

Civil Society and Pro-Poor Markets Case Study

Farmer Solidarity Community Increases its Voice in the CIP process

Samakum Kaksekor Samaki Mean Chey, is a Community Based Organization (CBO) in Angkor Chey I Village located in the Kampot province. This farmers association was established on February 3rd, 2006 with 72 members representing 5 different groups. Initially the CBO's activities focused on the development and dissemination of improved and innovative agricultural techniques, as well as collective savings. The group's activities centered on income generation and had very little interaction with local government or involvement in the Commune Investment Programme (CIP) process. In fact, many of the members did not fully understand the CIP development process, or the benefits of working with the commune council and being involved in the CIP process.

JOINING CSPPM

Recognizing the need to build its capacity, the CBO registered with the Civil Society and Pro-Poor Markets project in October 2008. Once cooperation with CSPPM began, the group received training in natural resource management, community business promotion, and increasing voice. More specifically, members learned about the following:

- Proposal writing and project management
- CBO management and CBO planning and development
- How to increase voice to the CC and others
- Community business concepts
- The CIP process and participation

Since cooperation with CSPPM began, *Samakum Kaksekor Samaki Mean Chey* has dramatically improved its communication with the Damnak Kantout commune council (CC) members, especially regarding the CIP development process. CBO executives have been attending the commune council's monthly meeting to learn about CIP process as well as to present on the CBO's progress and problems within the community. During these monthly meetings, the CC shares information on current activities, achievements, and the CC work plan, as well as information regarding the government allocated C/S and NRM-L funds.



“This year I am very happy because I have observed the CBO representative attending both the monthly commune meetings and the CIP process meetings. Based on this, I was able to learn a lot from the CBO such as their progress and work plan. In turn, [I] had the chance to present the activities and plan of the commune council. There is strong cooperation and communication with CBO executive members which ensures a good flow of information between the commune council and the community.” - Mr. Chheum Neth, Commune Chief of the Damnak Kantout Khan Tboung commune council

Voicing the Needs of the Community

Not only have CBO executives learned more about the commune council's role and its budgeting, they have successfully voiced their concerns at the CC's meetings. During the first phase of the CIP process, meetings were held at both the commune and village levels. It was here that CBO leader, Mrs. Chey Siyath raised several issues such as water gate construction for the irrigation of crops and vegetables, needed improvements for natural resource management, and needed assistance in marketing community products such as rice, potatoes, taro, and peanuts. At this same meeting, Miss Pech Sineth, the youth group representative, mentioned problems which included school abandonment, migration, and non- attendance in both family and community work. She also suggested that the CC consider alternatives such as providing vocational training or supporting the youth group through both funding and ideas for educational and vocational opportunities. As a result of this participation, the CC incorporated these needs into the CIP table 1.1, which outlines the community's priorities for future action.

As the CBO increases its voice through involvement in the CIP, village members are also recognizing the important role that the CBO plays in community development. As a result, more and more villagers are interested in joining the CBO. Membership has risen to 103 from the initial 72 members and over half of the current members are women. Additionally, the CBO has facilitated the formation of a local youth group.

Achievements in Voice

"Voice" according to CSPPM has three dimensions: Voice Awareness, CSO Structure and Voice Action. Since collaboration with CSPPM began, the voice of the CBO has increased significantly. Some achievements include:

- Increased awareness of the CIP development process, the amount of funding earmarked for NRM and how to access funds
- Active participation in the CIP process by attending both CIP and monthly CC meetings at the commune and village levels in order to voice the needs of the community
- Improved structure and an increased membership, including female membership (58% female)

Since joining the CSPPM project, CBO members are impressed that they are gaining more knowledge and have a better understanding of how to develop a proposal. They also recognize the importance of being involved in the CIP process. Mrs. Chey Siyath, proudly illustrated her knowledge of the CC stating that *"the [CC's] annual budget is around 104 million riel, including 66 million riel for the C/S fund and 24 million riel for the NRM-L fund."* Knowing this increases transparency and helps the community in accessing these funds to address its needs.

Samakum Kaksekor Mean Chey Today

In addition to its increased voice, the CBO has continued to strengthen its previous activities. To date the association has mobilized approximately 22 million riel in collective savings through providing loans to their members.

Current activities of this group now include:

- Collective Saving for Self-Reliance (SfR) ;
- Promoting agro-ecological innovations and conducting action research
- Promoting natural resource management;
- Increased voice through articulating issues to the commune council on behalf of the community in the Commune Development Plan (CDP) and the Commune Investment Program (CIP);
- Promoting community businesses
- Acting as a mutual-help group
- Managing a rice bank