

CASE STUDY

Empowering Women in Alternative Community Economies

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study focuses on empowering women within alternative community economies by enhancing skills, fostering social cohesion, facilitating networking, and protecting access to farmland from potential land grabbing. The project aimed to equip women with practical skills in sustainable agriculture and entrepreneurship through participatory training sessions and legal literacy workshops. Key findings indicate significant improvements in agricultural productivity, strengthened community bonds, increased market access, and successful advocacy for women's land rights. These outcomes have led to economic empowerment, social cohesion, and environmental stewardship, highlighting the project's contribution to sustainable development and resilience in the community.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2012, the community in Preah Vihear, encompassing districts such as Chaeb, Tbaeng Meanchey, and Cheysen, has faced significant challenges due to economic land concessions granted to Hengfue Chinese sugarcane plantation. This situation has sparked resistance among local farmers, both indigenous and non-indigenous, who are fighting to protect their farmland from encroachment. The impact of these concessions was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, when local farmers, particularly women, faced dual pressures of financial strain and increased risks of land grabbing.

In response to these challenges, Ponlok Khmer took proactive steps to support the community. Initially, PKH established a community fund aimed at assisting the most vulnerable farmers around the sugarcane plantation site with essential farming inputs. This initiative provided crucial support during a period of economic instability and uncertainty.

Building on these efforts, in 2022, PKH expanded its support through technical assistance, specifically focusing on rice adaptability trial farms. This initiative aimed to enhance local agricultural practices and resilience, equipping farmers, including women, with the skills and resources needed to mitigate the impact of land concessions and improve their agricultural productivity sustainably.



Data Collection of rice breeding

CONTRIBUTIONS

PKH has applied PLD approach to empower women within the affected communities. This approach was engaging women in skill-building activities of rice research that encompassed sustainable agriculture, legal empowerment, and leadership skills. Training sessions were designed to not only enhance agricultural techniques but also to educate women on their legal rights concerning land tenure and re-occupying for economic activities. Community engagement played a pivotal role in fostering social cohesion and unity among women, achieved through regular community dialogues and collaborative projects. These initiatives facilitated a supportive environment where women could collectively address challenges and advocate for their rights. Networking efforts were integral to the project's success, with strategies focusing on establishing partnerships at both local and regional levels. These networks provided opportunities for knowledge exchange, resource sharing, and collective advocacy, strengthening the community's resilience against land grabbing and promoting sustainable practices in agriculture yield production.



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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project aims to achieve several key objectives focused on empowering community members, particularly women, in asserting their rights and enhancing their livelihoods. First, it seeks to strengthen community networks by fostering critical consciousness and mobilizing members to assert their rights effectively. Second, the project aims to promote structural changes identified by women as crucial to securing their human rights and rights to natural resources. Third, it aims to reactivate platforms for farmers and forest dependents to develop alternative products and income sources, supporting their rights-based activities. Finally, the project endeavors to ensure that communities maintain their bundle of rights over natural resources, including sustainable land use management, exclusion, and access essential for dignified living and cultural participation.

LESSON LEARNT

Throughout the project, several key insights have emerged regarding effective strategies for empowering women in alternative economies:

Firstly, fostering unity and social cohesion among community members has proven essential, as it creates a supportive environment where women feel empowered to advocate for their rights collectively.

Secondly, promoting the use of local seeds and sustainable agricultural practices has not only enhanced agricultural productivity but also contributed to preserving biodiversity and ensuring food security.

Success factors include strong community participation, strategic partnerships with local organizations, and continuous capacity-building efforts tailored to local needs. Challenges encountered included initial resistance to change and external pressures such as economic constraints and regulatory barriers. However, proactive engagement with stakeholders, adaptation of approaches, and leveraging community strengths have been instrumental in overcoming these challenges and sustaining positive impacts.

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Provided community fund
to poorest farmer

OUTCOMES

By 2024 the project has yielded significant outcomes across various dimensions crucial to community empowerment.

- Women participants have demonstrated enhanced skills in sustainable agriculture, legal awareness, food sovereignty and networking abilities, enabling them to adopt improved agricultural practices, navigate legal frameworks more effectively, and forge beneficial connections within their communities.
- Social cohesion has notably strengthened, evidenced by increased unity and collaborative efforts among community members, which have fostered a supportive environment for collective action and advocacy.
- Networking achievements include the establishment of community fund/trial farm among women farmers and community stakeholders, facilitating knowledge exchange, promoting local seeds, and best practices.
- In terms of land access protection, the project has implemented measures to safeguard women's land rights, effectively mitigating threats such as land grabbing and ensuring secure access to agricultural resources essential for livelihood sustainability and community resilience.



farmers in Sambo village