

Eye on Cambodia: Health

Location

Samphin is a town on Koh Pdao Island in the Kratie Province 90 minutes journey from Kratie Town. It is set in the centre of the stunning Mekong River.



Background Issues

Cambodian people spend approximately \$33 per person each year to treat sickness. In contrast the government health expenditure is just \$2 per person. One of the problems is mistrust and a lack of understanding when it comes to modern healthcare, preferring to go to traditional healers and ill-informed drug peddlers. One of the biggest contributing factors to poverty is the necessity to pay for healthcare services, and a lack of knowledge, coupled with unhealthy living practices that are born from dirty and infected water supplies and inadequate sanitation, is killing rural Cambodian people.

Approximately 10% of Cambodian children die before they are a year old. Many of these deaths are generated by inferior sanitation facilities that give rise to waterborne diseases or mosquito-driven illness such as malaria. UNICEF estimates that rural sanitation coverage in Cambodia is just 8%, which is the lowest in the region and the second lowest outside of Africa. Many rural inhabitants use rice paddies, banana groves, and other water supplies, such as the Mekong River to dispose of their waste. Polluting the resources that they depend on so.

Family History

Mr. Sray buon is 63 and has been in the village since he was born. Of his 6 children 3 are students continuing to learn after school. During the Khmer Rouge rule he was forced to farm far from his village, as well as labour all day to dig ponds. In 1979 when this was all over he got married and returned to Samphin.



What has CRDT done?

CRDT has introduced many practices to the island, many of which go some way to improving the health of the villagers. "We have much better sanitation now, we have toilets and rainwater storage for washing, and the drinking water is good". As was discovered through the course of researching, all the people working with CRDT seemed to be fully aware of how they were benefiting: "We had no development in the village, the people were always getting sick with things like malaria, colds, stomach aches... We spent more money on medicine before CRDT arrived and there wasn't enough food to go around".

What has changed?

Mr. Sray Buon seemed affable and slightly self conscious as he answered questions about the health issues his people face in Samphin and on Koh Pdao Island. "What we used to feed our children depended on the situation, but normally it was rice. They never used to eat meat. Now we are able to buy meats and raise our own animals to eat".



He goes on to reiterate about previous health problems: "Not just my family, but everyone in the village has come down with diarrhea as a result of not drinking clean water. Also I never grew my own vegetables as I do now, I bought them from the market and they may have used a chemical substance on them. At home we didn't eat enough and we drank dirty river water. But now the villagers get diarrhea much less frequently".



So has he noticed any change in the overall health of him and his children? Yes, it seems so, his kids are not sick as often as they were before. Has the quality of the water you get changed? "Before CRDT brought the rainwater storage we had to get our water from the river and boil it. We washed our pans and dishes in the river, and cooked with riverwater as well"

"I want all of my family to have good health, and I want my entire village to have good health and less disease, as well as a better idea of the behavior that will encourage development. We must all throw out the old ideas and get new experience". Mr. Sray Buon has a clear view of what he wants for his village, he wants people to be healthy, have enough to eat and drink and to be aware of their actions. And for Cambodia? "I want

people in both rural areas and in the cities to have good health and think about our future”.

Cambodians die earlier than the neighboring people of Vietnam or Thailand, the average age is 57 years. They also bear more children, die more often from malaria, and are more likely to die when giving birth according to the United Nations Development Programme. CRDT has much to offer rural Cambodian people, and after 25 years of civil unrest and hardship there are many looking for that support.
