

# STORIES FROM THE FIELD



SAVING FOR CHANGE

**Photo credit**

All photography by Oxfam, otherwise mentioned

Published 2018 by Oxfam Cambodia

**STORIES FROM  
THE FIELD**



# CONTENT

**01:** Experiencing  
The Potential Growth

**03:** So Em  
And Her Dream

**05:** Better Planning,  
Better Growth

**07:** Not Too Young  
To Be Strong

**09:** Sophun Opens Her  
Discussion On  
Reproductive Health

**11:** Saving for Change,  
A Turning Point In  
My Life

**13:** Sinay Talks:  
Reproductive Health

**15:** Saving  
For My Kids

**17:** Savings And Loans Help  
Farmers Survive Drought

**19:** Saving To Become A Doctor

**21:** Saving For Cassava

**23:** How The SfC  
Helped One Woman  
Achieve Her Dream

**25:** Women's leadership Encourages Savings Group Success

**27:** Beyond Cambodia: Oxfam's SfC Set To Reach The Region

**29:** Hard Work And Water Grow A Business

**33:** Saving for Change

**35:** High light Voice from Saving Group



# INTRODUCTION

Since its introduction in Cambodia in 2005, SfC has been refined and market tested. It now reaches more than 140,000 rural poor communities members (85% of members are women) and helped to a mass of more than \$5.5 million in community-based savings, through 18 local partners and one academic institution. Through SfC groups, rural farmers and community members control annually 8 million US, and manage 6 million US loans.

Poor, rural Cambodians, most of whom did not have access to bank or MFI services, now have a safe place to save, a share of accumulated interest on increasing group funds, and easier access to loans – which are typically used to income generating activities and to cope against shocks.

Saving groups provide a safe method for people, typically the rural poor, to provide financial services to themselves, and one that is generally much less expensive per person reached than other approaches to providing financial services. Generally, the people served would not otherwise have access to a safe way to save or a convenient, affordable place to borrow.

Saving for Change (SfC) is a savings-led microfinance model, pioneered by Oxfam America, Freedom from Hunger and the Stromme Foundation of Norway, and scaled up with the support of the Gates Foundation. It served those, especially the rural poor, who have been left behind by traditional financial service providers, replicates itself on a large scale and at low cost, and has demonstrated positive results--both financial and social—for savings groups members and their communities.

This booklet is a collection of stories from the field collected by Oxfam and partners in various Saving for Change project. Until now, the program had positively impacted the lives of poor and marginalized people to improve their family economics, e.g, they increased income through small-scale businesses. People changed their saving behavior, improved their financial practice, build their social asset and increase their participation and leadership.



កម្មវិធី  
សន្សំប្រាក់ដើម្បីផ្ទះ

គម្រោងសន្សំប្រាក់ដើម្បីផ្ទះ  
របស់សហគមន៍កសិករស្រូវ  
ក្នុងតំបន់ស្រះស្រពស្រែ  
ខេត្តស្រះស្រពស្រែ  
កម្ពុជា

OXFAM  
GRACHA

# EXPERIENCING THE POTENTIAL GROWTH



Sitting in her house filled with colourful wedding dresses and jewelry, Thout Vanthy is counting the number of wedding dates her clients have booked.

As she could have up to three weddings to attend a day, the 32-year-old embellisher takes her work from place to place. Her husband, a teacher sometimes doubles as her photographer. The pair also raise pigs to contribute to the family's income.

While it seems like an idyllic life for the happy couple, life was different for Vanthy before. Living in Kol Thmey village in Uddor Meanchey province, Vanthy's family was among the 70% of the villagers who were in serious debt, according to the village chief.

Vanthy said the high interest of up to 2% per month meant her family was in dire straits, with her lack of business skills at the time meaning her embellishment business was struggling.

"Before, the money that I earned was just enough to pay the interest, I was so worried as we could save so little," she said.

Tong Dear, a project partner at Youth Council of Cambodia (YCC), said almost every family in the village previously took loans from private loan providers or Microfinance Institutions.

"It was difficult for them as the process is complicated and even requires collateral," he said.

"With the high interest rates, some villagers could not afford to pay it back."

In the past, he said villager were often concerned about where they could borrow money from, now thanks to the Saving for Change (SfC) group, they can take loans at a much lower rate and involves a much simpler process.

Saving for Change is an ingenious way for poor people themselves to provide each other with access to both savings and credit. SfC group has a simple, easy-to-understand structure. The group collects fixed deposits from members on a set schedule, then distributing these combined deposits to each member in turn at interest. They manage the groups by themselves. This includes selecting members and setting up the rules and regulations.



During the busy wedding season, the Saving Group is a big help to Vanthy when she needs additional funds to buy essential accessories. She can borrow the money from the group easily with a low interest rate when needed.

Furthermore, she has learned the errors of her business practices. Through SfC, Vanthy has learned to develop a business plan from the C-BED training, which has taught her to critically think about her financial decisions.

