

CEDAC Meets With PLHAs in Prey Veng Province - We will not surrender to HIV/AIDS

Baphnom: On November 24, 2011, CEDAC's President, Dr. Yang Saing Koma and Mr. Khim Sophanna, CEDAC's Senior Advisor, participated in a quarterly meeting of People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLHAs) at CEDAC's office in Baphnom district, Prey Veng province. 53 participants, including 32 women, who are infected by the HIV/AIDS virus, came from three districts (Baphnom, Kampong Trabek and Preah Sdach) to attend the meeting. They were invited by CEDAC to share their successful stories after cooperating with CEDAC's project. The project has been supported by EED, Germany, and Kasumisou Foundation

During the meeting, Mr. **Bun Savuth, 46 years old**, who lives in Svay Chek village, Prey Chhor commune, Kampong Trabek district, shared his experiences concerning vegetable home gardens, and chicken and fish raising. He plants vegetables around his house and earns on average 8,000-10,000 Riel per day (2-2.5 US \$). He currently raises around 100 chickens and 500 fishes. He is also a chairman of a thirteen member saving association. He was in despair after knowing that he has HIV/AIDS for the rest of his life. He was about to die. People in his village distanced themselves from him. But, after cooperating with the project his life has changed completely. He is now living with hope for a brighter future.

Similarly, Mrs. **Oeur Nang, 38 years old**, who comes from Pornvath village, Prasath commune and Kampong Trabek district, shared her success stories by saying that she plants vegetables around her house to supply her daily consumption needs and she has a small business that generates a stable income for her family. She earns around 350,000 Riel or 85 US \$ per month. Recently, she was able to rebuild her house spending 1,500 US \$. Currently, she is a vice chairman of a saving association with 11 members and the saving capital is 3,270,000 Riel (about 800 US \$). The saving money is used to lend to members with a 2% monthly interest rate to do business.

The third presenter was Mrs. **Chhit Sophors, 34 years old, lives in Boeung Protep village, Cheang Dek commune, Kampong Trabek district**. Her husband died in 2006 of AIDS. When she realized that she is infected with the deadly virus, she thought about committing suicide. A bitter experience was that one day, she went to a neighbor to borrow just 5,000 Riel (1.25 US \$). But, she was turned away. At that point, she was very ill, thin and felt hopeless – almost on the brink of death. Additionally, she has two children to take care of. After cooperating with the project, she regained hope and a strong determination to survive. Currently, she raises 5 cattle, 7 pigs, 8 chickens and has a small business at home. She built her own house and has one new motorbike, one bio-digester plant, one toilet (only 29% of rural Cambodians own hygienic toilets) and rice fields to support her family.

The main factors that motivated them to continue their lives are as follows:

- Strong will to turn hopeless situations into opportunities
- Inner strength to survive and take care of children and family members
- Moral support from the project, from the local authorities, from the communities
- Interacting with other people who share similar living conditions
- Has hope in life
- Has group members who support each other

It was a very interesting meeting in which participants learned about the success stories from PLHAs. There are around 52,118 PLHAs in Cambodia. The infection rate (prevalent) is about 0.8% among adults. Cambodia is praised by the international community for combating AIDS successfully. CEDAC programs help to transform hopeless and dying PLHAs to become important human resources for the society.

