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Woman wins model farming award in Cambodia



Photo: UNDP Cambodia

Ms. Roun March, a model farmer for integrated farming from Preah Vihear province, wins 5th place in a nation-wide farmer competition.

A Cambodian woman who used to rely on doing odd jobs for a living has become one of the top five winners in the latest round of farming competition organized by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF).

During a ceremony on Thursday, 19 March, the Ministry declared Ms. Roun March, 48, the fifth winner of the "Integrated Farming System" competition and handed her a prize package that included a pumping generator, US\$150 and a certificate.

"This was my first time to make a presentation in front of hundreds of participants. I was nervous but I tried my best, and I'm happy with what I have received," said Ms. March from Thomachiet village, Preah Vihear province in northern Cambodia.

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In Cambodia, villagers take entrepreneurial step in solving water woe



Photo: Chansok Lay/UNDP Cambodia

Delegations from Sweden and UNDP witness water reservoir expansion activities in Kraing Serey village, Kampong Speu province. The reservoir will store water of 60,000 cubic metres after the expansion work is finished.

First he thought about it and now he is making it happen. That is a new water distribution plan that Mr. Long Thim is overseeing in his village of Kraing Serey village in Kampong Speu province. When it is completed by the end of 2015, more than 500 families in five neighbouring villages will have running water up to kitchen all year round.

"We have completed about 40 per cent of the reservoir work and in two to three-week time, we will have a bigger water basin," said Mr. Thim, head of the water management committee in Kraing Serey village, during a recent visit by delegations from Sweden and from UNDP in late May 2015.

To respond to the new demand, Mr. Long Thim decided to make an entrepreneurial move by borrowing US\$10,000 from a local NGO to top up on his village's collective fund to carry out the project. For the village which – just like others in the country – does not receive any development fund directly

from central government, the venture is a bold and risky step, but one that Mr. Long Thim and his community members said was worthwhile with happy return for everyone.

Under the new plan, which he began hatching some two years ago, the present reservoir in Kraing Serey village is being enlarged to store up to 60,000 cubic metres of water, more than two times bigger than the original reservoir storage when constructed. The pipe system linking the reservoir will also be extended to the clients later this year. Each home will be charged 2,000 riel (US 50 cents) for every cubic metre of water consumed – a fee which is one-fifth of what they are currently paying private water truck drivers.

The residents of Kraing Serey, about 60 kilometres Southwest of Phnom Penh, were no strangers to the difficulty either.

"Before we had the reservoir, my family had all sorts of problems," said Ms. Prak Khun. "Domestic violence, food insecurity, illness,

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In Cambodia, villagers take entrepreneurial...

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family disputes and children missing classes, as they had to help find water," Ms. Prak Khun said, recalling the tough days in the past.

The water woe in Kraing Serey village ended after a water catchment project there was completed in 2012. Responding to the villagers' plight, Sweden, through UNDP's Cambodia Community Based Adaptation Programme (CCBAP), had given money to dig a pond to catch water flushing down from the surrounding hills during rainy season. The pond can hold 25,000 cubic meters of water, more than enough to serve the Kraing Serey's 70 homes all year round through a pipe system that was also installed as part of the initial project.

With the water, the people are able to diversify sources of income by growing vegetables and raising livestock such as pigs and chicken. Each home now features a water-supplied toilet – which was once considered a luxury – to improve sanitation and reduce chances of water-borne diseases such as diarrhoea among children.

The facility had made those living nearby jealous, prompting the Kraing Serey residents to agree among themselves that it's time to



Photo: Chansok Lay/UNDP Cambodia

Community members give a presentation about impacts of the reservoir and water pipe system project, and their activity plan to a group of delegation from Sweden and UNDP.

reach out a helping hand to their neighbours.

"If we extend the pipe system, we can help other villagers out there and also generate income for our community. That's why we've agreed among our community members to enlarge the reservoir and stretch the piped system to those villages," Mr. Long Thim said.

