



QSA Notes

people, places & projects

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Housing for ethnic Vietnamese in remote commune, Prek Chrey. Photo: KCD



Inner Prek Chrey, where most of the Khmer are living. Photo: KCD

Peace and development

Is there a connection between peace and development? Are QSA's projects concerned with peace? The answer to both questions is 'Yes!' Development is not a short term process; it can take years to really improve the situation for some communities, and if a community is at war or in conflict with their neighbours, their immediate thoughts are food for the next meal, not planting crops to harvest in a couple of months or to be taken by others who are equally hungry. So there is a strong need to ensure the communities we work with are in a stable environment where they are able to benefit from the training courses and other development work provided by the project partner organisations. But what if there is not peace in the community – does that mean QSA cannot work there? No, but it means we need to think of other ways of doing so.

One project QSA is supporting is addressing peace within the community, in a remote commune called Prek Chrey in Kandal Province, Cambodia, a location close to the border with Vietnam. The project partner working there, Khmer Community Development (KCD) was formed in 2005, and for a few years was receiving funding from several donors, including American Friends Service

Committee out of their Phnom Penh office. QSA was asked in late 2010 to step in when AFSC was no longer in a position to support them. Now with the larger support from Bread for the World, a Protestant donor organisation based in Germany, and a smaller grant from Community for Children based in Japan, the program is addressing inter-racial tensions within the Prek Chrey community. There are 2309 households living in this region alongside the Bassac River, of whom 80 per cent of the households are Vietnamese, 15 per cent Khmer and the balance are Khmer-Vietnamese families. The Khmer families are mainly farmers, and live on the land away from the river, whereas the Vietnamese families derive their income mainly from fishing and so live closer to the river. Until now, the Khmer villagers in Prek Chrey consider themselves as less valuable than the Vietnamese, mainly because they view them as being economically more successful. The Vietnamese, despite living in Cambodia for decades, are experiencing anti-Vietnamese sentiments, with unsubstantiated rhetoric principally about their business interests in Cambodia and Vietnamese people dominating the economy. This is also being exacerbated by a political party with a slogan of chasing

the Vietnamese out of the country. So for KCD, this small community is at the centre of conflict which they seek to address through community activities, peace building and child rights promotion involving both parts of the population, the Khmer and the Vietnamese. With funding from QSA and the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, activities to bring about economic enhancement through a savings bank, a rice bank, a cow bank and learning about organic farming are underway. These supplement other activities such as children's clubs, sporting and art activities, community health campaigns as well as raising awareness about social issues of women's rights, children's rights, ways of addressing domestic violence, and reducing alcohol abuse. The community is also addressing issues of bribery and corruption, equitable access to resources such as education and health care, and the impacts of climate change, especially as so much of their livelihood comes from agriculture. Genetically modified seed is also an issue, especially to those farmers wishing to grown organic produce and secure a higher price for their produce as a result. There is no such thing as organic certification in this region, and the extent of the separation



Above: Sarat in his shop where he sells his organically grown produce.

Below & Front Cover: Sarat tends his small garden
Photos: QSA

between fields is measured in centimetres and so is unlikely to be an effective barrier. This area has been cleared of land mines, which is of significance to people farming in new areas.

During a recent monitoring visit to meet project participants, Jackie Perkins met Sarat Npom, a farmer aged 26 years, who has been growing vegetables organically now for six months, and is keen to learn more about drip irrigation to improve his crop yield. Visiting at the end of the dry season it is easy to see why access to a water supply is so crucial. Sarat has a small street stall where he is selling pumpkins, tomatoes, cucumber, gourds, long beans and four different types of leafy vegetables. He also has a mango tree, banana trees and a fine collection of ducks giving him a regular supply of eggs for sale. His field is small, and is rented from a neighbour for

US\$30 per year, but there is no certainty that the neighbour will be willing to lease it to Sarat in future years as the neighbour is growing GM crops using irrigation methods and selling his crop to a trader, and so may well want the land to increase his own crops. When Sarat started farming he had no money, and no land, but was able to borrow to lease the field. In the six months Sarat has been farming, he has generated enough income to repay the loan to lease the field, and the US\$600 to move and rebuild his house. He is hoping to buy a larger field nearby, at a cost of US\$2,500. Sarat has benefitted from being on the community committee involved in agriculture; while he was in school he had little interest in learning how to read and write, now he wants to learn!

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QSA is a member of the Australian Council for International Development, and is a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct. The Purpose of QSA is to express in a practical way the concern of Australian Quakers for the building of a more peaceful, equitable, just and compassionate world. To this end QSA works with communities in need to improve their quality of life with projects which are culturally sensitive, as well as being economically and environmentally appropriate and sustainable.

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