IMPACT SPOTLIGHT

ISSUE 12 | JUL - SEP 2026



OXFAM

CONTENTS

Financing Health Protection That Leaves No One Behind 1

Oxfam and Partners Launch Swiss's Funded Initiative to Strengthen Citizen Voice and Local Budget Accountability in Cambodia 3

Oxfam and IDEA Promoting Decent Work for Informal Economy Workers in Cambodia's Digital Transition 5

Cambodia Pushes for Fair Climate Finance Ahead of COP31 7

Working Together to Build a More Resilient Family 8

Women Take on Greater Role in Forest Protection in Preah Vihear 9

Bridging Grassroot Voices and Institutional Action 11

Bringing Justice Closer to Communities: A New Path for Resolving Debt Dispute in Cambodia 12

The River Protector 13

Celebrating ODF+ Success in Kandaek Commune, Siem Reap 17



A WORD FROM THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR

> Lasting change begins when people have the opportunity, confidence, and support to shape their future. Across Cambodia, communities are turning challenges into progress through leadership, participation, and collective action, building a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable society where everyone can contribute and thrive.

Greetings,

This edition of Impact Spotlight reminds us of a simple but powerful truth: lasting change begins when people have the opportunity, confidence, and support to shape the decisions that affect their lives. Across Cambodia, we continue to witness communities transforming challenges into opportunities through leadership, resilience, and collective action.

The stories featured in this issue highlight the many ways people are building a more inclusive and resilient future. Whether advocating for universal social protection, strengthening local governance, protecting forests and rivers, resolving debt disputes, or improving sanitation, communities are demonstrating that meaningful progress is most effective when solutions are rooted in local realities and driven by those most affected.

A common thread throughout these stories is the importance of participation and voice. Through initiatives such as the Citizen-Led Inclusive Planning and Services (CLIPS) project, citizens are engaging more actively in local planning and budget processes, helping to strengthen accountability and ensure public resources respond to community priorities. At the same time, informal economy workers are raising their voices to promote decent work and strengthen social protection in an increasingly digital economy.

This edition also showcases inspiring examples of women and young people stepping into leadership roles. From women taking on greater responsibility in community forestry management in Preah Vihear to families applying gender-transformative approaches to strengthen household resilience, these stories demonstrate how empowering women creates benefits that extend far beyond individuals, contributing to stronger communities and more sustainable development outcomes.

As the climate crisis continues to test the resilience of communities across Cambodia, we see remarkable leadership emerging at the local level. Indigenous youth are championing river protection and climate awareness. Communities are working together to develop adaptation plans, improve water governance, and advocate for fair and accessible climate finance.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to our partners, donors, government counterparts, civil society allies, and community members whose collaboration and dedication make these achievements possible. Together, we are helping create pathways toward a Cambodia where every person can participate, contribute, and thrive.

SOPHOAN PHEAN
National Director, Oxfam in Cambodia

FINANCING HEALTH PROTECTION THAT LEAVES NO ONE BEHIND



Panel discussion on sustainable financing for social health protection during Cambodia Social Protection Week 2026. Photo: NSPC

Cambodia's social protection system is at a critical turning point. Amid economic uncertainty, climate shocks, inflation and changing labour markets, social protection is increasingly essential to human dignity, resilience and inclusive development.

As a longstanding supporter of Cambodia Social Protection Week, Oxfam contributed financial resources, technical expertise and policy perspectives to the 2026 event, which focused on strengthening social protection amid multiple and overlapping crises.

During a discussion on sustainable financing for social health protection, Oxfam's Policy Advisor Mr. Ritthy Ou joined government, National Social Security Fund (NSSF), the Social Security Regulator and World Health Organization (WHO) representatives to discuss how Cambodia can expand protection while ensuring long-term financial sustainability.

CLOSING THE MISSING MIDDLE

Cambodia has built a strong social protection architecture, yet a major challenge remains: the "missing middle." According to ILO, around 88.3% of the workforce, approximately 7.22 million workers, is engaged in informal employment. Many fall above the eligibility thresholds for poverty-targeted assistance such as IDPoor and the Health Equity Fund but remain outside mandatory NSSF protection. They include tuk-tuk and ride-hailing drivers, street vendors, smallholder farmers, domestic workers, subcontracted workers, caregivers, and millions of others whose labour sustains Cambodia's economy.

With the national poverty line at around US$2.70 per person per day *[UNDP 2022]*, being above the poverty threshold does not necessarily mean being economically secure. The report by Cambodia Investment Review three months ago shows that rising living costs and inflation of around 5.1% in 2026 leave millions of workers and their families vulnerable to even small economic, health, or climate shocks. Moving towards universal social protection requires making the system affordable, trusted, preventive, and accessible.

