

IMPACT SPOTLIGHT

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OXFAM



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A WORD FROM THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR



Greetings!

I am delighted to present the fourth issue of **Impact Spotlight**. This edition highlights Oxfam's and our partners' contributions to greening Cambodia, while building resilience for communities in the Mekong and Tonle Sap regions.

This issue underscores the importance of collective and concerted efforts in mitigating the impacts of climate change. Our partnership with the Ministry of Environment allows for stronger engagement in policy development and implementation.

We also explore climate-smart livelihood resilience initiatives by small-scale farmers, addressing the challenges they face. The roles of communities, especially women, in not only protecting natural resources but also accessing the carbon market are highlighted.

The concept of a circular economy makes a comeback in this issue. We feature selected women's economic empowerment through eco-production and plastic waste recycling on the ground, while promoting policy dialogue under the theme "Enhancing Economic Activity in Waste Management" at the Waste Summit Cambodia 2024.

I invite you to dive into this captivating issue of **Impact Spotlight**, where you will discover inspiring stories and remarkable achievements that are transforming lives and communities in Cambodia. Together, let us continue to amplify the voices and experiences of those we serve and work towards a more just, equitable, resilient and sustainable future.

Sophoan Phean

National Director, Oxfam in Cambodia



Solar Irrigation System in Kandieng district, Pursat province, installed by Solar Green Energy.

PAVING THE WAY FOR A FAIR ENERGY TRANSITION IN THE COMMUNITY THROUGH SOLAR IRRIGATION SYSTEM

Text by: Ratha Ra | Photo: Oxfam

The agricultural sector in Cambodia plays a vital role in the country's economy, employing 37% of the workforce and contributing significantly to GDP. However, it faces challenges like rural-urban migration, labor shortages, and climate change.

In Pursat province, solar irrigation systems provide a sustainable solution for water supply issues, leading to increased yields, lower costs, and greater empowerment for women.

Farmers in Pursat province primarily cultivate rice with a well-established irrigation system that supports year-round production. Yet, they have limited access to modern farming techniques and vulnerability to natural disasters. In Kandieng district,

insufficient water supply during dry seasons forces farmers to rely on expensive diesel pumps, causing disputes and environmental problems while placing additional caregiving burdens on women.

Ms. Thea Bou, a farmer in Kandieng district, emphasized the importance of water for agriculture, noting that without it, cultivation is impossible. She had to buy 120 liters of petrol, costing about 560,000 Riels (\$140), to pump water for her rice field, with her husband helping to lift the machine.

Mr. Ra Sin, from a neighboring village, face similar high diesel costs spending over 500,000 Riels (\$125) per harvest. Mr. Khut Lunh mentioned frequent issues with irrigation pumps, which

sometimes broke down, leaving field without water for days and incurring high repair costs.

The adoption of solar-powered irrigation systems in Pursat province by Oxfam partner, Solar Green Energy (SOGE), has emerged as an effective alternative. Farmers highlighted advantages such as increased rice yield, higher incomes, longer cultivation cycles, more frequent farming opportunities, greater women's participation, a cleaner environment, and a strengthened sense of community.

Ms. Thida Seng, a farmer and member of the solar-powered irrigation system committee in Kandieng district, shared her excitement about the positive

changes in her community. She noted the absence of water-pumping noise and that now farmers have enough water for irrigation three times a year, with cost reduced to about 300,000 Riel (\$75) per yield. Thida expressed joy in seeing women taking charge of the solar irrigation system and emphasized that farmers now need less external support, finding it gratifying to see this empowerment.

The experience in Kandieng district highlights the effectiveness of transitioning to solar-powered irrigation systems. This shift not only mitigates climate change by reducing CO2 emissions but also boosts local economic prospects. The implementation of solar-powered irrigation systems managed by the community promotes collaboration and increases women participation in agriculture and energy sectors. Thus, integrating renewable energy solutions into agriculture should be a priority for sustainable development in Cambodia.

