



JULY 2024 | ISSUE 9

PROJECT UPDATE

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE NEXT GENERATION
AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION PROJECT



Collaborative extension and practice change

FROM BRIAN COOK

PHOTO: MRS SREY MOM INSPECTING HER MAIZE CROP

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 published an academic journal article on the topic of agricultural extension and agrarian transitions in Southeast Asia. From our work with farmers in Activity 3B we also documented changes in farming practices from financial management and resource allocation to crop monitoring and diversification. These changes are a result of collaborative efforts between project partners. Lastly, we began Activities 6 & 7 (the final activities of the project).

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

How agricultural extension responds to amplified agrarian transitions in Southeast Asia

FROM: CAITLIN FINLAYSON
PHOTOS: MAO MINEA

Research Fellows Dr Thong Anh Tran and Dr Van Touch (top image) from the University of Melbourne have published an article in the academic journal [Agriculture and Human Values](#).

Drawing on interviews from [Activity 1](#) with international experts working in the field of agricultural extension, agrarian studies and rural development in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, the paper examines how **agrarian transitions are shaped by multiple drivers of change**, and how these interwoven processes have triggered shifts in agricultural extension practices across the three countries.

The authors outline how 'business-as-usual' extension models have failed to adequately address the emerging needs of farmers. They evidence challenges to operational structures, capacity, and performance of agricultural extension in Cambodia.

Findings show that **pluralistic extension approaches can foster stakeholder co-learning and productive engagement** in extension practices. They also found that the **proactive role of champions** can orchestrate collective efforts towards the co-production of innovative agricultural extension models.

One example cited is the Metkasekor (Farmers' Friend) sustainable climate-smart extension model in Cambodia. In this example, 'champions' from the private sector and development organisations have identified bottlenecks existing in the local agricultural extension system and built strategic partnerships with relevant institutions (i.e., Provincial Departments of Extension, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and CIRAD) and other individuals to develop extension solutions.



You [farmers] want an extension worker to be a problem solver, not a technology transfer person...They [extension workers] should be able to tap into knowledge and bring the knowledge to the forefront of the farm and work jointly with farmers to solve the problem.

- Activity 1 international expert interviewee





Improved financial management in farming

FROM: PANHALEAK CHAY, SOPHANARA PHAN AND VAN TOUCH

PHOTOS: PANHALEAK CHAY AND SOPHANARA PHAN

Mrs Hiep Sophat is a lowland farmer living in Phnom Yay Ma village, Banan district, Battambang. She began to be involved in the project in October 2022, when her household participated in the Activity 2 census. In October 2023, she was randomly selected to take part in Activity 3B, which focuses on field crop monitoring and record-keeping of farm inputs and practices.

Since joining the project, Mrs Hiep Sophat has made **significant behavioural and practice changes in her financial management and resource allocation strategies** to her farming activities. Regular monitoring of her crops (see top image) has enabled her and her husband (see bottom image) to gain a deeper understanding of crop health and phenological development.

Together they are now better at managing water and identifying issues such as weeds, pests, and diseases at an early stage, allowing them to respond promptly. Keeping detailed records of all inputs has provided Mrs Hiep Sophat with a clear view of her farming cash flow and a more informed financial decisions, optimising the use of inputs. This crop monitoring and record-keeping of all inputs has **enabled her and her husband to make better decisions**, resulting in improved crop yields and increased profitability.

Prior to her involvement in Activity 3B, Mrs Hiep Sophat had never tracked her farming expenses and profits. She has come to understand the importance of monitoring these financial aspects through the project. She was particularly surprised to discover the high costs associated with rice farming.

Due to its benefits, Mrs Hiep Sophat now **plans to apply the same record-keeping practices to her vegetable production**, allowing her to better assess the commercial viability of her farming. The knowledge and skills she has gained from her involvement in the project have also spilled over into her family's financial management.

It is crucial to record all farming expenses and profits. As I record rice production costs, I will also record vegetable production costs. Seeing the income figures is truly encouraging and satisfying.
- Mrs Hiep Sophat



Improved crop health, diversification and productivity

FROM: SOPHANARA PHAN, PHANHALEAK CHAY AND VAN TOUCH

PHOTOS: SOPHANARA PHAN

Mrs Srey Mom is an upland farmer residing in Ta Leak village, Samlout district of Battambang. Her journey with the Next Generation Agricultural Extension project also began in 2022, when she participated in the [Activity 2](#) household census. A year later, in 2023, she was randomly selected to voluntarily participate in [Activity 3B](#), which focuses on field crop monitoring and record keeping of farm inputs and practices.

Through participating in the project, Mrs Srey Mom received comprehensive training on how to effectively monitor her maize crop and maintain detailed records of inputs, crop health, and development throughout the growth cycle. This training enabled her to **observe changes in crop health and growth in response to varying weather conditions and inputs**. By visiting her farm more frequently, Mrs Srey Mom was able to identify problems sooner and take timely actions to address them (see top image of Mrs Srey Mom inspecting her maize crop). This proactive approach led to significant improvements in overall crop health, yield, and profitability. On her 1.12-hectare farm, she **achieved a remarkable total yield of 10 tonnes**, which translates to 8.33 tonnes per hectare, while the average maize yield in her area is between 2.5 - 3.5 tonnes per hectare.

Inspired by the benefits of regular crop monitoring and record keeping, Mrs Srey Mom has **expanded these practices to include another crop, 'cassava'** (see bottom image). She has developed her own record-keeping forms to document farm inputs, soil moisture levels, crop health, weed prevalence, insect and disease incidences, and yields for her cassava crop.

Mrs Srey Mom's success story highlights the transformative impact of an active agricultural extension approach as well as the importance of detailed crop monitoring and record-keeping in achieving higher yields and greater profitability.



Mrs Srey Mom was able to identify problems sooner and take timely actions to address them.

- Mr Sophanara Phan (Pailin PDAFF Chief of Agronomy)



Project Partners



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Resources

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

Dynamics of power and participation in Cambodia and Thailand

Community Economies scholars engage with strengths-based approaches in two separate community-led social innovation design processes. They discuss how to identify strengths in a given context, the importance of being cognisant of cultural practices, dynamics, and local customary arrangements and the need for researchers to renounce expertise and authority in defining problems.

[Read more](#)

The impact of COVID-19 on smallholder farmers in Cambodia

Yi and Green outline how COVID-19 intensified translocal precarity among smallholder farmers in Northwest Cambodia. The pandemic led to urban job losses and forced workers to return to rural homes and farming. Impacts were seen in terms of an increase in production costs, land competition and indebted households.

[Read more](#)

