

Teofang Tnaut from Cambodia Receives the IYSH Memorial Encouragement Prize of the Japan Housing Association. Congratulations!

Teang Tnaut was formed in 2005 by Meas Kim Seng and Hallam Goad. It aims to bring together designers, artists and community organizers to work on community based projects. The focus is on three areas, namely technical assistance to community infrastructure, advocacy & housing rights and research on informal settlements. It is based in Phnom Penh with a field office in Kampot.

What is 'teang tnaut'?

'Teang Tnaut' means 'Sugar Palm frond' in Khmer. The Sugar Palm tree itself is typical of the Cambodian padi landscape and is used for many things including house construction, thatch roofs, palm wine, sugar and packaging. The frond is a combination of simple charm and utility - some of the

most appealing Cambodian characteristics.

These also reflect the aims of Teang Tnaut - to provide 'low key' interventions and a useful resource for urban settlements to improve their own infrastructure and surroundings.

Community infrastructure

STT has spent much of the year gathering information and research about communities in and around Kampot. It is always tempting to want to 'build' something but much of the year has been spent listening and observing. However in the final months of the ICCO funding STT decided to look at implementing some small scale upgrading in areas where the community has shown good cohesion. One of these sites was in a largely Cham (Muslim) village called Phum Kandal, in Trauey Koh Commune -- about 8 kms south of Kampot.

The local Surao (mini mosque) had some land used as water storage which over the years had silted up. The plan was to use community labor to deepen and repair the storage pond and install some simple steps. The community contributed US\$17 and ICCO (thru STT) US\$127 and within 7 days 192 cubic meters had been dug out and the banks reinforced. 3 weeks later STT supported 4 bags of cement to construct the steps leading into the water, useful not



BEFORE



only to access the water but for those wishing to wash themselves before prayer.

The project was simple and effective and soon after a neighboring community asked for support to upgrade their water storage which is a good sign and one of the objectives of our work -- for communities to take the initiative to develop projects themselves.

This involves 'catalysing' community initiatives to develop and upgrade small scale infrastructure including clean water supply, wells, sanitation and safe access.

This usually means helping to talk with local authorities, linking communities to potential funders, and intermittently assisting with budgeting and project management. Usually all labor skills can be found within the community.

A community upgrade its access road

In September 2004 the Samaradey Satrey community in Kampot, south Cambodia, was recommended by local NGO ADHOC as a good place to initiate a small pilot project. Staff and volunteers from Sahmakum Teang Tnaut, the Urban Poor Development Fund (UPDF) and the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) met with community leaders and members.

The community (with 128

families) already had many priority projects which it had been presenting to the local Government for many years. At the top of this list was the need for a new access road which would be high enough to avoid the daily tidal flooding and allow access to the nearby Dei Hoy Market.

A committee was formed to oversee the design, costing and management of the new 285 m long stretch of lane (at a budget cost of US\$2,028). They also managed the new savings and credit program which at present has over 60 families participating.

Construction got underway and even the Deputy Governor chipped in with some extra funds. It was truly a community event with the children also doing their bit. One of the key parts of the new road was the culvert which was required to allow the tidal waters to flow easily. After some structural problems (one pipe caved in after a truck went over it) the system was repaired and is working well.

The project was completed in November 2004. Ongoing maintenance will be very important and the committee arranged planting along the sides of a local salt tolerant plant that will help strengthen the road edge.

AFTER





The inauguration event and opening ceremony was in December 2004. Local Government and NGO officials and the community were invited to take part in the opening ceremony followed by food and games - a typical Cambodian celebration.

A photo project with 30 children under 13 was organised and each child was allowed 3 photos of their community but it had to be taken while standing on the new road. The resulting 90 photos entire stretch of the road and apart from this the project ran very smoothly and efficiently and has inspired some more small scale house improvements and ideas for future upgrading projects.

With support from Borderlands (an Australian based Housing Rights organisation) and Norwegian People's Aid, STT has begun to set up a simple system of collecting media articles about land and eviction but also about other issues affecting urban dwellers especially the poor. Khmer, French and English language papers are reviewed and articles scanned into an excel database.

This is focused on informal settlements and the general plight of these communities mainly in urban and peri-urban areas but also includes some rural situations where land grabbing and abuses have created profound problems. Research topics include a wide range of issues from documentation of communities and their current infrastructure to wider issues of transport and the environment. Research plays a key role in understanding communities and

complements the main work of actually working with communities and their goals.

Training aims at building the capacity of community members who show a natural ability to organize and inspire others in a way that breaks the mould of traditional hierarchies and allows room for consensus and discussion. It involves sending community members to visit others communities in Cambodia but also regionally in Laos and Thailand to get ideas and inspiration on how others work in areas of

organizing communities, budgeting for projects, negotiation techniques, community savings and credit systems etc. In this way we build up a pool of volunteers who are interested not only to help their own area but can explain these ideas to other communities.

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