



MALIS: Improving food security and market linkages for smallholders

Farmer groups are key to increased productivity and profitability for smallholders

Agriculture Co-op Gears up for Commercial Success

By Antoine Touch

Preah Vihear - Deep in the countryside, a stout, sun-tanned man shows the way inside a barn. The storage facility looks very solid, all metal sheets, concrete, and wooden beams, but there is no time to appreciate as Thuon San presses on. "We got the dryer in September 14 and the rice polisher in December 14. These were bought and installed with the support of MALIS, but the new road outside we paid from the Co-operative's funds," San says.

Mr. San presides over the Krabao Promtep Agriculture Co-operative (AC), supported by EU-FAO MALIS since 2013 along with 22 other ACs. Krabao Promtep has a growing membership of over 250 members, who managed to sell their first organic certified rice at the end of 2014 through a commercial contract with AMRU Rice Ltd. Together with 7 other ACs, they produced 1 200 tonnes of rice for potential export.

The dryer, thresher, seed cleaner, and other equipment donated through EU-FAO MALIS provide tremendous benefits to the AC by reducing operating costs and improving efficiency. The first training provided to the AC Management Committee was through a Farmer Business School (FBS). They were selected for the FBS after a feasibility study and engagement process and given access to postharvest equipment, technical advice, business counselling, and input credit.

This assistance came gradually as the people of this AC showed their willingness and ability to learn. "We started with small equipment and monitored performance, and we saw they could handle more," Dr. Iain Russell, Project Manager for MALIS explains. "Our strategy was to invest in success, and they were very successful. So we continued investing in them."

"The AC participated in various projects before, but we were especially happy to participate in the input credit scheme," Mr. San adds. And so they did, with an impressive track record. Every input credit for each member of the AC had a 100 percent repayment rate.

Mr. San thinks the exceptional rate was due to "the input credit system that was really good. We were provided with the equipment we needed, when we needed it. And the repayment was after the next harvest, so the farmers could repay easily. The part of it that went to the co-operative funds made us much stronger, too."

Ms Long Sophary,
FAO Agribusiness



Members of the Krabao Promtep Agriculture Co-operative demonstrate their rice milling capacity

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Advisor in Preah Vihear, sees a bright future ahead. "I want to see the Co-operative continue to grow. A strong AC can bring together the members of the community, and become a connector between the local people and businesses, with solid negotiating power".

"This community distinguished itself with their strong leadership skills, their business skills, their transparency, co-operation between members, and the trust they built," she adds. When asked how he feels about this AC being a model of success, Mr. San stays very humble: "It's not my role to judge our performance; I only want to develop the community."

"It's sad that MALIS has to stop but we're very grateful for everything they did for us," said San. "Until the end they try their best to help us find business opportunities." ■

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FAO Teams Up with WFP to Support Farmers Through Markets

By Botumroath Leburn



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Gianpietro Bordignon, Representative of WFP Cambodia, inspects rice quality at Krabao Promtep Agriculture Cooperative in Preah Vihear

Preah Vihear - To help smallholder farmers boost their agricultural production and sell their surplus at a competitive price, FAO collaborates with the World Food Programme (WFP) to examine the potential for smallholders to become competitive players in their local markets.

Through a series of field visits to several agricultural co-operatives (ACs) in Cambodia's remote northwest region, WFP is exploring the possibility of purchasing rice from local sources for its school feeding programme. The project feasibility will depend on the future availability of additional cash resources for WFP activities in-country. The co-operatives are currently supported by the EU-FAO MALIS project, but are on the lookout for future commercial prospects.

This pilot project in Cambodia would build on WFP's corporate knowledge from its Purchase for Progress (P4P) initiative, which has allowed WFP to try out new ways of leveraging its purchasing power to support agricultural and market development.

WFP Cambodia Representative Gianpietro Bordignon said the Krabao Promtep AC in Preah Vihear appears to have the potential for becoming a commercial partner due to their existing infrastructure and investment successes.

Bordignon explained that the P4P is a larger WFP initiative to address food insecurity and nutrition in many countries. "By providing market opportunities to smallholder farmers and supporting them to improve crop quality and increase their sales to WFP as well as other buyers, the initiative has transformed WFP's local procurement modalities into a vital tool to address hunger."

The discussions with WFP represent a wake-up call and inspiration for members of the AC to be more competitive. Ms Long Sophary, the FAO Agribusiness Advisor assisting Krabao Promtep, explained that for the first time the 250 farmer members see that better quality can bring better prices.

Dr. Ilean Russell said that the progress to healthier communities is clearly visible, with new roads, more income for members, a budget for social responsibility, contracts for sale of organic rice and the potential for supply of rice to the schools, effectively feeding the children of their own village. "WFP buying locally means a double investment in the community," he said. Dr Russell was confident that "joint support from FAO and WFP contributes to the health of the community and can serve as a good basis for planning a local procurement process."

Above all, Ms Sophary said, "Smallholder farmers need confidence that there will be buyers for what they grow." ■



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Improving Water Supply, Food Security and Resilience for Selected Smallholder Families

By Antoine Touch



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Preah Vihear - Everything seems still under the glare of the blazing midday sun. Occasional cars pass by the farm, leaving swirls of dust behind them. Roeun Ry and his son sit in the shade under his house, waiting for the unforgiving heat to pass. It is already March, and the dry season is almost at its peak.