First, make social protection affordable. Voluntary schemes are unlikely to achieve universal coverage when workers with volatile incomes must bear the full cost. Cambodia could consider a Formalisation Incentive Plan, including a time-bound state co-contribution, such as covering 50% of contributions during the first two years, to encourage enrolment

in NSSF health and pension schemes.

Second, close the dignity gap. People are more likely to contribute when they trust the services they receive. Concerns about treatment, medicine quality, and experiences at health facilities can undermine confidence. Rights-based training, stronger accountability, and effective beneficiary feedback mechanisms can help ensure everyone receives quality healthcare with dignity, regardless of income or employment status.

Third, strengthen prevention. Social health protection should increasingly support routine screening, early intervention, and occupational health services. Prevention protects workers and can reduce longer-term costs for families and the public health system.

Fourth, remove administrative barriers. Informal workers should not face digital dead ends, occupation mismatches, or duplicated registration processes. Commune-level assistance, integrated information systems, and flexible contribution schedules can make coverage more accessible to people with irregular incomes.

FINANCING SOCIAL PROTECTION FAIRLY AND SUSTAINABLY

Expanding social protection raises a fundamental question: **where will the money come from?**

A universal and sustainable system requires stronger and more progressive domestic resource mobilisation. Cambodia can expand fiscal space by strengthening tax administration, simplifying business formalisation, reviewing corporate tax incentives, and exploring environmental and carbon taxation. According to 'Revenue Statistics in Asia and the Pacific 2026: Cambodia' published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Cambodia's tax-to-GDP ratio of around 13% remains below the cited Asia-Pacific average of 19.8 percent and the global average of 23.3%, suggesting room to mobilise additional resources for social protection and essential public services.

For low-income informal workers, the voluntary NSSF health contribution of 15,600 riel per month can be difficult to afford amid rising living costs based on the data from the accounting company called KPMG. Flexible payment options and targeted government support could make contributions more affordable while ensuring that financing reforms do not disproportionately burden those least able to pay.

Oxfam also highlighted Social Protection for All (SP4ALL) Coalition calls to protect livelihood opportunities for informal workers, including fair regulation of competition in street vending, transport, tourism, and other informal economic activities. Broader participation in the NSSF, including by eligible employees of UN agencies and international NGOs not currently contributing, could also strengthen social solidarity and financial sustainability.

Cambodia already has strong foundations. The National Social Protection Policy Framework 2024-2035 marks important progress towards a rights-based, life-cycle approach. Khmer Times also reported that social protection coverage reportedly increased from around 2 million people in 2017 to 4.8 million in 2024 and approximately 8.5 million by late 2026.

The next priority is clear: no one should be excluded from social protection simply because they work in the informal economy. Oxfam remains committed to working with the government and other stakeholders towards a universal, equitable, and sustainably financed system. Protecting informal workers and marginalised groups is not only a matter of social justice but also an investment in Cambodia's long-term resilience and shared prosperity.

Photo: Participants of Cambodia Social Protection Week 2026 pose for a group photo. Around 500 people attended in person, while another 500 joined online to advance dialogue on inclusive and sustainable social protection in Cambodia.



OXFAM AND PARTNERS LAUNCH SWISS'S FUNDED INITIATIVE TO STRENGTHEN CITIZEN VOICE AND LOCAL BUDGET ACCOUNTABILITY IN CAMBODIA



Ms. Bopha Chea, a representative of the Phnom Penh Center for Independent Living, shared during a panel discussion, the barriers that people with disabilities face in participating in local decision-making and accessing essential public services. Photo: Oxfam

As Cambodia advances its decentralization reforms and strengthens public financial management systems, meaningful citizen participation in budget planning and oversight remains essential to achieve transparent, accountable and responsive governance.

To support these efforts, Oxfam, together with six consortium partners, officially launched the Citizen-Led Inclusive Planning and Services (CLIPS) project on 10 September 2026. Funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the initiative aims to strengthen local governance, improve public financial management, and empower citizen to participate in decision that affect their communities.

Implemented from June 2026 to August 2028, CLIPS will work across 14 districts and 60 communes in Phnom Penh, Kampong Thom, Kampong Chhnang, Pursat, Mondulkiri, and Ratanakiri. The project focuses on making local planning, budgeting, and public service delivery more transparent, inclusive, and accountable, while creating greater opportunities for participation by women, youth, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, and other marginalized groups.

Speaking at the launch event, Ms. Sophoan Phean, National Director of Oxfam, said, "The CLIPS project reflects our shared commitment to ensuring that citizens have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect their lives. By strengthening local planning, budget transparency, and public participation, we can help build stronger trust between communities and local authorities

while contributing to more inclusive and effective public services."

H.E. Sambathphalla Chey, Director of Policy Analysis and Development Division of the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development Secretariat (NCDDS), welcomed the initiative as a timely contribution to Cambodia's decentralization reforms.

