

Wells, Bicycles and IT...

Cambodia March, 2016

Have to admit that it is hot and dusty here in rural Cambodia. But when you see (first-hand) the difference between a dangerous long walk to school and a bicycle ride or you contemplate carrying water for about 1 kilometre every day for 10+ years and then it is on your doorstep, no amount of heat or dust will deter one from visiting.

So off we set in the morning traffic to Kampot District. Vu Thi, one of COCD's (Cambodian Organisation for Children and Development www.cocd-cambodia.org) staff was our brave and trusty driver with enthusiastic passengers Glenn Fawcett of Lotus Outreach (www.lotusoutreach.org) Pola Ung, founder and director of COCD, Raksmeay Lotus Outreach National Representative and me. I love to go on these trips because i see what is really happening. Surprisingly, people often thank me for coming because, it seems, that many donors do not take/have the time to experience the results of their donations.



That day we visited two girls who had received bikes from LotusPedals (remember the bikes we gave out in 2014?) The contracts fulfilled (girl in school, only she uses it, maintained) they will continue to use the bikes. However we did find that the pumps had broken and so arrangements were made to replace them.



The home

Diet for vegetarians in rural Cambodia consists mainly of bread (can be delicious baguette), bags of cashews (grown in Cambodia, processed in Vietnam) and coffee with tinned "fresh" milk. The French really spread their culture!!!!



That's Sopheak, Glenn, Raksmeay and Vu Thi at Well 1: Mono Sok

Next day off to the wells. To make a well, you need a place and good luck. So far 3 of our 8 wells have been successful, but



finding water has not been easy in a couple of the others; they are still trying. When the well is on someone's land, then it is agreed that all members of the well committee — in this case a minimum of 15 families — have free access to the well, that no livestock is to be nearby, that no clothes are to be dried nearby and that there is attention to maintenance. The well enables families to not only stop having to carry water but also to keep their precious revenue as they no longer have to buy water. Well Fees are, at present in many cases, an initial US\$2.50 and then mostly \$0.50 a month.

The wells are created by contractors who remain unpaid until everyone is totally satisfied with the work. In the case of the 3 wells we visited, the concrete finishing, the anchoring the pump into the concrete and the positioning of the well etiquette signs were are not perfect. A review was quickly planned!!

Back to PP, as Phnom Penh is fondly called, and The Meeting = 3 hours of discussing the ins and outs of our assessment of the 3 year Integrated Rural Development (IRD) for which we had furnished wells.

IRD is integrated. There are classes on hygiene, cash crop development, business, the importance of education, animal husbandry, children's rights, advocacy, money management to name a few! The self-help groups are an amazing success. (please see <http://www.douglasacampbellfoundation.org/newsletters/2009-2014/no-10-part-4.pdf> for a fuller view.) We learned that national annual poverty alleviation in the form of increased revenue possible is a max of 1%. Our lovely IRD model managed an annual average of 5.33%, the families involved actually were, in many cases able to lift themselves out of the detrimental cycle of poverty. This is where it is truly at: changing the lives of whole communities.

Unfortunately, donors like concrete. They are not so keen on something more nebulous (in their minds) such as IRD. The buildings are important but we need to change something in the ever-growing gap between rich and poor and IRD is one way which we have proved works.

Anyway, good meeting with Passerelles Numeriques Cambodia (PNC) and more information about their development: curriculum changes, extra curricular activities and so on. (At present, they have more requests for interns than they have students ready for internship!)

And then our lovely dinner with 4 graduates, 4 second year and 4 first year students. Here they all are! If you look carefully you can see Glenn of Lotus

Outreach and Raksmei beside him and Elise Durand of PNC.



The dinner is such fun that we have formed an alumni and it was good to see the more experienced talking about life to their younger sisters. This will be a future project, maybe we can even get them to

give a speech of encouragement and mentor their younger sisters!

And so ended a packed week of events. It was well worth it and i now have a better and better idea of what needs to be done and how to do it.



Sunset over Lake Geneva...

PS. COCD is starting business projects with Social enterprise models to create profit to support the other projects. The first was launched a few months ago: a water purification plant in rural Kampot. Soon there will be a rice dryer in Pursat and and and Let's wait and see..... Do you want to join in?

Thank you all, mujin



Here is Pola Ung with his brand belonging to the White Lotus Group.