

GRAISEA STORIES OF CHANGE

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Increasing farmers' income through organic and certified rice production in Preah Vihear Province in Cambodia



COVER PHOTOS BY: CHOR SOKUNTHEA | OXFAM

Located in the north, Preah Vihear (PVH) is one of the poorest provinces in Cambodia. While certain market influences bring opportunities to the province, smallholders—particularly women—are often excluded from these potential benefits. Hence, PVH farmers, especially those in Sangkum Thmey district, suffer from low prices for rice and high production costs.

THE CHALLENGES IN THE DISTRICT OF SANGKUM THMEY

Farmers in Sangkum Thmey have plenty of potential to produce organic rice for a higher price, as most of their rice fields are free from chemical pesticides and they use local rice varieties. However, agricultural cooperatives (ACs) in the district are not functioning, and—due to budgetary constraints and lack of incentives—there is limited support from the provincial department and district office of agriculture. Likewise, these ACs do not have the capacity to manage their members and to link their products, particularly rice, to the market with higher prices. Hence, farmers produce rice and other crops for family consumption only, while other families have left PVH to look for employment in provincial towns and cities.

TAPPING THE POTENTIAL OF PVH FARMERS

In order to tap their potential, PVH farmers should have the capacity to follow organic rice production standards and to put in place an effective internal control system to comply with these standards. Following these standards not only means producing organic and certified rice, but also taking into account socioeconomic and environmental aspects, as well as the health of producers and consumers.

Moreover, ACs should have the capacity to lead and manage their organization, and to support their members with appropriate production techniques, production input costs, and linkages to markets.

GRAISEA INTERVENTIONS

Through the Gender Transformative and Responsible Agribusiness Investments in South East Asia (GRAISEA) programme, Oxfam in Cambodia and its partners developed the capacity of four ACs in Sangkum Thmey (Ro Ang Romknea Aphiwat, Sen Kong Aphiwat, Sdao Aphiwat, and Ranakse Preah Khan Aphiwat) in organizational development and management. A total of 153 organic rice



INTERNAL INSPECTORS CONDUCT MEMBER-FIELD INSPECTION TO ENSURE THAT VARIETIES, FERTILIZER USE, AND LAND SIZE COMPLY WITH THE STANDARDS. (PHOTO BY OXFAM IN CAMBODIA)

producers—100 of which are women—were likewise trained on organic and certified rice production.

INCREASE IN FARMERS' INCOME

Farmers in the four ACs in Sangkum Thmey are now applying the lessons they learned from capacity development sessions. An external certification body called ECOCERT audited their processes and found that these farmers also comply with organic rice production standards. As a result of project interventions, 251 tons of paddy rice had been sold to Amreth Rungroeng Rice Company, or AMRU Rice, as of January 2018.

AS A RESULT, THE FARMERS CAN NOW SELL THEIR RICE AT A HIGHER PRICE (AN INCREASE OF 20 TO 30%) THAN THE NORMAL MARKET.



RELEVANT RICE VALUE CHAIN STAKEHOLDERS ATTEND THE INCEPTION MEETING TO SHARE PROJECT PLANS AND STRENGTHEN COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION. (PHOTO BY OXFAM IN CAMBODIA)



ORGANIC AND CERTIFIED RICE PRODUCTION IS VERY IMPORTANT NOT ONLY IN HELPING COOPERATIVE MEMBERS INCREASE THEIR INCOME, PRODUCE SAFE PRODUCTS, AND CONTRIBUTE TO ENVIRONMENT CONSERVATION BUT ALSO IN STRENGTHENING THEIR LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, WHICH ULTIMATELY LEADS TO SUSTAINABILITY.

—NHEM TANCHENG, PROJECT MANAGER AT AMRU

Aside from organizational development and management, GRAISEA also assisted the four ACs in developing and implementing policies and procedures on gender equality and agricultural marketing. Among these four target ACs, three were linked together to build the provincial AC union Preah Vihear Meanchey Union of Agricultural Cooperative (PMUAC). Development and Partnership in Action (DPA), the GRAISEA partner that leads this initiative, is expected to hand over the leadership and management of PMUAC to its members in June 2018.

STRONG AND EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION LEADING TO CHANGE

Crucial to making these changes last will be the strong and effective collaboration with different stakeholders that support the rice value chain in PVH, such as the district office of agriculture, provincial department of agriculture, World Vision Cambodia, Supreme National Economic Council, AMRU, and Sano Rice, which serves as the buyer company in the Netherlands. Prior to the start of the project, an inception meeting was held, where all stakeholders committed to support the project.

Together with DPA, AMRU also helped—especially in the early stages—in raising awareness to build trust among the producers, supporting nongovernmental organizations, and linking with buyers. The commitment of partners coupled with clear plans and innovative training skills was vital for community internal inspectors and producers to understand, record, and develop supporting documents for external auditing.

PROSPECTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The collaboration among relevant stakeholders and skillful and committed staff is critical and should be continued. To increase the number of producers, raising awareness by using existing successful producers as models and case studies was found effective. In the future, ACs need to further strengthen their capacity not only to manage their cooperatives but also to mobilize other farmers to become producer group members and to link other products into the market.

GRAISEA is a regional programme funded by the Government of Sweden. It aims to improve the livelihoods of women and men small-scale producers in Asia through responsible, gender transformative value chains and private sector investments.

For more information about the programme, contact the GRAISEA Programme Management Unit at graisea.pmu@oxfam.org.uk. Bangkok, Thailand | www.oxfam.org.uk/graisea