

Visit to Cambodia in November 2011 by Brian and Jackie Cole, accompanied by friends Keith and Penny Honeyman, Henry and Vicki Saltmarsh and John and Penny Taylor

We planned our trip to Cambodia specifically to visit the new O'Sampur School that had recently been completed and to see one of the Reflect Centres built in 2008. Sarah Higson of Action Aid, London helped with the organization of the visits and she accompanied us on our visits, along with Chantara Kimsan and Thida Kong of Action Aid, Cambodia. They were of enormous help enabling us to meet and talk with many of the people we are supporting, for which we were all very grateful.



Our first visit was to a rice project in the village of Kork Thmei, about 45 minutes from Siem Reap. The rice project had been set up a couple of years previously, by the community, so members could buy, store, sell and loan rice to each other. This enables the group to buy rice from the market when it is cheaper and store in the village for later use. They have also set up a savings group, as previously they had to borrow from money lenders, which was very expensive.

Early the next morning, we left Siem Reap to visit the Kosh Snoul Reflect Centre and the O'Sampur School. The drive took about an hour and a half initially along well made up roads, but when we turned off the main road we realized how devastating the recent floods had been, leaving many homes totally mud and water logged and had we not been in 4x4's we would have been unable to complete our journey.



When we arrived at the Centre it was wonderful to see a room full of smiling children, who sang a welcome song for us. This Centre is used for children of all ages who are too poor to attend school and it was so good to see the children playing with the toys, puzzles and games the ACF had sent out a couple of years ago.

Also many of the children have benefited from the bicycles we sent out as, without these, they would be unable to attend the Centre. Upstairs parents, teachers and members of the community meet to discuss various problems that arise and we met the Commune chief who had worked to help clear the area of landmines.



We then drove a few miles along the road and arrived at the O'Sampur School. The new school building has 5 light and airy classrooms with rows of 2 seater desks; about 250 children attend in the morning with a similar number in the afternoon. The children seemed very happy, so well behaved and very smart in their school uniforms of sparkling white shirts and grey trousers/skirts. The old school building is next to the new one and they still use one of these classrooms as a library, even though it has holes in the roof and is very dark and miserable. Opposite the school is the teachers office and a double toilet block. The area around the classrooms is very rough ground and needs a lot of work carried out, but hopefully in the future this will be done.



Cambodia is an amazing country and we all came home with many wonderful memories. They are a very resilient people who believe that if all children are offered an education, they have a chance to break the cycle of poverty which will give them new hope that they can move forward with their lives. My lasting memory will be of the wonderful smiles that greeted us from everyone, especially the gorgeous children, amidst unbelievable poverty and difficulties which we in the West do not experience. Despite all their problems and lack of material goods the Cambodian people seem very hopeful that the future is looking brighter for them and with more and more people visiting their country we can only hope that this is the case. I think they have much to teach us.

