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Visitors Come to Cambodia

In November and December we have been busy with guests from overseas. The first guests were Bev and Beth—from the Food Resource Bank—and Larry Lehman. They arrived from Laos where they had traveled with CRWRC staff, visiting projects and assessing the impact of the activities on the lives of the local farmers. On Monday they attended an orientation with our staff who explained the community organizing process that CRWRC uses. In a nutshell, the purpose of this integrated approach to development is to work from the grassroots up, emphasizing sustainability and ownership. The process uses a 167-page, newly published manual, written entirely in Khmer by CRWRC staff. The photos and illustrations are all done by our staff. It is very hands-on, and was distributed to over 300 people, including commune councillors, Community Based Organization (CBO) committee members, and partners.

Later, during the late afternoon, we left Phnom Penh and crossed the Mekong river by ferry on our way to visit Love Cambodia, our partners in Prey Veng, the provincial capital. We visited a village where an environmental training had just taken place. The

participants had time to clean up only half of the 1000-family village. This is a big village by Cambodian standards. We could see exactly where the 85 participants had managed to clean up by where the trash-laden areas started. Plastic is a great problem in areas where there is no collection or disposal mechanisms, as people tend to throw it away, not realizing that plastic will outlive us all!

We also visited villages in Svei Rieng Province, where our partners, believing that a four-wheel drive car is invincible, took us over a water-covered road that hid deep holes into which our tires got quite stuck. Luckily a *David*-tractor was able to pull out the *Goliath*-car with the help of over ten men pushing.

In two days we visited four provinces and four partners! One of our church partners had a weaving project where our guests were able to purchase pure silk materials woven by the women. We were amazed by the resilience and hardiness of our guests. They were able to express both compassion and friendliness to the CBOs and farmers in ways that made the visit a joyful and happy occasion, where farmers showed with pride their



A walk through the ripening rice fields on a windy day.

achievements and testified to transformed lives thanks to FRB's funding.

Our second visitors were two journalists from the Norwegian Mission Alliance (NMA). They came to write on Cambodia and also to visit projects funded by NMA. We visited a village in Svei Rieng and met a woman who had received a cow from the cow bank project of our partner KADRA. "I never dreamed that one day my family would possess a cow, because we are so poor," she said. In fact the family is so poor that a month ago, one of their twin babies died due to malnutrition—the mother, severely anemic, simply did not have enough milk to feed the child.

As we walked through the rice fields, it was heartbreaking to see the number of children whose teeth were often so bad that they could not chew properly, so poor that they

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You can barely see the week old calf hiding behind its mother.

could not attend school (or simply lived too far from a school to walk to it), or whose parents needed them to look after siblings while the mothers labored under hard conditions. "My life has been very difficult," said one widow, the mother of a nine-year-old boy, who lives on less than fifty cents a day. "Every spare moment I have, I collect branches to make mats that I sell for \$2.50 apiece. I am able to make between four to five mats a month. I have no time to ever relax or rest."

Our last visitors were Andrew and Margaret Wunderink from Covenant Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, who were passing through on their long trip throughout Southeast Asia.

We were blessed with all these visitors, who gave encouragement to CRWRC-

Cambodia's work.

We have numerous signs that CRWRC is making a big difference in the lives of the poor. And, our trip with our partners to the villages showed not only how important our work is, but how your support is such a vital link to the transformation we seek. Thank you for your faithful support and please pray for the many women and children for whom moments of rest and happiness are nonexistent, as every second of the day is filled to ward off hunger, sickness, and despair.

This comes to you with our prayerful wishes for a very blessed *Christ-Birth Celebration* and *Happy New Year 2010*.



1) Over 30 percent of people in Cambodia live on less than fifty cents a day. Forty percent live on up to one dollar a day. That means 70 percent of the population lives on one dollar or less a day.