



C R O A P
Centre for Research on Optimal
Agricultural Practices

S O R I Y A
Montessori Learning Centre

19th Aug.2020

Dear Friends,

The last report which I had sent you was in June and I have also kept you updated on the Covid-19 situation in Cambodia. On 31st July, which is the Feast Day of our Founder St. Ignatius, I celebrated 60 years as a Jesuit. I am ever grateful to Our Lord for this vocation of mine. I am grateful to all who have been a part of my journey - my family and friends, my companions in the Society and all the Mission Offices, Donor Organizations and individual friends like you who have given so much meaning to all that I was able and am able to do. I am grateful to our team who have provided me with the information for this Newsletter as I am still in a locked-in situation.

Let me begin this report with one of the farmers:



Mr. Nouv Sao Noun, 73 years old, lives in village Prek Takong, Pursat Province. His wife passed away in 2016, age 66. His son and daughter-in-law are back in Thailand as migration workers. He lives with his grandson and his wife who work for a water filter company in Pursat. Noun Rattana, next to him is his youngest grandson, 7 years old. They are dependent on rice and vegetable cultivation and raising cows and chickens for generating income. Seeing the results on the team leader's farm he joined the SRI program in 2019.

In the 2019 season he tried SRI on 600 sq. meters while on the remaining 1 hectare he planted rice the traditional way. The harvest on the SRI plot was great so this year he will do SRI on 1600 sq.m. Farmers need time till they fully adapt to a new method.

In 2020, he is looking after his grandson. He prepared seedling nurseries in July using 5k.g.s of SOMA VOTHEY rice seed. Then 4 days for transplanting (22-26 July) assisted by a farmer of his group. Our staff helped him a little on the first day. Mr. Sao Noun said " I am very happy to apply SRI transplanting again. The group members always help me when asked for help". This year he expects a great rice yield again.



Here is a report about Mrs. Peng Sarith:



She is 30 years old and lives in village Keo Mony. Her husband, age 36, is a construction worker. Off and on they have worked as laborers for harvesting cassava and water melon. Income was low.

In 2020 her daughter got sick and her husband lost his job. They have taken a loan from a Micro-Finance-Institute to survive. They do not have farm land of their own but are planting vegetables next to their home.



They are aware of the dangers of the spread of Covid-19 and take the precautions necessary. They see to it that their children follow safety practices too. With no other income for the family, they depend on agriculture now.

She started land preparation and prepared rice seedlings together with 5 farmers. They chose Choul Za rice variety. She will start transplanting by SRI method on 2000 sq. m. land. The Covid-19 situation affected her family as her husband lost his job. Luckily in early August her husband was employed by a Sanitation company with a basic salary of 175\$ a month. He has to work hard, from 6:00 AM until 10:00 PM, Monday to Sunday.

Every day, he and other workers go with the garbage truck to collect garbage, from house-to-house, around Pursat province. Mrs. Pheng Sarith herself, with a group of other garbage collectors, collect garbage together 2 to 3 days a week. She can earn about 50\$ to 60\$ a month. They built makeshift huts where they brought their children to live near the landfill site. Her niece and her two daughters are beside her in the photo.

She always comes to her house and fields twice a week. She told us that she will come back home to look after her house and SRI fields at the end of this month after SRI transplanting. Moreover, she will do re-preparation of land for growing organic vegetables on the land next to her house. She will also increase chickens rearing.



A report about Mr. Chhoeurn Makara, one of the affected Youth:



He is 18 years old and lives in village Keo Mony. He had left his village to go to work as an air-conditioner-repairer's assistant for about one and a half years. He then returned to work with his eldest brother in construction work.

He is back home now and is helping in normal house work. ***“My family doesn’t have enough money to buy food, rice, water and clothes. My parents decided to seek some loans from villagers,”*** he says. He would like to do all he can to help improve the situation. He confirmed that when the COVID-19 crisis is over, he will continue raising chickens, planting vegetables and doing rice farming, especially implementing SRI. He will join the SRI program of Karuna Battambang KBO for more knowledge about this method, organic fertilizer and pesticide production and vegetable cultivation. Organic practices will help him and his parents get healthy and they will stop using chemical fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides.