Since June 2024, Oxfam and our partner SOGE have implemented a solar irrigation system in Battambang province. The goal is to assist 150 households in improving their farming practices. Funded by the Embassy of Ireland, community members will manage the system with technical support from SOGE, enhancing climate change resilience and local welfare.

The Royal Government of Cambodia is committed to transforming the energy landscape through the Power Development Masterplan 2022-2040, which aims for at least 70% renewable energy by 2030. This aligns with environmental goals and economic growth shifting from fossil fuel-based irrigation systems to renewable energy.

As the agricultural sector was the second-largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in 2016, prioritizing this shift could reduce emissions by nearly 42% by 2030 compared to business-as-usual scenarios.



Thida Seng, a farmer and member of the solar-powered irrigation system committee in Kandieng District turns on the solar power to irrigate the water, showing how easy the system is.

// I want all communities in our country to switch from using fuel-powered pumps to solar-powered systems. This way saves money and ensure a better water supply without the noise // and smoke that disturb the environment.

- Thida Seng



Thea Bou standing in front of Solar Irrigation System in Kandieng district which is managed and operated by the local communities.



Ms. Phoeung Lam, under her winter gourd garden.

SMALL-SCALE FARMING INNOVATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE MEKONG RIVER COMMUNITIES

Text and photo by: Soknak Por

Phoeung Lam, 47, is among 30 households in Koh Sralao village, an isolated island in the Mekong wetland of Strung Treng province, who stands out and was chosen as one of the committed farmers to test a new technique for climate-smart farming under the Strengthening Climate Resilience in the Mekong Subregion (SCR) project.

Before receiving support from the SCR project, facilitated by Oxfam and our partner, My Village, Lam and her husband relied on traditional farming methods. They pumped water from the river, stored it in a wooden reservoir, and used a hand tank for watering vegetables. The vegetables were grown on natural plain soils. These practices resulted in low productivity, limited crop varieties and labor burden.

So far, we have introduced a drip irrigation model for climate-adaptive farming in the community. This method

includes covering the soil with plastic sheets to prevent grass growth that hindered vegetable cultivation. A new drip irrigation system, connected to a storage water tank, distributes water proportionately to vegetable beds using small, controllable lines. Water is pumped by a small machine from the Mekong River for storage.

"This method requires less water than traditional hand-watering, save labor and increases yields," said Lam.

On her 500-square-meter plot, Lam grows string beans, eggplants, winter gourds, and corns. In her August 2024 harvest, she earned about \$100 from local sales. Last year, it was just enough for her daily consumption. Lam is very optimistic about farming and plans to expand her vegetable production.

Another farmer, Phang Meng, 42, who has applied the same model on

his 2,000 square-meter plot earned 1,060,00 Riels (\$256), almost 50% increase compared to last year's traditional method. "I am happy for the project support and will tirelessly continue using this model even if the project phases out, as it sustains our livelihoods and food security," he said.

Strengthening Climate Resilience in the Mekong Sub-Region is a three-year project launched in March 2022 and implemented in three provinces: Kratie, Stung Treng, Ratanakiri. It aims to reduce vulnerability to disasters and climate risks by enhancing the capacity of riverine communities and local authorities in the Mekong Subregion. The project focuses on developing inclusive climate change adaptation and disaster risk management plans tailored to local needs. It also improves access to hydro-meteorological data for these communities and local authorities.

BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENCE: THE STORY OF TITH SAM ORN

Text by: Ratha Ra

Mr. Tith Sam Orn, 71-year-old former soldier, has five children—two sons and three daughters. He lives with his wife and his widowed son. The family supports itself through vegetable farming and a government pension of about \$500 per month. In April 2024, Sam Orn was identified as The Climate Resilience for All (CREFA) project beneficiary due to his active farming and advantageous location with year-round water access.

Since joining the project, Sam Orn has participated in trainings on advanced agricultural techniques including vegetable cultivation, organic fertilizer production, financial management, and climate change adaptation, provided by Oxfam partner, Farmer Livelihood Development (FLD). With the knowledge gained and essential materials from the CREFA project—

such as plastic basins, tubing, green nets, and resilient vegetable seeds—he has significantly improved his farming practices.