"Citizen ownership and participation are key factors in promoting decentralization and decentralization reforms. Citizen participation helps development and public service delivery better respond to local needs. Citizens can participate by providing proposals, making decisions, receiving information, and monitoring the work of local administrations. This project will strengthen local governance, transparency, accountability, and development effectiveness. At the same time, it will contribute to achieving the vision of reform and Cambodia 2050," he said.

Ms. Sonia Carlotti, First Secretary and Head of Program Governance and Citizen Participation at the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), said, "Citizens are not merely recipients of development; they are its driving force. This project will foster inclusive participation, transparent budgeting and responsive local governance to help build stronger partnerships between citizens and local authorities, creating communities that are more accountable, equitable and resilient".

The launch brought together representatives from government institutions, development partners, civil society organizations, media, youth networks, and community groups, reflecting a shared commitment to advancing citizen-centered governance in Cambodia.

A panel discussion during the event highlighted why inclusive participation matters. Among the speakers was Ms. Bopha Chea, a representative of the Phnom Penh Center for Independent Living, who shared the challenges that people with disabilities often face in accessing information, public services, and opportunities to participate in local planning and budget discussions.

She noted that limited accessibility in public facilities, together with barriers to accessing disability assessments and IDPoor benefits, can prevent many people with disabilities from fully exercising their rights and contributing to local development processes.

CLIPS supports Cambodia's ongoing decentralization reforms and contributes to the implementation of the National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development Phase II (2021-2030). By working closely with local authorities, government institutions, community groups, and development partners, CLIPS will promote evidence-based budgeting and strengthen accountability mechanisms at the local level.

Over the next two years, the consortium, led by Oxfam and comprising the Advocacy and Policy Institute (API), Cambodian Journalists Alliance (CamboJA), Development and Partnership in Action (DPA), NGO Forum on Cambodia (NGOF), SILAKA, and the Youth Resource Development Program (YRDP), will help create more opportunities for communities to engage with local authorities and influence decisions that affect their lives.





Representatives from CLIPS partner organizations, donors, and government institutions pose for a group photo during the launch of the CLIPS project. Photo: Oxfam

OXFAM AND IDEA PROMOTING DECENT WORK FOR INFORMAL ECONOMY WORKERS IN CAMBODIA'S DIGITAL TRANSITION



Informal workers performance during the event. The storytelling shared the challenges and aspiration of workers in Cambodia's informal economy as they navigate a reapidly changing digital world. Photo: Oxfam

By Naratevy Kek

The Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA) and Oxfam marked the 140th anniversary of International Labour Day with a celebration in Phnom Penh on 11 May 2026 under the theme "Together Promoting Decent Work in the Digital Context for Informal Economy Workers." The event highlighted the vital contributions of informal economy workers to Cambodia development while calling for stronger labor protection and social security in an increasing digital economy.

The gathering brought together approximately 250 participants, including informal economy workers, street vendors, trade unions, civil society organizations, development partners, and representatives from government ministries.

Informal economy workers ranging from street vendors and waste pickers to domestic workers, food delivery riders and smallholder farmers play a vital role in supporting livelihoods, strengthening food security and creating employment opportunities across the country. Despite their contribution, many continue to face unstable incomes, occupational health and safety risk, and limited access to social protection.

Ms. Sophoan Phean, National Director of Oxfam, said, "Informal economy workers are the driving force of Cambodia's economy. This International Labour Day is not only a commemoration but also a call to action to ensure that digital transformation and social protection policies include and empower informal economy workers."

As Cambodia pursues its ambition to become a high-middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income

country by 2050, ensuring decent work in the digital era is essential. Access to social protection, labor rights, skills development and occupational health and safety measures are critical to protect workers' livelihoods and reducing poverty and vulnerability.

Mr. Pao Vorn, President of IDEA, said, "We must ensure that informal economy workers are not left behind in this transition and that their rights, health and livelihoods are fully protected in line with the context of the evolving global condition."

Speaking at the event, H.E. Vannaroth Sovann, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, said, "The Royal Government's goal is not only to create jobs, but to create decent and productive jobs that improve workers' skills, livelihoods, and long-term wellbeing. Supporting informal workers and enterprises to transition into the formal economy requires the commitment and collaboration of all stakeholders. We call on government institutions, the private sector, employers' and workers' organizations, and informal economy associations to work together to expand social protection and ensure all workers benefit from legal protections and opportunities."

For any informal workers, accessing to social protection remains a pressing concern.

"We work every day to support our families but without proper health protection, one accident can take away our income and livelihoods," said Sokha, a street vendor from Phnom Penh.

The event also highlighted the growing number of gig and platform workers who are helping shape



Participants raised questions directly to the panelists during a panel discussion on "Social Protection Policy and the Development of Social Protection Policy in the Digital Context for the Informal Economy." Photo: Oxfam

Cambodia's digital economy. Unlike workers in formal sector, many platform-based workers are classified as independent contractors, leaving them without access to key protections such as health insurance, paid leave, retirement benefits and minimum wage guarantees. Their income often fluctuated based on customer demand, platform algorithms and market competition.

