

## **Khourn Vichet: From a Factory Worker to a successful Young Agri-Entrepreneur**

**Khourn Vichet**, a 24 year-old youth, is living in Mean Chey village, Prey Veng district, Prey Veng province. He finished his study in grade 10 in 2001. After finishing school he worked in a garment factory for four and half years. He said that initially, he could save 600 USD per year and 200 USD in the second year, but not in the third and fourth year due to his increased daily expenses such as food and rental ...etc. Vichet find his life to be difficult.

In July 2008, Vichet heard the announcement of **Young Agri-Entrepreneurs "YAE"** program from CEDAC Radio Program. The program was calling for applicants to join the program. He applied for this in his hometown, Prey Veng province. After completing the writing test and interview, Vichet was selected to join the YAE program. He immediately stopped working in the factory.

Being joining the program, Vichit undertook his first assignment for six months. With this, he was asked to do some visit, observe, and interviews with farmers and writing reports as well as his own history. At first, he found it very difficult to complete, but he tried and finally reached a successful stage.

During the six months period, Vichet learnt many new things; they include the following ecological agriculture techniques:

1). **System of Rice Intensification (SRI)**: He has applied some SRI steps; such as use of healthier, younger and fewer seedlings and transplanting in rows, use of compost etc. With this, Vichet found a difference on his rice yields. In 2007, he yielded only 2160 kg of rice on 1 ha of land, but in 2008 (after applying SRI), the rice yield increased to 3960 kg. At the same time, inputs applied reduced.

2). **Composting** to grow vegetables: He used to grow vegetables on 50m<sup>2</sup> land by using chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Expenses for materials was 80, 000 riel (20 USD) which does not include seeds yet, and he could earn 120,000 riel (30 USD) from his products. So, the gross income is 10 USD. After learning in the program, he grew vegetable on the same land without using chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The expenses amounted to 14,000 riel (3.5USD) including seeds. He could earn 160,000 riel (40 USD) from half of his products. The difference between conventional and new practices was that he applied mixed cropping rather than mono cropping. He grows mustard, water convolvulus, yard long beans, cucumbers and different herbs in his vegetable plot.

3). **Fish raising**: He used to raised 3000 Pangasius djambal fish (trey Pra) in his 25m x 30m pond. He used to feed the fish by buying fish food from the market. Therefore, when he caught the fish after 8 months of raising he found there were only 150 fish. Each fish weighed 400 grams ion average. So, he lost a lot with this fish raising practice. After attended the training course on fish raising from the program, he purchased 700 Pangasius djambal fish to raise. He found that in just two months, some of his fish weighed 200 grams by feeding available food from his own resources such as rice bran waste from his vegetable garden and kitchen etc. He was very proud that he could find a way to cure his fishes as well.

4). **Ecological chicken raising**: He uses to raise about 100 chickens before joining the training curse, but all chicken died. After the course, he started again without hesitation. He purchased 15 hens to raise. He was not following the conventional method, so he built a chicken cage 5 m x 3 m, with a terrace of 15 m x 20 m and a

bamboo fence surrounded the terrace. After two months, some of his hens gave him eggs.

Through the YAE program, Vichet has joined the saving for self reliance group. The group saves 5000 riel (1.25 USD) per month and this has increased up to 10,000 riels (2.5 USD) per month. The total amount of saved money now is 70 thousands riel (175 USD). With this collective savings, Vichet and other group members are eligible to take a loan to develop their agriculture practices and businesses to improve their living conditions.

Now Vichet has found that his family enjoys a better life. He asked his wife to stop working at the garment factory to help him managing the farm. "Within 6 months I could earn around 500 USD from what I practice; SRI and vegetable growing." He said. This does not include the consumption of my family members. He added.

He now plans to enlarge his Multi-Purpose farm on the 0.5 ha of his rice field. He has already dug a canal around his field. With this, he plans to raise fish in the rice field and apply SRI on the whole rice field. Vichet expects an income of 2000 USDs in 2009 and 7-8 thousands USDs in the next 5 years.

As an impact of the program and his implementation on his own farm, there are 20 neighboring farmers who have asked him to share and teach them new agriculture technologies.

It is important to note, that CEDAC in collaboration with (Society for Action and Change for Rural Education and Development) in Prey Veng province SACRED, implemented a project namely **Young Agri-Entrepreneurs "YAE"**, from July 2008 to June 2010. It was funded support by HEKS. The objective of this project is to build the capacity of rural youth in taking up a professional career in agriculture and to play an active role in contributing to overall rural development.