The Climate Resilience for All (CREFA) project is a yearlong project led by Oxfam. It involves a consortium of nine organizations specializing in climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy, climate resilience, and policy dialogue. CREFA aims to increase the resilience of Cambodian systems and individuals, transforming the risks of climate change into opportunities for sustainable development through effective and efficient adaptation and mitigation responses. The story of Sam Orn serves as a compelling example supporting this project.

Expanding his agricultural efforts, Sam Orn now cultivates a wider

variety of crops including maize, chili, eggplant, cucumber, and pineapple. This diversification has significantly boosted his farming income, increasing from \$125 to \$250 per month over the past couple of years. Moreover, Sam Orn generously shares his knowledge and experiences to fellow farmers, having already mentored five individuals on achieving high-yield vegetable cultivation.

Recognizing the challenges posed by climate change in vegetable farming, Sam Orn acknowledges the necessity for ongoing assistance from relevant stakeholders in areas such as technical guidance and market pricing. His dedication to sustainable agriculture and knowledge-sharing underscores his commitment to continuous improvement and the well-being of his community.

Photo caption: Mr. Sam Orn Tith and his wife, Thnom village, Prek Chhik commune, Rukkhakiri district, Battambang province. Photo: Kimheang Tuon/Oxfam





Signing ceremony of CREFA project between the Ministry of Environment and Oxfam, 5 September 2024. Photo Kimheang Tuon/Oxfam

OXFAM AND MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT PARTNER FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE PROJECT

Text by: Ratha Ra

Oxfam signed an agreement with the Ministry of Environment in September 2024 for the “Climate Resilience for All” project, funded by the Embassy of Ireland, the Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). This project aims to enhance the resilience among Cambodian people, reduce climate change risks, and promote sustainable development.

This agreement underscores the collaborative efforts of the Ministry of Environment in addressing climate challenges in Cambodia. Oxfam and our partners believe the project will drive significant change, advancing resilience and sustainable development in the region.

H.E Paris Chuob, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Environment, recognized the strong cooperation

with Oxfam and noted that this agreement will help address climate change and turn risks into opportunities. Initiatives will focus on afforestation, green initiatives, waste recycling, and renewable energy adoption to promote equitable and sustainable growth at the grassroots level.

Ms. Sophoan Phean, Oxfam National Director, expressed enthusiasm for the Ministry of Environment’s commitment to enhancing collaboration on the Climate Resilience for All project. Oxfam recognizes the need for close cooperation to effectively address climate change, focusing on supporting communities dependent on natural resources, particularly women, youth, and indigenous groups in rural areas. This partnership aims to foster a sustainable and resilient future for Cambodia.

Oxfam and partners are dedicated to supporting the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) in balancing environmental conservation with economic development. The Natural Resources Governance (NRG) program of Oxfam aligns with Strategy 4 of the Pentagonal Strategy - Phase 1, emphasizing resilient and sustainable development practices that prioritize environmental sustainability and climate preparedness while promoting a green economy.

Oxfam has supported the Ministry of Environment and the Cambodian government in their commitment to combatting climate change and transition to a climate-resilient, low-carbon sustainable development model, including the Long-Term Strategy for Carbon Neutrality 2050 and the new circular strategy for clean, green, and sustainable development.

THE RISE OF THE WOMEN IN PLASTIC WASTE RECYCLING GROUP

Text by: Menghout Lay & Bunly Minh/FACT & Chong Ear

The Women Plastic Waste Recycling Group, established in 2023 in Sangkat Chreav, Siem Reap province, serves as a remarkable example of community-led initiatives aimed at tackling environmental challenges while promoting economic empowerment for women. This initiative was facilitated by Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT) as part of the EU-CAPFISH/FOSTER project, funded by the European Union and led by Oxfam. The project emphasizes the importance of local participation in sustainable practices.