If all goes well, the loan would be paid up within two years using income earned from the service his project is providing to the new clients, he added.

"I'm impressed with the community," said

Ms. Asa Heden who led a Sida delegation from Stockholm to visit Kraing Serey village recently. "They have used just a small amount of money that UNDP and Sida supported and upgraded their project. I think they are very entrepreneurial and took responsibility for the whole community."

"It is very nice to see a project like this," Ms. Heden said. "It's very much aligned with what Sweden is focused on when it comes to Cambodia. It also involves economic growth for the reduction of poverty. It is a successful project," she added.

Mr. Napoleon Navarro, UNDP Deputy Country Director, was humbled when the villagers said how appreciative they were for the assistance from Sweden and UNDP.

"You thank us for giving you the funds? Most importantly, it is you who made all these changes happen, so you must say thanks to yourselves," he told the villagers during the visit.

When it first started in 2012, the project received US\$49,832 through the CCBAP project out of the overall cost of US\$60,257 for the reservoir and pipe system. It was intended to resolve water shortage problem of the 70 homes in Kraing Serey village. But since then the village committee has taken their own initiative to expand it to serve 500 homes in five villages by the end of 2015.

Woman wins model farming award in Cambodia

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The single mother of two children is one of 13,581 villagers who are benefiting from a project funded by Canada, GEF and UNDP. The project – Promoting Climate Resilient Water Management and Agricultural Practices in Rural Cambodia – is implemented by the Project Support Unit of MAFF. Apart from helping address the problem of water shortage, the project also trains the villagers on techniques to diversify farming to increase their food security, income and resilience to impacts of climate change.

A total of 210 farmers took part in the 6th Farmers' Assembly competition which began on 10 February and concluded on 19 March. During the contest, they were tested about their technical knowledge and implementation skills on subjects such as crop diversification, rice field irrigation, livestock and fish raising and, last but not least, community forest management to



Photo: Chansok Lay/UNDP Cambodia

Ms. Roun March checks vegetable grown in her farm in Thomachiet village of Preah Vihear province.

reduce impact of climate change.

The award – although it was the last among the five – was rather significant for Ms. March, who, until two years ago, had to rely on working in other villagers' farms in exchange for meager pay to support herself and two daughters. But life has turned around for the

better after the project arrived at her village in 2013 with a package of livelihood support system that included a solar water pump set and farming diversification techniques.

"I am not going to sit around to be reminded about what I should do. I will keep working hard and through that I hope to make more money," Ms. March once said. "Working hard – not to please anyone but for my own sake."

She said that, in 2014, she earned 12.42 million Riels (US\$3,105) from selling produce she grows around her house. She added that, by increasing vegetable plots and livestock, she expected her income to grow by 29 percent this year.

"When I'm back home, I'll continue sharing my experience in particular the improvement of soil quality through growing various types of vegetable to other villagers," said March after receiving the award on Thursday.

The other four winners with higher prizes were from Kampong Chhnang, Siem Reap, Svay Rieng and Battambang provinces.

In Cambodia, student gardeners get hands-on lessons in climate adaptation

Just one month after vegetable seeds were provided to the school director and teachers, Kok Srolao Primary School compound is now lush and green. Picking rice from home, some students and teachers come to school in the early morning to make breakfast with vegetables grown in the schoolyard.

“I’m happy seeing the green vegetables at the compound, the smile of the students, the improvement of their knowledge and skills,” school director Sorn Bundin said.

A solar pump built in late 2014 benefits 8 households and 271 students. It was built to improve access to water and for use as a learning site to better educate students on climate change impacts and adaptation. It also exposes students with practical experiments in Integrated Farming Systems.

School director Mr. Bundin said the 1,800 square meter garden of the school compound is divided into 5 plots for students from Grade 3 to Grade 6 and those in English class. Each group visits their location in the morning before class starts, during break time and in the evening to tend to their vegetables and water them. This is also part of the school’s life skill development.

