next morning to solve the problem. Next morning came and I, who was the witness, took Sophea to the authorities in order to fine good solutions. After having noted down all the points, the authorities invited Makara to their place in order to fine

possible solutions. By using the domestic law, the authorities educated and told him not to commit that again because that activity will bring only the negative point not the positive one. It can affect the feeling of the children who are studying and also the relationship between a wife and a husband. Makara promised that he would never let that activity happen again after he listened carefully to what the authorities said. Since then until now, he, his wife, and his children live happily together because he always stay home with his family by not going out and getting himself drunk. Moreover, every weekend he usually brings his family to visit somewhere. Whenever he has got a party, he always invites me to join by not caring that I am the one who had interfered his family affair. More than that, he praised me that I am the young who dares to help neighbors when they are in trouble.

In conclusion, on the behalf of a student and a usual citizen, I would like to request to all people that we should not commit all the activities that are not praised by the society like domestic violence and any others. All these activities will only bring bad effects to the family as well as the whole society.



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