"Digital platforms can help us register and access to healthcare scheme but most of us do not know how to use them. We need more training and support to keep us with these changes. The owners of the company do not consider registering us with the National Social Protection Fund," said Dany, a food delivery worker.

IDEA called for a stronger policies to protect gig and platform workers. According to the association, extending social protection coverage, clarifying workers' legal status and ensuring fair working conditions are necessary steps to ensure digitalization creates opportunities rather deepening vulnerability.

The Royal Government of Cambodia has made significant progress in expanding social security coverage, providing health equity cards, implementing cash assistance programmes, and introducing digital registration systems for vocational training and skills development. However, challenges remain, including limited digital literacy, rising living costs, inadequate childcare services, and gaps in data and research on informal economy workers.

The International Labour Day celebration provided a platform for workers to share their experiences directly with policymakers and stakeholders. Participants also heard updates from the Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation on policy developments affecting informal economy workers and joined discussions on social protection in the digital era and occupational safety and health.

CAMBODIA PUSHES FOR FAIR CLIMATE FINANCE AHEAD OF COP31

As Cambodia prepares for the 31st Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Antalya, Türkiye, the country is calling for greater support for developing nations facing the growing impacts of climate change.



Participants discussed priorities including climate finance, adaptation, loss and damage, nature-based solutions, renewable energy, climate-resilient agriculture, and implementation of Cambodia's Third Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC 3.0). ©Oxfam

That message emerged during a national consultation in Phnom Penh on 23 September 2026, where around 80 representatives from government, civil society, Indigenous communities, youth groups, people with disabilities, academia, development partners, and the private sector gathered to help shape Cambodia's position for the global climate summit.

Organized by the NGO Forum on Cambodia in partnership with Oxfam, the consultation focused on ensuring countries like Cambodia have the resources needed to adapt to climate change, protect vulnerable communities, and pursue sustainable development.

Participants emphasized that climate finance must be accessible, predictable, and responsive to the needs of countries on the frontlines of the climate crisis. They also highlighted the importance of a just transition that supports economic development while advancing climate action.

The discussion comes at a critical time as Cambodia prepares to graduate from Least Developed Country (LDC) status. While graduation reflects development progress, many participants expressed concern that countries graduating from LDC status could face reduced access to concessional financing and technical support despite remaining highly vulnerable to climate impacts.

Mr. Saroeun Soeung, Executive Director of the NGO Forum on Cambodia, said, "Local multi-stakeholder-led climate action is one of the key approaches for sustainably coping with climate change, so finance and other resources should be given to local communities without obstacles or prerequisites."

"Cambodia has committed to ambitious climate action, targeting a 55% emission reduction by 2035 and carbon neutrality by 2050. COP31 must deliver grant-based, predictable, and debt-resilient finance to ensure that graduation marks a milestone of sustainable development, not an increase in climate vulnerability," said Ms. Sophoan Phean, National Director of Oxfam.

Community representatives also shared firsthand accounts of climate impacts affecting rural livelihoods.

Ms. Channy Yem, a participant from Stung Treng province, said, "Our families depend on the rain, our crops, and the fish in our rivers, but unpredictable weather is destroying harvests and pushing communities deeper into debt. We need greater support for local adaptation efforts, protection of natural resources, and meaningful climate finance that reaches communities on the frontlines of the crisis."

Key recommendations included protecting access to climate finance for countries graduating from LDC status, increasing grant-based adaptation funding, improving access to the Loss and Damage Fund, and recognizing the importance of freshwater ecosystems such as the Mekong River and Tonle Sap Basin within global adaptation frameworks.

As countries prepare to gather in Türkiye later this year, Cambodian stakeholders hope their message will resonate beyond the negotiating rooms.

WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD A MORE RESILIENT FAMILY

By Phanith Yip/VSG

For years, Kay Ya and her husband, Moeurn Moeul, worked hard to support their family in Phnom Konkleng Community Protected Area in Banteay Meanchey province. Raising three children was not always easy, especially as Moeul lives with an amputated left leg.

Before joining the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) and Gender Action Learning System (GALS) training through the Climate Resilience for All (CREFA) project, the couple had clear responsibilities but rarely made plans together. Moeul spent most of his time farming rice and raising livestock, while Ya managed the household, cared for the children, and handled other caregiving responsibilities.

Although both worked hard, they seldom talked about their long-term goals as a family.

That changed when they participated in the training delivered by Village Support Group (VSG). Among the tools introduced was the Household Vision Map, which encouraged couples to discuss their dreams, identify shared goals, and develop a plan for achieving them together.