Vanthy said she now notes down income and expense in detail, as well as calculate the expenses and projected prices to avoid losing income. She has also made a clear budgetary plan and knows how much she can save alongside how much she can invest in new accessories to help grow her business

She said that unlike before, she has now developed positive business techniques and marketing training to help bring in more clients and negotiate service fees more effectively.

“Sometimes, it’s hard to convince my clients to take my service, but we would reach the deal after I give them some discounts or free items,” Vanthy said.

While before Vanthy could only work at one wedding ceremony a day during peak season, now she manage up to three. With this growth, Vanthy is able to afford to hire up to 10 assistants to help her work, compared with the previous three.



Vanthy is doing make up for her client’s wedding day.

Seeing the benefits the program has brought their family, Vanthy’s husband and 10-year-old daughter has also joined SfC. Though her daughter is still young, Vanthy said she wants to use the program to help save for her daughter’s future schooling and to teach her good financial practices. She also wants to teach other villages about the SfC, and the benefits it can bring their community.

# SO EM AND HER DREAM



Throwing out fistfuls of rice for her hungry chickens, 15-year-old Phal SoEm carries out the seemingly ordinary chore behind her wooden house in Yeay Oort village, Banteay Meanchy province. But for SoEm, taking care of this small chicken farm is a step to achieve her dream of having a higher education.

The grade-10 student is determined to pursue a university degree once she has graduated high school so that she can empower other women in her village. She said women in her community were still considered weak and were unable to participate in social activities as a result.

“I can see that woman have less involvement in economic activities and community issues,” she said.

“I want to see women take part in community activities equally to men.”



This chicken farm is source of income for So Em’s family. She saves some money from selling in the saving group for her higher education.

For SoEm, changing the concept of men being superior to women is of utmost importance after witnessing her mother suffering domestic abuse at the hands of her father.

In July, she joined Saving for Change (SfC) in the hope that she can save enough money for her university tuition fee.

At first, SoEm thought SfC would not be a reliable source of income for villagers, with only some elderly villages initially joining the program. However as more money was saved, more villagers joined the program. Now, there are 46 SfC groups across Banteay Meanchey province.

SoEm created a savings group along with 15 other students in the village. The group meets on Sundays so it doesn’t interrupt their studies, with each member contributing 3,000-5,000 Reil (USD 0.4-1.20) a week.

“I told my friends about the saving group and they were interested in joining so I asked the Cambodia Human Resource Development (CHRD), an NGO partner of Oxfam, to

help me form the saving group in my school,” So Em said.

She said she is especially interested in the various programs and courses that come with the program that teach her about gender and women’s leadership.

While before she was quiet and reserved, SoEm said now thanks to the experience of successfully managing a savings group, she has become more outspoken and able to express her ideas freely at home and at meetings.

“In the past, I didn’t talk much. Before joining the woman leadership training which was organized by CHRD in the SfC program, I didn’t know what woman leadership was,” she said.

“I am happy that I could manage this saving group with the support from CHRD regardless of being a young girl.

“Whenever I attend the commune meetings, I ask questions and I share my thoughts.”

SoEm said she has now worked up the courage to talk to her father about the negative consequences of his abuse and has convinced him to attend coaching on gender and domestic violence.

“After some time, I haven’t seen my father commit violence in the family lately,” SoEm said with a smile on her face.

Despite her leaps and bounds, SoEm said she still feels her participation is limited because of her age. She is not allowed to take part in some commune meetings, and some of the older people consider her ideas invalid.

However she understands that some issues take time to resolve and maintains she will be able to make more of an impact on her community once she finishes university.

Joining SfC not only contributed to SoEm having a better quality of life that will lead her to university, it has also given her the confidence and self-esteem to know once she has graduated university, she will be able to empower other women to participate in as many community activities as possible.

“I want to work in the commune office after my graduation so that I can participate in activities that will affect my community, and I want everyone understand that woman can play a part in development,” she said.

# BETTER PLANNING, BETTER GROWTH



Soeung Sinat, 30 has been selling noodles, porridge and Banh Chey, a typical local pancake in Banteay Themy province for almost a decade, but her business has not been a successful one. With her lack of education and her husband struggling to find work as a motor taxi driver, the couple was struggling to improve their lives.

When Sinat first heard about the Saving for Change (SfC) program, she believed it would help educate and expand her business knowledge and help her livelihood as a whole.

After being part of SfC for the past two years, Sinat said the program has not only helped her save money, but has provided critical business knowledge to her thanks to the Community-Based Enterprise Development training (C-BED).



Soeung Sinat, who used to experience failure in business and in debt, is able to improve her business practice through C-BED training offered by Saving for Change. With proper business plan and financial management, which she learned from the training, Sinat notices that her business grows.

“After joining C-BED training, I realising I was running my business incorrectly,” she said.

“Before, I did not keep any records of my expenses or income which is why I struggled to earn money.

“Now, I understand that running a business requires financial planning, marketing and confidence.”