“It’s important to integrate climate change adaptation into school activities to help



Photo: Naratevy Kek/UNDP Cambodia

Lao delegation team visits a school garden in Kok Srolao primary school in Preah Vihear province. With technical support from the NAPA project, the school campus is full of green vegetables in just one month later.

the students who are our next generation to understand climate change adaptation and at least be ready to adapt themselves through various activities in such the integrated farming system,” said Hok Kimthourn, National Project Manager of the Project Support Unit, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

The Ministry has been implementing the project on Promoting Climate Change Adaptation in Agriculture and Water since September

2010, with funding from the government of Canada, the Global Environment Facility, UNDP and in-kind contributions from the Royal Government of Cambodia.

In 2014, two community ponds, 35 solar pump systems and 15 pump wells were built in 37 villages. They supply water to 1,481 households; 61% of beneficiaries are female.

At Kok Srolao School, the students grow about 10 types of vegetables such as morning glory, yard long bean, cucumber, a few types of cabbages and amaranth.

According to Mr. Bundin, vegetable yield has triple with the introduction of the solar pump infrastructure.

What’s left over after breakfast is shared among the students. Some of them take it home, while others sell their remaining vegetables to the market.

“The money from selling those vegetables was not much US\$2.5 for each group but they were happy getting the vegetables and got some money to buy school materials and give to their parents,” said Mr. Bundin.

In the months ahead, the school is looking forward to growing some longer shelf life vegetables, including eggplant and chili, which can be stored until the rainy season.



Photo: Naratevy Kek/UNDP Cambodia

12 year-old Ngean Savry, Grade 5, waters vegetables during a study break in Kok Srolao Primary School in Preah Vihear province.

A climate change project with triple benefits



Photo: Chansok Lay/UNDP Cambodia

Farmer Phy Hoeun tends to check rice seedlings he sowed last week in his rice field in Lvea village, Seang Khveang commune in Prey Veng province.

Prey Veng – Rain finally started to fall, as the month of May just started. That gave Mr. Phy Hoeun, a farmer, a sense of relief after having waited anxiously for the rain to feed his young rice seeds.

“As long as there are some rains, there will be water in the canal to irrigate my rice field when it needs water,” he said. The 52-year-old farmer has increased rice production to up to three times per year in the past few years.

He plans to do two rice cycles again – a new way chosen by other farmers like him following the restoration of canals to increase their capacity for storing water to irrigate the paddy fields in Seang Khveang commune, Prey Veng province.

“Restoring canals has proved to be a good initiative,” said Mr. Sorn San, the Seang Khveang commune chief since 2002. “Because of that people in our commune are better off now as they can increase cultivation to at least two times per year. They were also able to double rice outputs during each cycle. As a result, they have enough rice for consumption and can sell the excess,” he said.

While it may seem as a routine solution to the water woes, it is the central role of

the local authority that helped make the difference. With increased recognition of the impact of climate change, the commune council made sure to include adaptation and resilience measures in the development plan for their communities.

In 2012, a 2.4-kilometre canal was widened and dredged, with funds from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) through UNDP. Measuring six metres in width and two metres in depth, it can store rainwater enough to irrigate 970 hectares of rice field for at least two cycles per year. In the following years, two more canals with a total length of 3.4 kilometres



Photo: Chansok Lay/UNDP Cambodia

Farmers in Lvea village in Seang Khveang commune started sowing rice seedlings in early May 2015.

linking up with a lake were restored to serve another more than one thousand hectares of rice field. Some 1,170 households are benefiting from the initiative, which Sweden funded a total of US\$121,314. Among other sources of fund is the commune council, which also contributed US\$2,700 using its investment fund.

Previously, one rice cycle was all the farmers in the commune could ask for due to lack of water. The existing canals that zigzag across the paddy field were hopelessly shallow, leaving the villagers to beg for mercy of the sky.