For the first time, Kay Ya and Moeurn Moeul sat down to map out what they wanted for their family's future. Their goals included expanding their pig-raising activities, growing vegetables to earn additional income, improving their pigsty, supporting their children's education, and managing household finances more effectively.

"Before participating in the GALS training, we worked hard every day but rarely discussed our future together," said Ya. "The Household Vision Map helped us identify our common goals and make plans as a family. Now, we make important decisions together and support each other more than before."

The training also prompted the couple to rethink how responsibilities were shared at home. Gradually, Moeul became more involved in childcare and household tasks, while Ya gained confidence in expressing her opinions and contributing to decisions about the family's livelihood and finances.

Today, the couple regularly discusses household expenses, savings, and future investments. By making decisions together, they have strengthened not only their family relationship but also their ability to plan ahead and adapt to challenges.

The impact reaches beyond their home. With responsibilities shared more evenly, Ya now has more time to participate in community activities, including tree-planting campaigns and climate change awareness events. At the same time, the family continues to improve its livelihood activities and financial planning, helping them become better prepared for economic and climate-related shocks.

"In the past, most household chores and childcare were my responsibility. We did not have a shared plan to improve our livelihoods and income. After the training, we started creating our Household Vision Map together and discussing our household and livelihood activities. I feel more respected, confident and involved in decisions that affect our family's future," said Ya.



Kay Ya and her husband, Moeurn Moeul, work side by side to water their pigs and keep the pig house clean. Photo: VSG

WOMEN TAKE ON GREATER ROLE IN FOREST PROTECTION IN PREAH VIHEAR

By Chheng Kimchhay/DPA

A few years ago, 23-year-old Leam Sora rarely imagined herself speaking in community meetings, let alone helping lead efforts to protect her community's forest.

Today, she serves as Deputy Leader of the Community Forestry Management Committee (CFMC) in Krasaing Community Forestry in Preah Vihear province and is encouraging other women to take an active role in forest management and climate resilience.

Krasaing Community Forestry is one of five community forests supported under the Climate Resilience for All (CREFA) project implemented by our partner, the Development Partnership in Action, to strengthen forest management and climate resilience. Before the project began, women had limited opportunities to participate in leadership and decision-making. Of the CFMC's 11 members, only three were women, and Sora was one of them.

Already active as a volunteer promoting maternal and child health in her village, Sora joined project activities to learn more about community forestry. Through training on forest management, climate resilience, and the Gender Action Learning System (GALS), she gained new knowledge and the confidence to take on greater responsibilities within her community.

"As women, we often hesitate to speak up. The training helped me believe that my ideas and contributions matter," said Sora.

As her confidence grew, so did her involvement. She became more active in meetings, helped mobilize community members, and took part in discussions with local authorities and the Forestry Administration. Recognizing her commitment and leadership, community members elected her as Deputy Leader of the CFMC. She was also selected to become a Community GALS Trainer, helping other women and men identify challenges, build confidence, and work toward shared goals.

One of Sora's priorities has been encouraging more women to participate in forest patrols, an activity traditionally dominated by men. In 2025, only one woman was part of the patrol team. By 2026, that number had increased to 10 women out of 20 members, meaning women now make up half of the patrol team.

"In the past, women did not actively participate in community forestry activities," Sora said. "Now, more women are getting involved. I am happy in my role and committed to mobilizing more women in forest management and activities so our community forest can work better."

Community members say women's increased participation has strengthened efforts to protect the forest while ensuring that decisions reflect the experiences and priorities of more people in the community.

The progress in Krasaing Community Forestry reflects broader changes taking place through the project. Community members have improved their knowledge of forest management, tree planting, agroforestry, carbon measurement, forest patrols, and climate-smart agriculture. At the same time, more women are stepping into leadership roles and contributing to decisions that affect their communities and natural resources.

For Sora, becoming a leader was never part of the plan. Yet today, she is helping shape the future of her community forest and inspiring other women to do the same.

"I am committed to mobilizing more women in community forest management. I hope the support can continue for Krasaing Community Forestry and other community forests in Preah Vihear," said Sora.

Sora acknowledges the support of the Embassy of Ireland, Oxfam, and DPA for helping create opportunities for women like her. Her story shows that when women are given the skills, confidence, and space to lead, the benefits extend beyond individuals, helping communities strengthen forest protection, improve livelihoods, and build resilience to climate change.

This initiative is part of the Climate Resilience for All (CREFA) project funded by the Government of Ireland's International Development Programme through the Embassy of Ireland in Hanoi. The proejct helps reduce climate vulnerability in Cambodia by strengthening adaptation, mitigation, and sustainable development through policy engagement and capacity building.



Community Forestry Management Committee (CFMC) in Krasaing Community Forestry in Preah Vihear province during the forest patrol. Photo: Peut Ey/Krasaing CFC

BRIDGING GRASSROOT VOICES AND INSTITUTIONAL ACTION

By Soknak Por

For years, communities along the rivers of Stung Treng, Ratanakiri, and Kratie have faced increasingly unpredictable weather. Longer dry spells, floods, and other climate-related shocks have made farming and fishing more difficult, putting pressure on livelihoods that depend heavily on natural resources.



