

PROJECT UPDATE

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE NEXT GENERATION
AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION PROJECT



Activities 1-5 complete

FROM BRIAN COOK
PHOTO: SAROET YONG

Hello/ជំរាបសួរ (Chom Reap Sour) from the research team of the *Next Generation Agricultural Extension Project: Social relations for practice change*. This quarter the team completed data collection for Activities 4&5. This involved 8 participatory village workshops across Battambang and Pailin, and 64 interviews, farm walks and photo-responses with successful and unsuccessful households. With these efforts, Activities 1-5 data collection is now complete. In addition, a number of team and project partners published an academic journal article on the topic of historical agricultural change in Northwest Cambodia.

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, The University of Melbourne

Historical Agrarian Change in Northwest Cambodia

FROM BRIAN COOK

PHOTOS: SINUON CHHUN, CAITLIN FINLAYSON & ADOBESTOCK

Project Lead, Associate Professor Brian Cook, and a number of other research team members, project partners and collaborators (Dr Paula Satizábal, Dr Van Touch, Assoc. Prof Andrew McGregor, Dr Jean-Christophe Diepart, Dr Ariane Utomo, Dr Nicholas Harrigan, Prof Katharine McKinnon, Dr Pao Srean, Dr Thong Anh Tran and Dr Andrea Babon) have published an article in the academic journal [Critical Asian Studies](#).

This article is a historical overview of agricultural change over time in Northwest Cambodia from a political ecology perspective.

The article focuses on seven key historical periods:

- Angkor era (8th-14th century)
- Post-Angkor period (14th-19th century)
- French Protectorate era (1863-1953)
- Kingdom of Cambodia (1953-1975)
- Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)
- People's Republic of Kampuchea and transitional period (1979-1993)
- Contemporary Kingdom of Cambodia (1993-present)

Findings show that global initiatives, including the UN Strategic Development Goals privilege external objectives towards increased production and modernisation. These objectives are often detached from the local context, and the complex social, political, and economic dynamics of everyday life. Throughout the seven key historical periods there are patterns of exploitation which have exacerbated conflict and precarity for farmers.

The authors discuss possible future directions to begin addressing these patterns including transdisciplinary pathways and alliances between farmers and external actors, recognition of historical path dependency and working with farmers within their social networks.





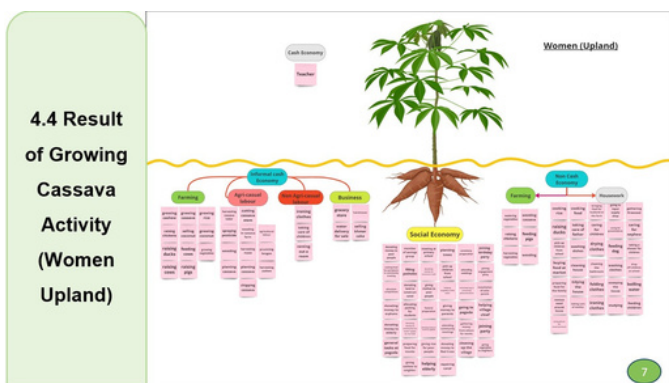
Wellbeing & Livelihood in Community Economy Workshops

FROM CAITLIN FINLAYSON & KATHARINE MCKINNON
PHOTOS: PANHALEAK CHAY, LITA MOM, PHEROM SONG

8 village workshops were held with up to 20 women and men in each of the project location sites throughout December and January as part of [Activity 4](#).

The workshops were divided into 4 parts:

- **Making a 'Growing Cassava'** - mapping the local economy to find out what work women and men do in their community and whether work is for cash, for food, or for other benefit
- **Relational Livelihood flow charts** - deep diving into the network of relations that apply to key activity types to understand the relationality and dynamics of economic activities in the village
- **Defining Soupheak Mongkul/Wellbeing** - discussing what wellbeing means for local people
- **Web of Ideas** - generating and prioritising participants' ideas for change, building on local expertise and insights from the workshop



These workshops generated gender disaggregated data about how women and men create livelihoods from diverse paid and unpaid work and what they feel could change in order to meet their needs and aspirations. For example, in the 'Growing cassava activity' (see middle image) almost all women reflected that their daily activities, especially those considered as part of the non-cash economy, are undervalued and underestimated. For both men and women, most of their activities were part of the informal, non-cash and social/cultural economy – allowing both women and men to see that their livelihoods are made up of more than just work that they do to gain a cash income.

This is a critical step to realise that all other economic activities are important and need to be considered in future planning for changes in village lives.

Why are some households more successful than others?

FROM ANDREW MCGREGOR

PHOTOS: SINUON CHHUN, SAROEUT YONG, PANHALEAK CHAY

The aim of [Activity 5](#) is to learn about how and why some households are more successful than others and what we can learn from the experiences of households that can inform the design of Activity 6.

We interviewed 64 households in 8 categories - rice farmers, cassava farmers, fruit farmers, livestock farmers, agricultural labourers, small business owners, full-time employed and elderly. This sample was drawn from the Activity 2 Household Census.

Preliminary insights from the data collection show that different factors contribute to success/wellbeing for different categories. Those factors include social, material & economic relations, individual qualities and geography. They could be either enabling, i.e. led to being successful or disabling, i.e. led to being unsuccessful.

Enabling material relations could include access to land or productive soils. The top image is from a farm-walk with an elderly household in Ta Sanh Commune who owned 2 hectares of land and grew 30 tonne per hectare of cassava.

On the other hand disabling economic relations included crippling household debt or low income. The middle image is of the grocery store of a household in Kampong Prieng Commune who struggle to succeed due to debt repayments for an extended family member.

Enabling social relations included connections to village institutions. The bottom image is of a successful livestock farmer in Ta Sanh Commune who received support from a local collective that enhanced her ability to raise cattle.

As the research team works to transcribe and translate all of the data over the coming months, more insights and learnings are to come.



Project Partners



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Resources

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

Climate change adaptation in the Cambodian highlands

Through a political ecology lens, Tim Frewer explores how the economic, political, and cultural relations of a village are co-produced by the external interventions and threats of climate change, economic land concessions, logging of surrounding forests, land settlements and state conservation efforts.

[Read more](#)

Study of a Cambodian Village

Milada Kalab provides a pioneering anthropological study from the 1960s of a Cambodian Khum (Khmer for village) in Kompong Cham Province. She documents and provides insights into monastic education, social mobility and village structure in Cambodia.

[Read more](#)



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