



NEWS FROM CAMBODIA

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We drive through the villages, a bumpy dirt road bordered with eucalyptus trees interspersed with ponds and rice fields - dry and dusty in this hot season – and over an occasional wooden bridge. In each village, fences which are often waist high hedges, define the homesteads. Small children and women sit on two square meter tables which serve as eating and sleeping quarters for the families. Under the tables, pigs, dogs, and chickens all take their turn to investigate. Rice fallen through the boards, will be quickly disposed of by these eternally hungry animals. They are not the only ones who are concerned about where their next meal will come from; undernourished children abound, their lackluster and faintly discolored hair, blotched skin and sores on their thin bodies all point to malnutrition.

And yet, we are greeted with bright smiles as we stop to see a well that was built with funds from one of our new donor's, the Norwegian Mission Alliance. This is one of two wells built recently in this village. They are a result of a survey that was done with CRWRC's local partner, Community for Transformation (CFT) in ten villages. Seven of them are new to CFT but Pastor Metta and the Community Organizers are well known in this community. The CBO leader, a woman in her 40's greets us. Her eyes light up as she pumps the water into buckets where clothes are ready for a scrub. She makes a point of thanking us. She laughs as she wipes her hands on her sarong and holds my hand.

I can not tell her that my contribution was just a small part of the whole effort. As I laugh with her, I think of all the people involved in this reality, this cement well and hand pump, built in this compound, serving these families whose

lives have been transformed. There is no need to walk distances carrying heavy buckets of water; no need to take baths in the unsanitary pond we saw entering the village; no need to buy vegetables, since the new vegetable garden that is fed with water from the well has all manner of herbs and greens that supplement the family diet.



Graciously, we acknowledge the thanks on behalf of all the people around the world, congregations from Canada, the US, and Norway; people who through their savings and giving, their thinking, their planning and organizing, their prayers and time, their dreams and hopes - all linked to make this village acquire this well, these materials to build latrines, these children's books for village and school book clubs, and a rice bank. This is the first rice bank in the village. Twenty families contributed 15 kilos of rice each in order to sell later and build a village kindergarten with the money saved. Why a kindergarten?

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A kindergarten is one of the community's biggest wishes simply because there isn't one close by, and the school is too far for little ones to walk to. How many children? Around 40, maybe 60. The children who participated in a CRWRC survey back in September had their first focus groups where they were able to answer questions and share their feelings. They said: *"We have no time to play. Many of us do not go to school because we are too poor, or school is too far, or we have to work to help our parent(s)".* The mothers said: *"Our children need education, we are too poor, too busy, too preoccupied, and too ignorant ourselves to help them".*

How wonderful to see these children, who are the wealth of the village but also some of the most neglected and vulnerable members of the community being told: *"You are important, you are valuable, learning is important for you, and we care for you!"*



Don't get me wrong, it is not the parents who do not care. Cambodian parents care so much for their children, sometimes having to parcel off their land to sell it, or part with their only capital – a cow or a pig - to provide expensive medicines for their sick children, often having to travel far to get to a reliable doctor or pharmacy that does not sell tainted drugs. Fathers become indentured farmers, or have to find work

in Phnom Penh to get money for food, for medication, for schools fees, mothers and children left in the villages.... I do not exaggerate when I say that we have no idea of how poor the poor really are.

Before January 2008, this village did not have a rice bank, two new wells, sixty small children meeting for play time, books to read, 5 latrines about to be built by the villagers, composts and vegetable gardens, and regular visits from CFT staff to see how they can help the community mobilize itself. All of you who read this story have contributed. You have helped take a dream off the drawing board into this and many other poor villages in Cambodia. On behalf of the community, and in my own words, CRWRC thanks you!

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