Panelists discuss how line agencies and development partners can better support locally led initiatives, exploring ways to strengthen local leadership, enhance collaboration, and ensure communities play a central role in shaping sustainable development solutions. Photo: Soknak Por/Oxfam

Through the Inclusive Water Governance and Climate Resilience Phase 3 (IP3) project, funded by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), communities have been working to better understand these risks and develop their own disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation plans. The process has brought together women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and persons with disabilities to ensure local priorities are reflected in community planning.

Those priorities were discussed during a Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue held in Stung Treng province on 29 September 2026, where 57 participants gathered to discuss how community-led plans could be translated into practical action. The event brought together community representatives, sub-national authorities, provincial line departments, and civil society organizations.

During the discussion, Ms. On Chan Keo, a community leader from Samkhuoy village, spoke about the urgent need to improve water management infrastructure. For local farmers, access to water is becoming increasingly critical as dry seasons grow longer and less predictable.

Keo highlighted community proposals to rehabilitate water sluice gates and strengthen water management systems to help protect rice fields and vegetable farms from water shortages. She also acknowledged the technical support provided by the Provincial Department of Water Resources and Meteorology in helping communities address these challenges.

Mr. Socheath So, Advisor to the National Committee for Disaster Management, said that reducing disaster risks requires collective action from government agencies, communities, civil society organizations, and development partners.

Stung Treng Deputy Provincial Governor Mr. Samrithy Sron also emphasized the value of the dialogue platform in connecting local priorities with government planning and support mechanisms.

The discussion moved beyond identifying challenges. During panel discussions and interactive exhibitions, participants explored practical pathways for implementing community proposals. Local partners, including My Village (MVi), 3S Rivers Protection Network (3SPN), and Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA), committed to supporting follow-up coordination with provincial departments and local authorities.

The next steps include joint planning meetings, field verification visits, technical assessments, and efforts to mobilize co-funding for priority interventions identified by communities.

BRINGING JUSTICE CLOSER TO COMMUNITIES: A NEW PATH FOR RESOLVING DEBT DISPUTES IN CAMBODIA

By Asisah Man

For Cambodian families, access to credit has created opportunities to invest in farming, small businesses, and household wellbeing. However, the rapid expansion of lending, combined with economic shocks, rising living costs, climate-related losses, and limited financial literacy, has also left many households struggling with debt. When disputes arise between borrowers and financial institutions, private lender, many people, particularly women, Indigenous Peoples, and rural communities, face significant barriers in accessing justice and resolving their cases fairly.



Community members participated in an awareness raising workshop on the National Authority for Aternative Dispute Resolution (NADR) held across five provinces in early September 2026 to improve their understanding of aternative dispute resolution mechanism and access to justice at the local level. Photo: NADR

Recognizing these challenges, Oxfam has partnered with the National Authority for Alternative Dispute Resolution (NADR) to bring accessible justice services closer to communities. Through this collaboration, people can access free, timely, and fair dispute resolution mechanisms without the financial and procedural burdens often associated with formal court processes.

From 7 to 11 September 2026, Oxfam, NADR, and local authorities organized public forums across five districts and municipalities in Kratie, Mondulkiri, Ratanakiri, Stung Treng, and Preah Vihear provinces. The forums introduced local authorities and community members to NADR's role in resolving disputes, particularly those related to loans, debt contracts, and other civil matters.

The outreach was brought to 530 participants in total (30% women), particularly important in remote areas, where access to legal information and justice services remains limited. By engaging directly with communities, the forums helped raise awareness of people's rights and the options available to them when facing financial disputes. Community members were able to ask questions, share concerns, and learn how mediation can provide practical solutions that preserve relationships while protecting the interests of all parties involved.

The initiative comes at a time when Cambodia's financial sector continues to grow rapidly. By the end of 2025, more than 5 million Cambodians held loans, while increasing economic pressures contributed to rising concerns about over-indebtedness and financial vulnerability. According to NADR, disputes related to lending and borrowing have become increasingly common, highlighting the need for accessible and effective mechanisms to help people seek remedy and resolve conflicts.

For Oxfam, strengthening access to justice is an essential part of promoting responsible finance and protecting consumer rights. By supporting alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, Oxfam is helping ensure that communities, particularly women, Indigenous Peoples, and other marginalized groups, have greater access to information, representation, and fair outcomes when disputes occur.

Beyond resolving individual cases, the initiative contributes to building trust, reducing pressure on the court system, and fostering more accountable and people-centered financial practices.

As Cambodia's financial sector continues to evolve, Oxfam remains committed to advancing inclusive access to justice, strengthening consumer protection, and ensuring that no one is left behind in their pursuit of fair and equitable solutions.