The canal banks were also made big enough as rural roads for the villagers to travel on and transport goods. “Before, I had to roll up my trousers and walk about four kilometres per round trip with between 20 and 30 kilograms of seed on my shoulder. I had to do five to six rounds during the planting season. These days, I can just transport the seed on my motorcycle-pulled cart, and that save me lots of time and labour,” said Sen Mean, a 47-year-old farmer.

And the canals don’t just give the villagers enough water to boost rice yield but also fish – the main source of protein for Cambodians.

“Last year, a family could catch about five kilograms of fish a time from the canals,” said Mr. Chhum Chhoeun, the head of the water management committee in the commune. “Several families were able to earn about 800,000 riels (US\$200) from selling fish for the whole season,” in addition to income from rice farming, he added.

Mr. Sorn San, the commune chief, said he expected that the villagers would be able to earn more revenue from fish stock as work on restoring an additional canal has just been finished.

More restored canals mean more water for farmers like Mr. Phy Hoeun to boost his crop output, more fish to catch and more money to earn.

“My family’s situation is different, like earth and sky. With enough water, farming is very profitable. With the money, I can support two children to study at university in Phnom Penh,” he said while tending to his newly planted rice seedlings.

Cambodia needs to capitalize on demographic dividend



Photo: Munthit Ker/UNDP Cambodia

Ms. Vin Rattana, middle, supervises her colleagues at a car garage she manages in Siem Reap province. More skilled workers are needed for the country to grow faster and to compete with other nations, especially when ASEAN economic integration is coming soon.

But, what is demographic dividend?

A demographic dividend or bonus is a condition where greater proportion of the population is in the working-age against a diminishing total dependency ratio. It is a potential opportunity for countries to accelerate their economic growth through investment in education, health and economic opportunities as more and more resources are now freed due to lower dependency ration.

How does it happen?

The demographic window of opportunity begins with declining fertility and mortality rates. Eventually, population age structure changes, that brings more people into the working-age than the dependents. Then, the demographic dividend is opened up. In other words, more net producers than net net consumers are in an economy freeing more resources for investment in education, health, and other wellbeing.

What are the benefits of demographic dividend?

When birth rates decline, families start having fewer dependent children. This increase in the ratio of the working age population relative to the dependent population (child and elderly) can give the country an

impetus for accelerated economic growth. With more people working, they produce more as a country. As more workers who now invest in their children's health and education without necessarily increasing family budgets – as they have fewer children



Photo: Chansok Lay/UNDP Cambodia

Workers climb up electricity polls in Takeo province to connect cables. Young and healthy workers are backbone of an economic growth. However, Cambodia simultaneously needs to upgrade its workers to high value added skills for the country to reap of its demographic dividend.

than their ancestors – more money is saved for investments in the future.

For a country to take advantage of this new change in age structure, it must ensure that the larger labor force is well-educated, skilled and gainfully employed. However, having a larger labor force alone does not mean that the country will have a demographic dividend. The country must simultaneously make the right investments in education, health, job creation and governance in order to realize accelerated economic growth.

Can Cambodia reap the benefits of demographic dividend?

It highly depends on how fast the country responds to the demographic dividend enablers. However, the good news is that Cambodia's labor force is growing faster than its population growth (2.71% against 1.63%) which is a relief provided workers are skilled and the economy supports them to have good jobs. Cambodia now is in the middle of its demographic dividend and this window will continue for the next 30 or less years.

Thus, in order to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend the Royal Government of Cambodia needs to create conducive environment for domestic and foreign direct investments, and upscaling its investments in education, public health and good governance. National campaign is also important for parents to keep children in school and healthy by investing on their children's well-being while government keeps on providing quality public services in education and health.

