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PROJECT UPDATE

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE NEXT GENERATION
AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION PROJECT



Battambang & Pailin visit

FROM BRIAN COOK

PHOTO: SOKUNTHEA NUON - TEAM DINNER AT JAAN BAI

Hello/ជំរាបសួរ (Chom Reap Sour) from the research team of the *Next Generation Agricultural Extension Project: Social relations for practice change*. This quarter team members have been on-site in Battambang and Pailin throughout February, facilitating workshops and teaching with PRD, PDAFF and NUBB. We have also been collecting data from a thinking theatre performance from our sister project. In this issue we also welcome Ru Foong to the team, an undergraduate student from the University of Melbourne who will be conducting her honours research with the project. Finally we would like to wish all our partners and colleagues a Happy Khmer New Year 2023.

Project Overview

FROM CAITLIN FINLAYSON

This project aims to produce an innovative model of agricultural extension founded on expanding enabling social relations, which will complement and/or replace existing models of extension based on the provision of technology, capital and information.

Duration: January 2021 to December 2026

Target Areas: Cambodia

Budget: AUD\$4.5million

Project Leader: Associate Professor Brian Cook, University of Melbourne

Participatory workshops

FROM CAITLIN FINLAYSON

PHOTOS: CAITLIN FINLAYSON - WORKSHOPS WITH PRD AND PDAFF; TEACHING AT NUBB

In February 2023, Associate Professor Brian Cook, Associate Professor Andrew McGregor, Dr Caitlin Finlayson and Dr Van Touch visited Battambang and Pailin Provinces.

Three key events took place during the visit.

The first was a participatory workshop and photo diary presentation with our 8 research assistants from PRD (top image). Each research assistant presented case studies, taken from the household census, on diverse livelihoods and successful farmers. They also mapped farmer relations and the factors which shape successful farmers.

The second was a participatory network mapping workshop with a farmer group in Pailin, in collaboration with PDAFF (middle image). Farmers brainstormed and mapped the inputs and relations of their farmers discussing the positive and negative impacts of each.

The third was delivery of more course content for NUBB on Social Network Analysis with undergraduate and postgraduate students (bottom image). A big thanks to Activity 7 Lead, Nicholas Harrigan, for developing the lecture material.

The visit confirmed that the research issue being addressed is still relevant with farmers being socially, spatially and economically disconnected from each other, from centres of power, and from commodity chains. Both workshops undertaken during the field trip highlighted these disconnections.

A standout outcome from this visit were the skills and capacity of our 8 research assistants. They all showed in-depth knowledge of the spatial and relational context and farmers' livelihoods, and an ability to analyse and discuss the farmers, farms and farming practices.



Thinking theatre

FROM CAITLIN FINLAYSON

PHOTOS: CAITLIN FINLAYSON - LAKHON KOMNIT THINKING THEATRE PERFORMANCE, PAILIN

Communicating the findings of a project is a key part of the process of undertaking research. Our research is designed to reach beyond the academic community, to policy makers and extensionists, and most importantly to the farmers whom we work with in Battambang and Pailin.

As Kaye et al. (2020) note, it is important to recognise that different audiences use, require and respond to different approaches. In response to this point, Project Lead, Associate Professor Brian Cook, collaborated with Lakhon Komnit, a Battambang-based grassroots Cambodian theatre group.

Lakhon Komnit is dedicated to the inclusive development of Lakhon Niyeyay (Cambodian Spoken Theatre). This type of theatre is designed to cultivate emotional intelligence and critical consciousness in its creators, spectators and participants in order to ignite agency. Audience members become actors in the final act of the performance, writing the script and performing roles in the story.

During our time in Pailin in February, we were able to attend a performance by Lakhon Komnit based on the research findings of our sister ACIAR funded project *Uptake of agricultural technologies and best practices amongst farmers in Battambang and Pailin provinces, Cambodia* (see photos below). This project aims to unlock the potential of agricultural technologies and best practices by improving extension-adoption through emphasis on farmers' perceptions and experiences.

Following the performance, our research assistants conducted short semi-structured interviews with audience members. They asked about their impressions of the show, whether it reflected farmer situations and needs, and what impact it might make in their farming and life. These audience responses, collected after all 13 performances, will be analysed and available in a planned academic journal.

We welcome feedback on theatre production as a form of research communication and look forward to sharing more on this collaboration and the findings from our data collection as the project progresses.



Welcome Ru Foong

FROM CAITLIN FINLAYSON

PHOTOS: CAITLIN FINLAYSON - RU WITH HER SUPERVISORS; LITA, PHEROM, CHARIYA AND SINUON (OUR RESEARCH ASSISTANTS)

Ru Foong, an undergraduate student at the University of Melbourne, has joined the project team. In 2023, Ru commenced her honours year as part of her Bachelor of Arts in Geography and is under the supervision of Activity 2 Lead, Dr Ariane Utomo and Project Lead Associate Professor Brian Cook (top image).

Ru's research interests include development, globalisation and social change. She has a background in human geography and development studies.

Ru's topic is the livelihood aspirations of young agricultural science graduates in Northwest Cambodia. Young people are increasingly recognised in policy discourses as pivotal agents for rural development and sustainable agriculture. Yet, little is known about how youth imagine their place in agricultural futures and the aspirations of growing cohorts of agricultural science graduates in this period of rapid tertiary education expansion in developing nations.

Her research will answer the following questions:

- How have the livelihood aspirations of young agricultural science graduate students changed over the course of their young adulthood?
- What are the factors shaping the livelihood aspirations of young agricultural science graduate students?
- How has the involvement in tertiary agricultural education changed the way young students see themselves in “agricultural futures”?

Ru will be working closely with our research assistants (bottom image) on this research, many being young graduate agricultural scientists.

Her methodology utilises qualitative methods including life mapping, narrative interviews and photo elicitation.

We welcome Ru to the team and look forward to delving deeper into this topic over the coming year.



Project Partners



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Resources

Check out the latest articles, blogs and research outputs which are shaping the project

Youth in agriculture

This issue of the Asian Farmers' Association discusses the issue of youth in agriculture and has informed the conceptual framing for Ru Foong's research. The issue highlights seven interrelated reasons why many youth in Asia, even the sons and daughters of farming families, will not farm, if given a choice.

[Read more.](#)

The link between microcredit and migration

Drawing on survey data from Cambodian households, Oum et al. refute the notion of migration as a substitute for credit. Households with access to credit are more likely to have migrated family members than their non-borrowing counterparts.

[Read more.](#)

