

# Community Empowerment in Support of Community Fisheries

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*A case study by Ngeth Senglay*

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Performed at Koh Sneng village, Koh Sneng commune, Thalaborivat district, Stung Treng province



Nowadays, development is undertaken through decentralization, meaning that decision making happens from the very bottom level to the top. However, development must link to existing natural resource conservation efforts to ensure work undertaken doesn't impact the environment in a negative way or contribute to climate change. The Cambodian Rural Development Team has been implementing a project for nine months at the Ramsar site in Stung Treng province, a site rich in natural resources, landscapes, tradition and culture.

Koh Sneng is one of 21 villages in the Ramsar site in Stung Treng, located on an island along the Mekong River. It has an area of 4,000,000 square meters, and it is about 25 kilometres from Stung Treng town.

Many people living in this village say that once upon a time, there was a wildlife hunter named Kham Phorn living here, who often wore an animal horn. One day, he faced battle with a big wild pig and chased it down, losing his animal horn in the process, but defeating the pig and dining on cooked pork that night. The island became known as Keng Mou Thork, Lao for 'Wild Pig'. After that, Lao ethnic communities began to arrive tempted by the fishing and tales of wild pork. Time passed, and ethnic Khmer people also came to live here. Most of villagers have relationships in Laos and often use the Lao language in their daily lives.





Mr. Chann Theourng, 25 years old, is a popular single man involved in community development in Koh Sneng village and other communities in Thalaborivat district. Mr. Chann Theourng has a good standard of living along with the rest of his family. His father, Mr. Eang Chann, 56 years old, is the first assistant of Koh Sneng commune council. His mother, Mrs. Nar Meourng, is 52 and is a farmer, and his other four sisters whom are students also help with chore work, small business admin and farming. The sisters are: Miss. Chann Bor, 20 years old, Miss. Chann Khor, 18 years old, Miss. Chann Khesnar also known as Am, is 16 years old and Miss. Chann Lin, is 14 years old.

Mr. Chann Theourng is studying at only grade 8 because there is no school in this area and has no money to continue his education at the district or town level. His main jobs are farming, plantation sowing, fishing and other smaller jobs like all-season crops, small business admin, and he also gets a small income from visitors who come to stay at his house (most visitors come to stay at his house). He added, “Nowadays, I have a lot of work to do; house work and cooperating with many organizations. My daily jobs are fishing, working one hectare of plantation (potato, soy bean, corn, cashew etc)...”. He is also a boat taxi driver! He often brings visitors from other sites to his village and attends bi-monthly community meetings. His average income is about 2 million Riel per year.



Koh Sneng community is similar to other areas in Cambodia; many organizations cooperating with each other for sustainable development and natural resource conservation and working to reduce poverty. Mr. Chann Theourng has creative ideas and the willingness to participate. He has been voted by people in his community to be their representative and acts as secretary to the saving group community executive, facilitated by CIRD and CECAC since 2008. He is also the community chief of the NTFP group. CRDT has been facilitating and capacity strengthening community executives and other members, he has been recently selected to be the community secretary of agriculture development and rice production. In short - he's involved.

Mr. Chann Theourng expressed his happiness and said “I was a boy living in poor village with low education, but after I started learning and working closely with organizations, I gained much knowledge and experience such as economic analysis, plan making and implementing, budget planning, agriculture techniques, how to collect good quality NTFPs...”. He kept smiling.

He added that all organizations that worked in his community had helped him understand specific skills and provided a lot of help. The main things that made him happy were friendly and knowledgeable staff that gave their time to help the community. “I like working in groups, I recognize that we see success working this way”.

“It's not only me but also most villagers that are angry with illegal fishermen. They are used to living this way, they don't think ahead and didn't participate in community meetings.”





The Cambodian Rural Development Team is undertaking a project named Sustainable Development to Support Wise Use and Conservation of the Wetland Ramsar Site in Stung Treng, Cambodia to ensure development which doesn't impact the environment or natural resources. Hence, the activities which CRDT has proposed are community capacity building and the setting up of a network which will cooperate with organization partners and increase livelihoods in the community and even natural resources.

During the discussion, Mr. Chann Theourng strongly emphasized that for groups to succeed, they need to participate in team work closely with other members and other stakeholders, full of enthusiasm, respect each other and keep a good relationship. He kept smiling and continued, "I thought it was good that CRDT has been working with existing CBOs and increasing relationships with saving groups or agricultural or fishery groups, I like unity in community development. in short CRDT has been combining all CBOs in order to develop together, take care and love natural resources and joint ideas and approaches."

However, illegal fishing, illegal logging, and wildlife hunting are still present in this village and are still obstacles for conservation and development. It's just like what Mr. Chann Theourng said, "Participation is very important, without it, we will not succeed." Mr. Chann Theourng had the last idea that, "working together benefits everyone. If we looked at the saving activities, other agricultural activities and these are the part of conservation participation, because we reduced fishing activity in the lake and stopped going to the forest. We need to participate with organizations to get experience and learn how to protect our natural resources sustainably".



Mrs. Bour Khamtong, 38 years old living with her husband Mr. Bun Teng, 45 years old in the same commune as Mr. Chann Theourng also had the same comments. She was an accountant in a fishery group and also the secretary in the natural disaster committee. She said that, “I devoted much of my time without salary because I'm strongly committed to natural resource conservation. And, I'm a woman, and have more to share than just how to cook rice! I must help my community for the young generation”.

Natural resource conservation is not an easy job. It's not just an improvement in the physical environment but in peoples characteristics and behaviour too. Reaching to these points, Mrs. Bour Khamtong had a this to say, “I do not want to quit community work because community members had problems managing the project budget. We need to start again.”

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