Kiros Beyene: UNDP Cambodia's National Human Development Report Coordinator



Photo: Thomas Cristofolletti/UNDP Cambodia

Students study in a university in Phnom Penh. Upscaling education and skills is among the main steps that Cambodia needs to invest to realize its accelerated economic growth.

Mine clearance restores children's hope for education



Photo: Chansok Lay/UNDP Cambodia

Students in Tomnop primary school challenge their friends with calculation questions. Without mine clearance activity, this new school would not have been built and all of these children would have had to go to another faraway school or simply dropped out of school to stay at home or work in the cassava fields with their parents instead.

Pailin – In a normal progression, 12-year-old Kimleang should have been in Grade 5 already by now having started primary school six years ago. But she is still studying in Grade 3, falling two years behind.

Problem? Not because of a weak learning ability or family's poor economic situation that held her back. It is the landmines – the deadly legacy of Cambodia's past conflicts that continues to deny opportunities for rural children like her from getting proper education and pursuing their dreams.

"How could we allow any school to be built when we were not sure if the land was cleared of landmines?" Mr. Touch Teuk, deputy chief of Tomnop village asked.

In the absence of a school in the village at the time, Kimleang was forced to travel 10 kilometres to school on the other side of village – and the same distance on the way back home – every day. Her mother wanted her future to be different from that of her elder brothers' and sisters'. But after one year of enrolment, Kimleang's school journey hit a snag. Because her family did not have a transport, her mother paid a male neighbour to drive her daughter along with his children on a motorcycle to the faraway school. One day the man just stopped sending his children to school, and Kimleang had no way of getting there on her own. Her study abruptly came to a halt.

Hers is just one of many similar stories of hardship endured by children living in

Tomnop village. Daily torment in going to school had become too much to bear that many of them simply dropped out altogether to stay home or go to work in the cassava fields with their parents instead.

While the lack of a school nearby had been a barrier to education, it was landmines hidden in the ground that caused the biggest problem.

Pailin province was a former battlefield during the conflict. It is one of the three provinces where UNDP has worked, in partnership with the Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority (CMAA), to clear landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW). The other two are Battambang and Banteay Meanchey provinces. The current five-year Clearing for Results Phase II project has received US\$26 million in funding from the governments of Australia, Switzerland and Canada, among others.

Since it began in 2011, the project has



Photo: Chansok Lay/UNDP Cambodia

Students learn in a group during a lesson break in Tomnop primary school in Pailin province.

released a total of nearly 73 million square metres of land in the three provinces for various development purposes – agriculture, school, road, etc. In Pailin alone, nearly 12 million square metres of land were released to the local people as of January 2015.

In Tomnop village, a total of 514,940 square metres of land were cleared and 75 anti-personnel mines and 131 ERWs removed. This paved the way for a new school to be built on 22,282 square metres of land which was handed over to the local community in June 2013, through the coordination of the provincial mine action planning unit (MAPU).

With funds raised from 85 people, including several Cambodian singers, the school was built and opened its doors to students in October 2013. One year before that, lessons were taught to the children in a classroom under front yard of a villager's house. Bearing the name of Tomnop village, it now has four classrooms. Currently 119 students, 59 of whom are girls, are studying from Grade 1 to Grade 4 and the school director plans to add Grades 5 and 6 in the coming years.

"There would have never been any school here had it not been for the mine clearance activities. Because no one would dare start building one until they were sure the ground was safe for the children," Mr. Touch Teuk, the deputy village chief, said.

"My children can now come to school easily and regularly because it is near my house," Ms. Y Oeurn, 32, said. "Before, they often missed classes because it was far away and I did not have transport to take them there," she said.

Kimleang's dream has now been revived. Even though it is still a long way off to the steps to becoming a doctor, Kimleang said she was determined to pursue her dream.

"I don't want to be like my parents working in the field. It is a hard job," she said during a class break. "I want to be a doctor so that I can help my parents, my siblings and the villagers when they are sick."



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