THE RIVER PROTECTOR



Lina with her traditional basket in her cashew orchard. Photo by: Aimee Han/Oxfam

By Sereyrathanak Suon/Aimee Han

Lina grew up knowing the sound of the Sesan River before she knew much else.

The youngest of nine children, she was raised by two farmers from the Indigenous Kanchok tribe in Koh Paek village, 58km from the Ratanakiri provincial town with 415 households, along the Sesan riverbank. Her parents understood how to live with the river the way most people understand language; intuitively, in the body, without needing to explain it. Lina's father would cast his net and pulled it back heavily. Lina's mother carried river water home in buckets for cooking. The cows drank at the bank each morning. Everything that fed the family flowed, in one way or another, from the lovely Sesan. For a long time, this felt permanent.

Then the floods changed everything; it was not the gentle seasonal floods the community had always lived alongside, but a sudden, violent surges that arrived without warning in the middle of the night and retreated without apology. In 2018, the Sesan rose so quickly that Lina's younger cousin was caught in the current before anyone could reach him. The family's home was damaged. Their paddy fields vanished beneath murky water.

"Sometimes, people in the community wonder where the water comes from. And when flooding happens, there is no timely intervention, because villagers did not know in advance. It makes it difficult to solve this problem. For example, in 2018, the water level rose quickly and affected children, including my own brother," Lina said.

What struck her most, in the aftermath, was not the damage itself but who bore it.

Linda said, "Hydropower dams have many impacts, especially for people living directly along the river. The flood destroyed my house and my paddy fields along the river. This also creates serious difficulties for People with Disability and pregnant women. When the water level rises, it affects children too. They may have to stop school, or their

schooling may be suspended. For women, going to the hospital can be very difficult during floods. Sometimes there is no boat, so they have to stay at home. During flooding, some villagers' houses may also collapse."

CHOOSING TO ACT

Watching her family and neighbors absorb that kind of loss, again and again, Lina made a decision. She would not simply wait for the next flood. Driven by a passionate goal of protecting the river and her community, she sought an internship on the Mekong Inclusive Water Governance and Climate Resilience Phase 3 (IP3) project with 3S Rivers Protection Network (3SPN) when they chose her village as a target village; a role she still holds today.

Her main responsibilities center on raising climate change awareness and collecting data from communities affected by hydropower dams and other related impacts. It is, in many ways, the same river that once took something from her family is now the subject of her daily work.

BUILDING THE COMMUNITY'S DEFENSES

Through the IP3 project, Lina has watched 3SPN carry out activities that share information about the negative impacts of hydropower dams with local people and help connect communities to the 1294 early warning system so families can know in advance when a flood or heavy rain is coming, instead of being caught by surprise the way her brother once was.

3SPN also helps local people identify their own problems and work out solutions together, through awareness-raising activities with youth representatives, women's groups, and local authorities who are now expected to inform their communities when flooding approaches. The project supports access to clean water even during floods and has taught Lina and others how to record fish population data and release fingerlings back into the river.

"I observed that when the water level rises and falls quickly, it affects the fish population," Lina said with worry in her tone, "so there are fewer fish."

FINDING HER VOICE

Lina sees these efforts as a benefit to herself, her community, and the river alike but the change that may surprise her most is the one in herself.

She used to shy away from people, even run from a camera. Now she is becoming a speaker in her own village. She is, by her own admission and with evident pride, becoming a role model that an Indigenous woman now in her third year of a bachelor's degree, at a time when higher education remains far from the norm for rural young people, and especially young Indigenous women like her, in her village. Following her example, a handful of other young people in her community have begun pursuing higher education too.

She is shifting how her community sees girls' education and women's empowerment. Before, she said, women and children in her village rarely had access to higher education; something that made her feel her community wasn't developing the way it could. To her, their voices matter, collectively, in protecting the river. That belief has carried her beyond the village: she now raises concerns and advocates for river protection at commune and provincial forums, speaking about how the Sesan supports agriculture, provides food, and supplies the water her community washes with and drinks. If the river suffers, she says, so will the water quality and health of everyone who depends on it.

THE RIVER STILL RUNS THROUGH HER

Her parents and neighbors still farm beside Sesan. Lina still carries the vivid memory of what the water once held; its abundance, before it also became her fear of losing that forever.

"The river is the lifeblood of the community. If there is no river, surrounding communities will struggle to live without access to water. The river is like the breath of the people who live here. If we do no protect the river, it can be lost," she said.

Lina is now a member of the women's group, a member of the youth group, a river daughter, an intern, an example, a speaker who was once too frightened to raise her hand in school. She is still learning how to be courageous, but the learning is visible, and it is spreading. Quietly, deliberately, she is building her own team of river protectors.