Initially composed of just three members, the Women Plastic Waste Recycling Group has expanded to twelve dedicated women. FACT has played a crucial role in providing training on market strategies and quality production. These training sessions have equipped group members with the skills necessary to effectively showcase their recycled products at various events, including the “One Village One Product” initiative and the Tonle Sap Ecotourism Network (TEN). This exposure not only enhances visibility but also facilitates sales in local markets, establishing a robust connection between eco-tourism and the community’s entrepreneurial efforts.

Despite these advancements, the group has encountered significant challenges. One of the primary difficulties has been the lack of a communal workspace and a showroom for their products. Recognizing this obstacle, FACT stepped in to support the construction of a dedicated center for the group, providing a physical space where members can collaborate, produce, and display their work.

Ms. Sitha Mut, the leader of the group, exemplifies the transformative impact of the project. Her journey from a



Sitha Mut, 42, is proud to share the souvenir items made from plastic waste in her showroom center, Sangkat Chreav, Siem Reap province. Photo: FACT

reserved individual to a confident leader highlights the empowerment that comes from participation in such initiatives. Sitha emphasizes the importance of women earning income to support their families, thereby improving their overall livelihoods. Her leadership has inspired other women in the community to engage in recycling efforts, fostering a collective spirit of empowerment and collaboration.

The group has successfully developed a range of souvenirs made from recycled plastic, including bracelets, keychains, and bags. This initiative has generated a monthly income ranging from \$150 to \$200 per group. Sitha reported an average annual earnings of approximately \$1,400, which she utilizes to meet her family’s basic needs, illustrating the direct economic benefits of the initiative for its members.

Beyond the economic advantages, the Women Plastic Waste Recycling Group makes a significant contribution

to environmental sustainability. The group recycles approximately 10 kilograms of plastic waste weekly, playing a vital role in cleaning up the local environment and promoting ecological awareness within the community. This dual impact—economic empowerment and environmental stewardship—underscores the importance of community-based recycling efforts.

The Women Plastic Waste Recycling Group stands as a testament to the power of local initiatives in addressing both economic and environmental challenges. By fostering women’s empowerment and promoting sustainable practices, the group not only enhances the livelihoods of its members but also contributes to a cleaner, more sustainable environment. This case study highlights the potential of community-led projects to create meaningful change, encouraging further investment and support for similar initiatives in the future.



*Phnom Torntang Forest is home to endangered species like the sun bear, green peafowl great hornbill and several other species.
Photo: Naturelife Cambodia*





Women patrol team of Phnom Torntang Community Forest. Photo: Naturelife Cambodia

THE FIGHT TO SAVE PHNOM TORNTANG FOREST

Text by: Ixora D. & Asisah Man

Indigenous people in Cambodia in Phnom Torntang Forest wake up to the sound of nature, with their ears tuned to the calls of birds, mammals, and insects. These natural sound can soothe them to sleep or gently wake them up.

However, in 2013, their peaceful mornings were shattered by the noise of chainsaws and heavy machinery. Residents of Kanat and Chan villagers watched helplessly as their forests and livelihoods were destroyed. For years, their pleas went unheard because legally, they were not recognized as landowners, forcing them to share their forests with outsiders.

This situation reflects a broader trend in Cambodia that began in 2000s, when rubber plantations surged due to economic land concessions (ELCs) granted to local and foreign investors. Rubber became Cambodia's leading agricultural export, with plantations now covering over 400,000 hectares. While this boom has generated profit, it has also threatened the livelihood of local and indigenous communities, leading to significant social and environmental issues.

In Kanat village, over 80 families lost their plantations during land clearing. They had relied on the land for generations, practicing shifting cultivation and harvesting various crops and resin. Despite their customary use rights, these rights are increasingly endangered by illegal hunting, land encroachment, and logging, especially since the Rubber Company's arrival, which has made the forest more accessible to those with harmful intentions.



