

**Brief Report on Community Reflect Centre Building**  
**Bringing UK Volunteers and Community People Together**  
**25 November - 03 December 2007**  
**Cambodia**

### **Project Background**

ActionAid Cambodia has been working with local partner organizations in Banteay Meanchey and Siem Reap province since 2005 on women's rights, right to food, right to education, HIV/AIDS and governance. The 2 provinces are located near the Thai border in the North-West of Cambodia where more than 50% of people have a shortage of food for 3 - 9 months each year. This project would focus on the involvement of the most vulnerable groups within these communities including widows, men, women, children, people living with HIV/AIDS, disabled people and landless families.

ActionAid Cambodia and local partners work to bring these groups of people together on a regular basis to find collective solutions to the problems they face, and encourage the sharing of information and support. The problem lies in that there is no place available in either village for these meetings to take place. At present they happen in temporary places – pagodas, a villager's house, under a tree, but these don't provide the stability, storage space or privacy needed for these meetings to successfully achieve change.

These regular meetings are known as the 'village circle', or 'REFLECT centres'. Facilitated by community and group facilitators, these centres look to achieve the following:

- Sharing information regarding the progress of support programmes in the village
- Discussing topical issues affecting the day to day lives of these vulnerable groups (land grabbing, domestic violence, health, deforestation, HIV/AIDS etc.)
- Providing a non-formal education for children who aren't part of the formal education system because they either live too far from the school, families are too poor to support them going to school, or where they have to work to support their families.
- Learning space for community people if we have any kind of trainings/workshops

There is also a need for the following which could be achieved by the development of this project:

- Somewhere for the development of Women's health activities including women's health counselling, physical check-ups, HIV/AIDS counselling & support groups.
- Somewhere to hold literacy classes for adults and the elderly.
- A pre-elementary school for 3-6 year olds – currently not available in the area.
- Somewhere to socialise in any special event (Women's Rights Day, Children's Day, HIV/AIDS day and so on) which we can bring the collective voice.

### **Brief activities**

The centres were designed, developed and constructed by the local people who would be benefiting from it. Community facilitators and vulnerable groups came together to agree on the design, purposes of use, location, materials to be used, people to be employed, time frame and finally the construction itself.

#### **1. Banteay Meanchey Province**

**First day orientation** - There was an evening introduction and orientation at Orchid Angkor Hotel On Sunday, 25 November 2007. Keshav Gauman, Country director of ActionAid Cambodia, welcomed and briefed ActionAid-Cambodia program to the volunteers, and then Ms. Hum Boramey, Resource Mobilisation Coordinator, informed the participants about the project of reflect centers in Malai district, Banthey Meanchey province. Helen Walker, Employee and Challenge Events Assistant, gave short speech to welcome and thanks for arraignment and safety arrival of the organizers and volunteers.

**Working at Sok San center** - Preparation and performance of the group of UK volunteers at the Sok San center went very well, although there was some delay at the first day of the building as we need to work out with local subcontractors about work allocation and group division. However, things went on smoothly after a little while. Each member worked with high spirit. They had a short break of about 15 minutes during morning work and in the afternoon. The group had vegetarian lunch (fried rice or noodle with some vegetable) at about 12 to 12:30. Between each working time, some of them had a chance to interact and play with local children, taking pictures and they enjoyed it.

There were some changes in regard to working schedule for volunteers (particularly in Sok San) after the community could not fill up the floor before the arrival of volunteer group. So, instead of solely laying the brick or rendering the wall, volunteers also had to carry the dirt and gravel to fill the floor, tamping the floor, mixing cement and make concrete floor, which is one of the hardest work. Carrying dirt and gravel as well as sending also happened in Koh Snoul center. However, the group finally achieved a great deal of work; all brick work on the wall had been done; large part of the wall had been rendered; the whole ground floor had been filled and the concrete work in two rooms had been laid.

Starting at around 8 o'clock everyday, the group worked really hard with high commitment. Some of them rendered the wall, laid the brick, and carried the soil and gravel to fill the center's floor. Each individual had their own work to do. There were some shortage of tool such as wheelbarrow, trowel and other tools used in rendering. However, each volunteer managed to work and help each other actively and patiently.

**Working at Koh Snoul's center** - The eleven volunteers were assigned to work in Koh Snoul village, Tuol Pong Ror Commune, Malai district. The overall activities were much alike in Soksan's. The team worked so hard on carrying mixed-cement, laying brick, moving soil from the ground floor, carrying stone to fill up the floor, compacting the ground, and so on. The work was mixing up with song, joke and photo-shooting. During the a team spent around one hour to visit and interact with teachers and students at secondary school near by the center.

The five-day work, the team completed:

- Ground floor work, 108 m<sup>2</sup>, (moving soil out and putting rock, and compacting)
- Laying brick up to 50 m<sup>2</sup>
- Mixing cement, carrying the mixed-cement and brick...



**Santepheap's Center** - In the afternoon of the fourth day, (Thursday 29 Nov 07), all team members included the team from Sok San went to visit REFLECT center in Santepheap village. The first impression from the team at Sontepheap was the welcome with clap from about 50 children. After introduction from the team members and community. The village chief gave a brief speech to the guess about the village situation, landmine issues, reason of having the center and its advantages, and plan to develop in the center area such as building road, distributing land to homeless families to make shelter for living. The UK team spent the rest of their time interacting with children and community, signing songs and having snack. In the mean time Alex, the Journalist from Daily Telegraph, interviewed Mr. Chamrong about land grabbing, and process of people movement to get the land back.



**Final working day in Banteay Meanchey-** In the morning of November 30<sup>th</sup> before starting to work, all volunteers had visited the school near by, talking to children, taking photos and signing with children. They brought with them gifts such as books, color pens and pencils, ball and other toys for the children through school directors. At around 2:30pm, few dozen of villagers and students from nearby school attended together with volunteers to celebrate together the work they have achieved. Three community members, including a village chief, a committee member and an elder, spoke on behalf of the community thanking the volunteer group for their financial and physical contribution to help build the center. They also wished to have more participation from community villagers had it not been the harvesting season. On behalf of the volunteer group one of its members was speaking about their felling and emotion to have a chance to come and work there. In addition to 2 tables and 15 chairs, they also bought a white board, mats, a box of white board makers, an eraser and three ladders for the use in the center. As a souvenir, the communities gave each of the volunteer a Kroma (scarf).

In the ceremony, villagers and children also enjoyed snack such as biscuit and soft drink.



Before leaving, t-shirts, boot, some helmet, and other material were given to local partner staff for further use. In Koh Snuol, the team celebrated good-bye party with soft drink and biscuit. They also exchanged gift as well.

## 2. Siem Reap Province

UK volunteer group first visited Snar Sangkream village. A member of the community had presented the group with background of the land issue and how the community, local partner, as well as ActionAid Cambodia had been doing to address the issue. The group also visited a school there before leaving for Prom Kot village where the proposed REFLECT center would be built next year. In the second site, the group had to walk about 1.5 km to reach the center area since it is not accessible by bus.

Dozen of villagers were waiting to greet them; to interact about their plan for the center, how will the center be used...etc. the group seemed to be interested in the new site and promised to raise fund and came back to help build the center next year.



The solidarity and support from UK volunteers really motivates community people to keep up their hopes.

**Your continuous support and generosity will make their dreams come true.  
Thank you!**