



Meeting with evaluation participants in Kampong Thom. Photo: Department of Women's Affairs, Kampong Thom

Why does QSA undertake monitoring and evaluation? What knowledge does it hope to gain?

Monitoring is a way of assessing the results achieved; it's a collection and analysis of information as a project progresses, and is based on targets set and activities planned during the planning phase of the work. Evaluation, however, is the comparison of what the project has achieved against the agreed plans – in other words what you set out to do and what has been accomplished. It may take place during the life of a project or at the end and possibly also look at other completed projects for comparison of the impact – whether or not the project made a difference to the

situation for the community.

In May/June 2018, an evaluation was conducted by one of QSA's project partners in Cambodia – the Department of Women's Affairs office in Kampong Thom Province (DWA KT). Funding for this project comes from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade under ANCP together with support from QSA. This work was conducted by the project partner staff, who were trained and supported in the processes by Margaret Bywater, a Tasmanian Quaker and long-standing resident of Cambodia, living in Phnom Penh. This evaluation was undertaken in thirteen villages where the permaculture training projects have been located between 2013 and

2018. Evaluations can be conducted by external consultants, to ensure that there is no bias in the reporting, or as in this case, the local staff have received additional training and worked together on drawing up the survey form. This greatly increased their knowledge and skills, and enabled them to have a much better understanding of the processes involved for future project evaluations.

The survey form addressed the key training subject of home food gardens – a total of 340 people (291 women and 49 men) have received training and established their permaculture style gardens. The survey teams surveyed 136 participants and looked at 66 food gardens. The focus



Assessing the home food gardens. Photo: Department of Women's Affairs, Kampong Thom

of the training courses was on establishing permaculture gardens, educating people on social problems such as family violence, trafficking and hygiene, training in small business and raising awareness on good nutrition for families. The participants in one village which had recently completed the course showed enthusiasm for the project and many produced impressive results in developing their gardens in a short period of time. They were keen to continue developing their gardens and all were selling produce.

In another village which finished the course in 2014, the rice fields are small (0.5 hectare) but the land around villagers' homes is sufficient in most cases to enable them to grow a good range of vegetables, raise cows and chickens, feed their families and sell their excess produce locally in the

village and also in a larger market nearby. Half of the participants reported making improvements to their houses or building a new house as a result of their increased income from the sale of organic produce.

However, for two villages completing the training in 2014-5 and 2015-, the results were not so encouraging. The gardens were not so productive and the income was therefore greatly reduced, in fact it was below the Cambodia poverty line. For the staff of DWA KT, this news was a surprise but clearly demonstrated the value of conducting a study over several years like this, comparing results from villages who have received identical training courses. During a recent monitoring visit, I was able to discuss the results of the evaluation in detail. The staff all felt the evaluation process had taught them a lot, and they

were very appreciative of the training they had received from Margaret, but everyone felt that more was needed to support these two villages not doing as well as everyone else. In the next project, starting in July 2019, these villages will receive additional training and support in the hope that their income levels will bring them out of poverty and greatly improve their health and wellbeing. Without the evaluation, staff would have been unaware of the situation affecting these villages, so yes, evaluations are important.



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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Unit 14, 43-53 Bridge Road, Stanmore, NSW 2048 Australia • administration@qsa.org.au
PHONE+61 2 8054 0400 • ABN 35 989 797 918



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