



ADVOCACY AND GOVERNANCE

ESTHER MATHARU—CAMBODIA, ASIA

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He (or she) who oppresses the poor to increase his (or her) wealth, and he (or she) who gives gifts to the rich – both come to poverty! ~ Proverbs 22: 16

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We are reminded of the story of Hezekiah, King of Judah, who said **“Do not answer him!”** when a seemingly invincible Sennacherib taunted him and his people as they fought for survival, saying **“Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king of Assyria!”**  
~ 2 Kings 18 and 19, NIV

In Cambodia, as in other parts of the world, being rich is linked to material wealth. However, there is a different kind of wealth that CRWRC is tapping into which is not material but still involves giving “gifts” and making “bargains”. This is building the capacity of the poor **and** the closest people in power that the poor will ever encounter, that is the local authorities. With skills, know-how and new goals to work towards, community members experience the kind of transformation that does not automatically translate into moving up the ladder of affluence, but provides the learners with a new sense of value and self-worth.

This new pilot project, called the *Advocacy and Good Governance*



CRWRC staff and partners learn about Advocacy

*Project*, is integrated in the more general *Value Formation program* and emerged from the peace building trainings that had been done with CRWRC partners and community members over a year ago. In order

to meet the demand for more training in this area - following real transformation experienced by many participants as they learnt about non-violent communication and dialogue - CRWRC’s Justice Education Service Learning (JESL) provided Cambodia with funding for an *Advocacy Capacity Building Project*. This project was taken up by Tear Fund (UK), who supported an additional part of the vision with funds for a Good Governance component.

CRWRC saw how the many poor and isolated villages in Cambodia feel left out of the main stream of civil society and consequently disempowered. How could CRWRC and partners bring them closer to the next highest authority? How does one help people to begin to feel that they have the power to share their concerns and apply pressure onto the local authorities through advocacy, to fight corrupt



Commune Councilors and Police Officers share a light moment during the Good Governance workshop.

teachers who make their children pay extra or they will not pass their school examinations, for example? We found out that, technically, in order to help the communities with these challenges and concerns, more education and capacity was required, such as knowledge of the rule of law and human rights. Local authorities also said that they required more experience in communicating with community members on aspects of development such as how to plan and use the budget provided by the government for development activities.

We now have two main activities remaining: an advocacy and good governance workshop with the Christian Based Organizations (CBO) organized by CRWRC and facilitated by the partner’s staff, and a Forum bringing together the CBOs and local authorities to discuss the “how to” of organizing joint community development plans. We do not know the outcomes of this as yet, but we do feel that this approach will empower the villagers and promote sustainability, which is one of CRWRC’s and Tear Fund’s major concerns. We pray that this “gift-giving” of knowledge and awareness together with “bargaining” for peace and cooperation with the local authorities will result in transformed lives that radiate light to others and bring hope to poor community members.

~ Esther and Equbal Matharu



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