Funded by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the four-year IP3 project, 2025-2029, aims to promote resilient, inclusive, and sustainable development in Cambodia's Mekong basin through women's leadership, stronger civil society engagement, and climate-resilient community development.





The riverine forests of Stung Treng play a vital role in sustaining biodiversity, protecting ecosystems, and supporting local livelihoods. Healthy rivers and forests are closely connected, providing habitats for wildlife, regulating water flows, and strengthening resilience to climate change. Photo: Oxfam

CELEBRATING ODF+ SUCCESS IN SIEM REAP



School children, teachers, community members, and local authorities march together to kick off the ODF+ celebration in Kandaek Commune, Siem Reap province. Photo: Oxfam

By San Sar & Cheth Phay

The journey toward rural sanitation reached an inspiring milestone as six villages in Kandaek commune, Prasat Bakong district, hosted an Open Defecation Free Plus (ODF+) celebration on 26 August 2026. Led by a community march of school children, teachers, and villagers, the event marked the collaborative efforts between the local authorities, Provincial Department of Rural Development, Human Resource and Rural Economic Development Organization (HURREDO) and Oxfam in the KOICA-funded FOWASH project.

ODF+ status is verified when at least 95% of households in a village have their own latrine, while fewer than 5% share latrines with relatives or neighboring households. This achievement reflects not only improved access to sanitation facilities but also the community's collective commitment to ending open defecation and maintaining good sanitation practices.

The celebration highlighted remarkable progress across Kandaek commune. Mr. Solyda Thon, Head of Rural Health Care Office, Siem Reap Department of Rural Development, noted that the living standards and rural sanitation have improved dramatically over the past decade. Out of 946 communes in the province, 165 communes and 15 districts have achieved ODF+ status, with a provincial target to make all districts completely ODF+ by 2027, well ahead of the national 2030 goal.

For Kandaek commune, achieving ODF+ status across six of its ten villages is a testament to strong cooperation and community dedication. Ms. Sokongkea Mil, Kandaek Commune Chief, emphasized the commune's ongoing commitment to preventing regression into open defecation and maintaining high public health standards.

"Achieving ODF+ status across six of

our villages is a major step forward, but our true commitment lies in ensuring every single household maintains these hygiene standards for the long term," said Sokongkea.

Mr. Vanchan Taing, Executive Director of HURREDO, and Mr. Vichet Chheun, Deputy District Governor of Prasat Bakong, both praised the joint dedication of local communities, local operational teams, and all partner organizations in driving the WASH initiative forward.

Beyond the official ceremony, the true impact of the ODF+ is best seen in the daily lives of rural families. Through the FOWASH project, eligible households received "smart subsidies," contributions of essential construction materials such as latrine concrete ring, toilet pipes, ceramic toilet pans, and zinc sheets, valued at approximately US$114 per household. The households also contributed their own savings, materials, or labor to complete the construction of their latrines. Following the event, HURREDO and Oxfam teams visited local households that had benefitted from this support.

Ms. Sophal Phok, 28, and her husband Mr. Korna Chea, 28, who have 2 young daughters, supplemented the project's materials with US$100 of their savings and built the toilet themselves. Having a private toilet has transformed their daily routine, significantly improving hygiene and convenience for the mother and children while eliminating the inconvenience and safety concerns associated with using another household's toilet. Reflecting on the change, the family shared, "Having our own private toilet means we no longer have to worry about our children's safety and health out in the shared toilet of my sister's



Mr. Vichet Chheun, Deputy District Governor of Prasat Bakong District (center, white shirt), joined local authorities, Oxfam, and students in a ceremonial ribbon-cutting to celebrate Kandaek Commune's achievement of ODF+ certification. Photo: Oxfam



Ms. Tit Ry (right), accompanied by the Village Focal Person, stands proudly in front of her newly constructed household latrine, built with FOWASH smart-subsidy materials and her own savings. Photo: Oxfam

household, especially during the rainy season."

Similarly, Ms. Tit Ry, 55, a widowed head of household living with her 77-year-old mother and 4 children, invested US$200 of her savings for extended roofing and wall materials to complete construction independently. By contributing her own savings to complete the construction, Ms. Tit Ry was able to provide her family with a safer and more stable living environment.

The ODF+ verification and celebration and smart subsidy were supported by the KOICA-funded Fostering Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (FOWASH) project, implemented by Oxfam in partnership with HURREDO, and in collaboration with local authorities and the Provincial Department of Rural Development.

Published in October 2026 by Oxfam in Cambodia

Proofread by: Ratha Ra, Naratevy Kek

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Oxfam has supported Cambodia's development since 1979. We continue with a strong commitment to Cambodians, especially women, youth and other marginalized groups facing inequality, discrimination, exploitation, abuse, and violence. Our goal is to empower the people of Cambodia enabling them to exercise their rights and actively contribute to building a resilient society that is free from poverty and injustice.

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