"The pond you can see there is where we used to get water," Mr. Ry explains. "But by April it dries out completely." Ry and his family received a 2000 litre water tank in the previous week as part of a new multipurpose MALIS initiative that aims to increase farm household water supplies, be it for drinking purposes, hygiene or crop growing. The initiative relates to rooftop water collection for homestead gardening.

Plastic water tanks were provided to 250 families in 23 communes in Oddar Meanchey and Preah Vihear, and come with other inputs and training for drip irrigation and plastic mulching, composting and vegetable growing. Beneficiaries will have greater capacity to maintain a sustainable, productive vegetable garden extending further into the dry season using the water for supplementary irrigation for the home garden.

"Now, with the tank we can get good water to use in the house, then for the trees. Once we harvest [in the garden], we can even earn some money," Ry continues.

Another beneficiary, Mrs. Nun Khay, is a 24 year old farmer and mother of a 2 year old son. She shows us her tank, then points to the field behind the treeline: "First we use the water to drink. But we also use it for irrigation. We started to grow morning glory and pumpkins."

Participation in the MALIS nutrition education sessions was one of the factors deciding which family would receive the tanks, so as to multiply the effects on the community. The training is reflected in the vegetables she has chosen: both have a high nutritional value.

Mith Sary, 26, is the mother of a 20 month old girl and a perfect example of the interconnectedness. She says "I first saw my neighbour make *bobor khap krop kroeng* for her child, and decided to attend the same training so I could cook it too. Then I was given the tank and now I can grow the vegetables. Because I have the drip irrigation, I don't have to water them and that saves me a lot of time."

"That's exactly what we were trying to achieve," comments Dr. Ilean Russell, project manager of EU-FAO MALIS. "These different activities interwoven in the same community."

A higher quality of drinking water, better hygiene, and home grown vegetables all contribute to better living standards and improved nutrition and food security.

For Dr. Russell, this package cannot fail: "If they drink cleaner water or use it for hygiene purposes, they improve their health, which also contributes to good health and nutrition. If they use it to keep

a vegetable garden, they get most of the nutrients necessary for a balanced diet. Whichever way the farmers decide to use the extra water, we win."

"Even the simple fact of increasing water storage and enhancing drought resilience will make a huge difference to the households," he says. As MALIS is coming to an end in June 2015, a follow up will be crucial. As part of its disaster risk reduction mandate, a follow-on FAO project for DIPECHO will continue the work with roof top water collection and storage to reduce vulnerability to drought. ■



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Women's Affairs Engages Husbands in Cooking Contest for Improved Nutrition of Young Children

By Botumroath Leburn



Contestants from teams 5 (left) and 4 (winner) compete in cooking Cambodia's famous enriched porridge – *bobor khap krop kroeuung*

reasons for not cooking *bobor khap krop kroeuung* (an enriched porridge using locally available ingredients).

"Creating a supportive environment for women at home is essential for changing family feeding practices," said Dr. Ilean Russell, EU-FAO MALIS Project Manager. "We realized that men needed to be actively involved in the nutrition programme because women's behaviour has not changed in some cases, even after attending the nutrition education sessions conducted by the NGO Malteser International for MALIS."

With the support from the EU-FAO MALIS project, PDoWA in Oddar Meanchey was able to successfully launch the country's first 'couples cooking competition'. The event conducted in Yeang Tbong village in Anlong Veng District consisted of nine couples with six judges from the FAO and PDoWA. Three criteria were used to select the winners: taste, smell and thickness of the *bobor*. The prizes included baskets of cooking utensils, household supplies and nutritious foods.

"I was surprised that we won," said Vankom Seoun, 32, father of a 17 month old baby girl. "This was my first time preparing *bobor khap krop kroeuung* and this contest made me realize that cooking is not an easy task." Seoun vowed to help his wife with daily

household activities, especially with cooking for and feeding his daughter.

Ms. Ek Sophearum, Director of the PDoWA in Oddar Meanchey explained, "At our nutrition education training, participation is usually 90 percent women and this is why we wanted to involve men".

"One of the objectives of the cooking competition is to assess the couple's knowledge and skills in preparing *bobor khap krop kroeuung*" stated Ms Yeng Leap, PDoWA's Nutritionist.

"I hope these husbands will continue to help their wives at home, and understand that everyone in the household needs to participate in order to improve children's diets," concluded PDoWA's Director, Ms. Sophearum. ■

Oddar Meanchey - Despite overall decreasing chronic malnutrition rates in Cambodia, the issue remains a serious concern in Oddar Meanchey and Preah Vihear provinces. To improve the diets and nutritional status of infants and young children, the Provincial Department of Women's Affairs (PDoWA) in Oddar Meanchey organized a cooking competition for couples for the first time.

Over the three years since the EU-FAO MALIS project started, there is evidence that cooking and feeding practices of mothers and caregivers have improved, and their nutrition-related knowledge has increased. However, the adoption of improved complementary feeding practices still faces many challenges. Extensive consultation with mothers and caregivers shows that lack of time, resources and family support are often cited as

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