Signing agreement between Krongbuk Ratanakiri Apivath Caosu Company and NatureLife Cambodia to establish Phnom Torntang Community Forest. Photo: Naturelife Cambodia

Oxfam partner NatureLife Cambodia has collaborated with a rubber company and the indigenous communities of Chan and Kanat village to establish a communication platform, promoting dialogue and understanding. This initiative has allowed both parties to address misunderstandings and work together on local issues, a rare engagement for the private sector.

In August 2022, this partnership led to the creation of the Phnom Torntang Community Forest (PTCF), supported by the company as part of its social and environmental responsibility. This project stands out as many companies have not yet contributed to biodiversity management or local livelihoods.

The Phnom Torntang Forest, home to endangered species like the sun bear,

green peafowl, and great hornbill, is vital to NatureLife Cambodia's mission. "We want to help the indigenous community save the remaining forest before it is too late," said Bou Vorsak, CEO of NatureLife Cambodia. "The local community relies on the forest for their daily livelihood, and without support, it risks destruction or conversion to other uses."

Vorsak emphasizes the need for alternative livelihood options, such as education and skill training, to provide villagers with sustainable support. "These alternatives should improve upon reliance solely on the forest. Ultimately, as the community grows stronger strengthens, the company should contribute to their development, not just profit from them," he added.

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH WATER HYACINTH

Text by: Menghout Lay & Bunly Minh/FACT & Chong Ear



Roth Chhay (left) while making hyacinth handbag. Photo: Oxfam

Reestablished in 2022, the Women Water Hyacinth Processing Business Hub began with just six dedicated members and has since grown to include 15 women and young girls from Anlong Taour and Prek Toal village in Koh Chivang commune, Ek Phnom District, Battambang province. This expansion highlights the increasing recognition of the hub's benefits, such as skill development and economic opportunities.

At the forefront of this initiative is Ms. Roth Chhay, the Chief Leader of the Women Water Hyacinth Processing group. Roth has been instrumental in enhancing the skills and business knowledge of women

in the community. Her leadership is marked by a strong commitment to empowerment, particularly through hands-on training in water hyacinth processing techniques.

The economic impact of this initiative is considerable. Roth generates an average income of about \$1,300 annually from selling handmade crafts, including placemats and handbags. This income is vital for her family, enabling her to purchase essential goods like rice, vegetables, and fuel. Moreover, the business has granted her a level of financial independence and security, diminishing her reliance on her husband's income.

Training is a cornerstone of the Women Water Hyacinth Processing Business Hub. Members receive extensive training from Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT) in production techniques and marketing strategies, which help them enhance their skills and improve their product offerings. Roth actively participates in these sessions and also serves as a mentor, guiding her daughters and fellow group members in the complexities of water hyacinth processing. This mentorship cultivates a culture of continuous learning and skill development.

The group collaborates with various stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to boost women's skills and promote eco-tourism in the area. This networking has been crucial in raising awareness of women's contributions to the local economy. The initiative has garnered recognition for its role in empowering women and fostering sustainable local economic development.

The Women Water Hyacinth Processing Business Hub exemplifies a successful model of women's empowerment through sustainable livelihoods. By leveraging local resources and providing training and support, the initiative not only encourages economic independence but also promotes social empowerment among women. As the hub continues to expand, it stands as a beacon of hope for similar initiatives aimed at uplifting women in rural communities, contributing to broader goals of economic and social development.

This initiative is part of the "Fisher Folk Making Circular Economy Work for the Western Tonle Sap Lake" project, funded by the European Union (EU). Oxfam leads the project in partnership with the Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT) to revitalize the women's business hub.

The "Fisher Folk Making Circular Economy Work for the Western Tonle Sap Lake" is a three and a half years project that aims at empowering the economic livelihoods of community fisheries (CFIs) members in floating villages of Tonle Sap. The project focuses on diversifying income sources through community-led entrepreneurship and employment opportunities in ecotourism, sustainable agriculture, and renewable energy. The project seeks to enhance water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health and education outcomes.



