

## Beneficiary Story No. 5 (CRDT Project)

# The Stories of Sem Sarem and Than Sophat – Living a Better and More Climate-Resilient Life Next to the Mekong River



Than Sophat during the interview (left); Sem Sarem in front of one of the projects' model farms (right).

Sem Sarem is 48 years old. She is married and has 3 children. She lives in Kampong Damrei, Boeung Char Commune, Sambour District, Kratie Province. Than Sophat, 30 years old, married and 2 children, also lives in Kampong Damrei, a village that is located at the western banks of the Mekong River.

Despite living next to one of the largest rivers in the world, lack of water is, absurdly, one of the core problems of the community. In addition, the community has increasingly suffered from prolonged drought throughout the last years.

Both, Sem and Than, live on rice farming, vegetable gardening, pig and cow rearing. They have benefitted through the installation of a solar-powered water pumping system and training on management and maintenance of the same as well as training and learning activities on vegetable gardening by the project implemented by the Cambodian Rural Development Team (CRDT). As a result, they have seen significant improvements in their ability to grow and sell vegetables and use Mekong water for irrigation and domestic use. Previously, villagers used the Mekong water only for domestic consumption, using it for irrigation was too labour-intensive and for the ones that own smaller pumps themselves also considerably more expensive.

Interviewer: Than, how you have been involved in the project?

Than: I am the accountant of the water user committee that manages the water system installed by the project. Sometimes I am also helping with repairs of the system, as long as my technical skills are sufficient to do so.

I: Have you volunteered for this role?

T: To be honest, not really. I was elected by the community. At first, there was nobody volunteering to become a member of the water user committee when the community met to elect the members. Many of us felt overwhelmed by the prospective tasks. But after the chief of commune had explained to us, how important it is for the community, others encouraged me to step forward as a candidate. And eventually I was elected. While I now feel honored to be a committee member and thereby serve the entire community, it sometimes feels a bit weird. Because my house does not get water, as it is located at the far end of the village.

I: What does your role entail exactly?

T: I am in charge of collecting the user fees. The fees range from 500 to 2000 Riel per  $m^3$  depending on the type of use. For larger farms, we collect 500 Riel/ $m^3$ , for smaller farms like home gardens 1000 Riel/ $m^3$  and 2000 Riel/ $m^3$  for domestic water users. We use the collected money to maintain and repair the system. As compared, commercial water sellers charged 5000 Riel/ $m^3$  before the project. In addition, users pay 25 USD to connect to the system. This is mostly related to the costs for the necessary pipes and the meter.



Than in front of the batch tank that connects the pump and the main pipe.

I: In your opinion, how have you benefitted from the project?

T: I certainly gained more expertise in bookkeeping as well as the technical aspects of the water system. I also receive a compensation for the work I perform as a committee member. That amounts to 5 USD per week.

I: How much time do you spend on your work for the committee?

T: In the beginning, during the installation of the system even up to 15 days. Now, for the more regular work of the committee, I usually spend around 3 to 4 days. But if, the compensation was higher, I would be able to spend more time on this.

I: Do you experience any issues with the system?

T: No, the system is great and has helped the farming HHs to increase their income by 100 and some even up to 200 USD per months. However, the capacity of the system should be increased. The demand is certainly there. Also, the people get only water between 8 or 9 am and 4 pm due to the solar-powered pump. It would be better to have water throughout the day.



Sem watering the vegetable plants in her garden.

Sem Sarem is a female farmer that has benefitted from the agricultural training and support by the project. She has finished primary school and used to earn her living by subsistence livestock rearing and fishery in the past. Since the project has started, she has engaged in vegetable growing and selling.

Interviewer: Sarem, in your opinion, how have you benefitted from the project?

Sarem: I can plant vegetables easier than in the past, because of the water provided by the system. In the past, it was more difficult to pump water from the river, and more expensive since we spent money for the diesel. I am now also selling the vegetables, thanks to the Agricultural Cooperative Union that buys and markets them, together with the vegetables by the others.

I: How have you received advice on how to grow vegetables?

S: I joined the training by CRDT on vegetable growing. And sometimes also the meetings at village levels, though I did miss some sessions due to other obligations.

I: What was the most useful advice for you?

S: I have learnt a lot in general, but the advice to use more organic fertilizer and less pesticide was really helpful. Before we were always told to use more pesticides if needed.

I: How much do you earn by selling vegetables?

S: About 300.000 Riel and sometimes even up to 400.000 Riel a month.

I: How do you use this additional income?

S: I spend it on school fees for my children and domestic consumption. Nowadays, my life is better than before, because of the vegetable growing.

Sem and Than benefitted from support provided by the 'Promoting resilience in agricultural production and enterprises for food security among subsistence farmers along the Mekong' Project

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Please find more information on the project [here](#).