Along with other youth he is involved in producing the compost needed and getting the fields ready for rice planting. They are being trained for transplanting of rice seedlings and direct seeding.

In the photos below are other youth who had not migrated but are now involved in our SRI program.



The youth involved in land preparation, composting and are practicing direct seeding.

Once they learn the value of their farmland they will have different ideas about migrating.



The Youth have started with direct seeding on 4 plots and transplanting on 4 plots. They will continue transplanting on 4 more plots later.

They continue collecting compost, about 1 ton, for spreading on the rice field. They transplant using the SRI method. They have chosen the Romdul and Reang Chey variety rice seeds.

In the photos one sees the rows made for transplanting rice seedlings after levelling the land.

It is important to bring them together to learn details of the SRI method and then to help each other for putting it into practice.

I should have started this report with them, but here are the Women Farmers who are actually the ones who give strength to their communities.



They are active members of our Self Help Groups. The SHG of Prek Takong has 21 members (16 female) and that of Keo Mony has 16 members (11 female). The funds available to them is made up of their own contributions and the support given by KBO.



As we see in these photos, they are actively involved in planting of vegetables. They are being assisted to raise chickens as well. The return of unemployed youth is one of their concerns. We realize that their household chores have not reduced at all.

The SRI-farmer group helped the Women Farmers for transplanting using the SRI method to produce organic rice

In the second photo they are learning vacuum packing of their rice for the market.



At our Demonstration Farm + Café, the Women’s Group that will be managing the Café, are helping to make it a place of welcome. The present crisis has delayed its opening.





Bishop Kike is seen with Mr. Chheat and Ms. Borey (extreme left) who is responsible for the Café. In the second photo are 4 Jesuits from Phnom Penh and the Women's Group that manages the Café.

One of the observations of Bishop Kike was the lack of shady trees outside. We have planted trees but they will take time to grow. Mr. Chheat took immediate action. Here is what happened soon after:



Trees were purchased from a local dealer and planted at the entrance to the Demonstration Farm and Café. Once the trees and their branches flourish we will have a lot of shade. It will also make the entrance look attractive.

Now for an experience of one of our good farmers who had migrated to Thailand and returned.



This is Mrs. Pheng Vanny, one of the 3 farmers who joined our program in 2016. Seeing her conviction about the SRI method and the hard work she put in, we gave her a part-time assignment in our project. She had no real house so we built her one, the cost of which she had to pay back in small instalments.

Her husband is much older than her and used to earn money by going to the garbage dumping site to pick up saleable cans, plastic bottles etc. In 2018 he was too weak to continue that work and Mrs. Vanny took over and experienced health problems because of the pollution around the pit. She felt that migrating to Thailand would give her the opportunity to earn money for supporting the family.



This is Mrs. Pheng Vanny after her 8 months' work as a migrant laborer in Thailand. She was working on road constructions there. She faced many difficulties. It was hot, the work was heavy and she had difficulties with food and having a proper place for sleeping.

Sometimes she wanted to come back but then, according to the contract, she would have to pay for the remaining period. She finally returned due to the Covid-19 crisis and her being an illegal immigrant worker in Thailand was not safe at all.

KBO, knowing that Mrs. Vanny is a committed worker has reinstated her in its team. She is now employed as the gardener of CROAP. She is responsible for rice and vegetable planting there and producing the compost needed. She will also help the women farmers in the region to use the SRI method on their fields.

Because of the closure of schools, caused by the Covid-19 situation, our program for getting school children involved in Agriculture and the Environment has been on hold. However, some of the children will be assisted by our farmers to practice the SRI method on a part of land kept aside for them.



In the first photo are some of our children practicing traditional Cambodian dance. In the second photo they are dressed up to perform the Blessing Dance. They want to thank all of you for accompanying them and giving meaning to their lives.

Please keep Cambodia in your prayers. The Covid-19 situation has affected its economy in many ways and its effect is going to be felt for a long time. Together we can help it to recover for the sake of these children who are the future of their country.



In gratitude I remain,
Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Noel Oliver SJ".

(Br. Noel Oliver, SJ)