Roth and her daughter on a small boat while collecting hyacinth. Photo: Oxfam



2024 Waste Summit Cambodia. Photo: KAS

THE WASTE SUMMIT CAMBODIA 2024 CHAMPIONS ECONOMIC GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY

Text by: San Sar

The Waste Summit Cambodia brought together over 500 participants at The Factory Phnom Penh on September 7th. The event included diverse groups of environmental experts, government officials, waste management organizations, NGOs, entrepreneurs, and community leaders. Under the theme “*Enhancing Economic Activity in Waste Management*,” the summit aimed to foster collaboration among stakeholders focusing on Circular Economy, new business opportunities, entrepreneurship in waste, and resource efficiency.

Oxfam in partnership with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) and others emphasized its commitment to Inclusive and Green Economy, aiming to reduce inequality and promote sustainable practices. During the summit, Oxfam hosted a panel on “*Breaking Barriers to Finance Through Impact Investment*” discussing financial challenges for SMEs in waste management challenges and exploring tailored financial products



Panel discussion on “*Breaking Barriers to Finance Through Impact Investment*” facilitated by Oxfam Photo: KAS

and inclusive policies to create sustainable funding opportunities in Cambodia’s waste sector.

Oxfam is dedicated to strengthening Cambodia’s entrepreneurship ecosystem by promoting access to finance and fostering partnerships

that promote economic growth and environmental sustainability. As the country grapples with growing waste management challenges, innovative solutions and better financial access will be key for a more inclusive and sustainable future.

OXFAM AND MISTI JOIN FORCES AT THE 7TH ASEAN INCLUSIVE BUSINESS FORUM

Text by: San Sar

Oxfam in Cambodia partnership with the Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MISTI), participated in the 7th ASEAN Inclusive Business (IB) Forum, held in Lao PDR from September 23-24, 2024.

The event was co-organized by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce of Lao PDR through its Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion Agency, alongside ESCAP, OECD, and the ASEAN Secretariat, with support from Oxfam in Laos. This collaborative effort underscores a shared commitment to advancing inclusive and sustainable development in the region.

The two-day forum emphasized the progress of the ASEAN Plan of Action for Inclusive Business (2023-2027) and mapped out future strategies to strengthen IB practices across the region. The forum featured policy dialogues and workshops on impact investment, accreditation of IB models,

and ways to enhance the social impact of businesses. Discussions also examined gender equality, access to finance, and tools to help businesses become investment ready. Approximately 150 stakeholders gathered to share national initiatives, regional collaboration, and global best practices in promoting IB.

At the high-level panel discussion, H.E. Nara Soem, Secretary of State and Head of Cambodia's IB Accreditation Committee at MISTI, presented Cambodia's key strategies to promote IB. These includes the Inclusive Business Enabling Environment Cambodia (IBeeC) Strategy, the IB Accreditation System, capacity building initiatives, and the 'Superstar IB Competition 2023' – a flagship collaboration with Oxfam.

This competition recognizes the outstanding IB initiative in Cambodia that empowers farmers in the supply

chain and provides financial support to help scale these efforts.

In the session on "Promoting Gender Equity in Business," Oxfam emphasized the importance of addressing unpaid care work as a crucial strategy for achieving gender equality. We shared key challenges, practical solutions, and business case examples of how IB models can tackle UCW, drawn from a recent collaborative study between MISTI and Oxfam. The full report will be launched in the coming weeks.

Oxfam's involvement in this forum and ongoing collaboration with MISTI reaffirms its commitment to advancing IB and tackling poverty and inequality, not just in Cambodia but throughout the ASEAN region.

Photo caption: Delegation from MISTI and Oxfam participated at the 7th ASEAN Inclusive Business Forum held in Laos PDR.



MY JOURNEY OF GROWTH AND DISCOVERY, SWEEDEN

Many Veng, is a **river defender** from Ratanakiri province, working with Oxfam's partner, the 3S rivers protection network. At the World Water Week 2024 in Sweden, Many participated in panels focused on inclusive water management and revitalization of indigenous matriarchal roles in water leadership. Her contributions highlighted the importance of **indigenous women's leadership, traditional values of water within indigenous communities, and the need for collaborative action to address the challenges posed by climate change.** Check out her experience below!

When I learned I had to go to Stockholm, Sweden, I felt overwhelmed and anxious about obtaining a visa. I first shared the news with my aunt Nangnoy and my mother and told the rest of my team a week later. Oxfam contacted me about interviewing for the visa at the Swedish Embassy in Phnom Penh, I was scared of facing difficult questions, especially in English, and worried about wasting Oxfam's money if I failed.

On August 7, the embassy requested I pick up my passport the next day. Anxious, I contacted my agent who assured me he'd handle it. The following day, I learned my visa was approved. Overjoyed, I shared the news with Oxfam and 3SPN teams, confirming my departure date of August 22nd.

World Water Week is vital for indigenous women, leaders, and communities worldwide to connect, share their voices, and express their challenges, cultures, and beliefs.

I felt privileged to share my tribe's culture and history, as well as community issues, with new audiences. Despite meeting new people, I felt respected and safe to express my opinions. The warmth and encouragement from the larger

indigenous group inspired me, and I appreciated their acknowledgment of my contributions.

During World Water Week, I felt a strong sense of connection, even with language barriers, thanks to excellent interpretation. The friendly moderators and panelists, dressed in their unique styles, eased my nerves and made me comfortable on stage.

In recent years, my community has felt the impacts of climate change. Flooding has devastated our agricultural crops, reducing our rice harvest from 30-40 sacks to just 3. This decline has led to food shortages, forcing family members to migrate for work in other provinces, taking jobs in farming and construction to support us. It pains me to see my aging parents working so hard just to feed the family.

My curiosity to learn has motivated me to grow. Attending seminars and training has shown me the importance

of education in mobilizing and encouraging community members, especially young people in remote areas, to value and protect our local resources.

In 2012, I completed 9th grade but decided to drop out of school to work on the farm with my family. That June, my older brother, Yen Bora, head of the community-based organization in Vensai District, invited me to volunteer as an assistant for the Fishery Community. Initially, I didn't understand the role and hesitated, but he explained it, and I decided to join.

At first, I felt embarrassed and compared myself to others, often engaging in negative self-talk. However, with support from Aunty Foy Soth, a senior women leader in the community who spoke my indigenous language, I began to feel more at ease. When I first joined as a speaker, I was afraid I wouldn't perform well and doubted my abilities. However, after participating several times, my fear faded, and I now feel proud of my progress. I never imagined I would have the opportunity to travel abroad, let alone to Europe.

My family and villagers are thrilled with my achievements and often encourage their children to follow my example. At dinner one night, my mom asked how I liked Sweden. I told her I enjoyed seeing people walk instead of drive, like we do to the farm. I shared that their food included bread, coffee, vegetables, fruits, fish, and meat. She wondered how they felt full of just that, and I chuckled, explaining that it was their daily diet, just like rice and noodles are for us. I also told her I spent a total of 13 hours on the plane, mostly sleeping until we arrived at our destination.

Many's key takeaways from the Water Week include:

- Opportunities and valuation, building trust, mental strength, and promoting rights.
- Practical strategies for assembling strong community networks.
- Empowering leaders and building relationships with diverse stakeholders.
- Understanding objectives, goals, and the importance of protecting our identities.
- Creating traditional leadership styles.

“

Building trust
is so important
when I'm
working with
local
communities.



Many Veng speaking at the 2024 World Water Week in Sweden.

We appreciate the long-standing support and relationship we have with our partners and donors. Thank you for being the primary change agents of Oxfam's endeavours to reduce poverty and empower communities. We have come a long way on the road to harnessing peace and ensuring social justice. We are extremely grateful for the continued support, cooperation and collaboration we have had over the years and we hope to continue this journey for years to come.



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Oxfam has supported Cambodia's development for more than four decades. 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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