C-BED has helped Sinat improve her financial management and can now identify cash-flow effectively.

“I noted down all the money I spent and the money I earned. At the end of the day, I see how much money I make per day,” she said.

Before joining the savings group, Sinat said her husband and she would earn around 600,000 to 800,000 Riel (150-200USD) per month. Now she is earning 1 million Riel (250USD) a month from her business and with the help of her savings group can save up to 2 million Riel (500USD) which she plans to use to expand her business.

Sinat said she wants to open up a grocery store, but still faces challenge to execute her business ideas. She said more resources are needed to strengthen vocational training and technical assistance in the implementation of business plans.



# NOT TOO YOUNG TO BE STRONG



Every school day, 13-year-old Sum Panha walks three kilometers from her home to school, leaving her dressed soaked with sweat and sometimes rain. However the arduous journey would never make Panha quit school, knowing she faces the bigger challenge of becoming a doctor in her local village.

Joining a saving group five months ago, the grade-eight student is determined to save enough money to buy a bicycle so she can ride to school.

“I believe that saving will help me to be able to buy a new bicycle at the end of this year, so going to school will not be a big challenge,” Panha said.

So far Panha has been able to save 151,500 Riel (38USD). While at first she expected the savings group to be just that, she was surprised the skills and training she received as a result of participating.

“Woman leadership and gender knowledge is very interesting to me,” she said.

“I haven’t learned this at school.”

Panha says she can see how men still dominate the community, with

hardly any women working in the commune office. Even in her family, her father makes most of the decisions for the family.

“I believe women can also be good leaders, It’s women who can understand women better,” Panha said.

Being the youngest of her three siblings, Panha’s voice has little power. However, she said she doesn’t want to keep quiet like her mother, she likes to talk and share ideas and wants to help make decisions that matter to her and her community.

By attending the training on gender and women’s leadership offered by Saving for Change (SfC), Panha has learned that women’s participation in family and community decision-making is crucial as women play a key role in both settings.

She says girls and boys should be given an equal chance to receive an education.

“I am lucky I can still go to school, many families in my community stop their daughters from going to school and prioritize their sons.,” Panha said.

“This really limits girls’ opportunities to go further and stay where men could.”

Thanks to the training, Panha noticed she is more confident and able to express her ideas. She knows the right of expressions is for everyone, not just for men or her elders.

“In the past, I like to talk, but was afraid to share because I thought because I was a young girl that no one would listen to me,” she said.

“After I join the gender and woman leadership training offered as part of the Saving for Change, I know everyone can express their ideas regardless of their age, gender or race. Now I talk and share whenever possible.”

In the near future, Panha said her savings will mean she will soon own a bicycle to make her trips to school easy, and through the training, she will be a stronger advocate for change.

“Being a strong girl doesn’t mean being physically strong, but mentally. I need to learn to be strong and independent from now on so that I will reach my dream career as a doctor,” she said.



After attending some training on gender and women’s leadership, 13-year-old Sum Panha turns to be braver and more confident to share ideas during meeting.

# SOPHUN OPENS HER DISCUSSION ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH



Phek Sophun holds a steady gaze as she carefully pours rice wine into bottles in her family's shopfront in Phneas village, Oddar Meanchey province. The 19-year-old is equally as attentive when discussing reproductive health.

Unlike many children and adults in her community, Sophun is open to discussing reproductive health after her training provided by Oxfam's Saving for Change (SfC) program through the Youth Council of Cambodia (YCC).

Joining SfC six months ago, Sophun said the program provides a variety of training and educational sessions to her and the people in her village. Her favourite among these is on family planning and reproductive health, a topic that is traditionally avoided being spoken about publicly in Khmer culture.

"Elderly people in my village seem to talk less about reproductive health," she said.

"They said young woman like me shouldn't talk about this topic as it is

not appropriate. They think it's not necessary to know about all of that, claiming they can still survive without such knowledge."

However Sophun has seen what happens when people remain oblivious to these topics, witnessing many unexpected pregnancies in her village which have impacted the family's livelihoods.

"Having too many kids at the wrong time can harm women's reproductive health and lead the family to poverty," Sophun said.

"No matter how much money people save, poor family planning will not get them out of poverty."

Sophun said she attempted to talk about birth control with her sister, who was married last year. She said her sister wouldn't dare talk about what she thought of as an embarrassing topic with her husband, but was later convinced by Sophun to use birth control.

Sophun is committed to sharing the knowledge she has gained through SfC, despite sexual health being a taboo topic in her community and most of Cambodia as a whole.



She emphasised that it was vital that both men and women be a part of the conversation, so that partners can gain a mutual understanding of each other and to avoid impacting their livelihoods.

“This is a general knowledge for everyone, not just for women or mothers but also men,” she said.

“Men also play a big part in family planning, men should know and be open with his wife.

“Though I am not married yet, I am ready to share and discuss reproductive health and family planning.”



Phek Sophun holds a steady gaze as she carefully pours rice wine into bottles in her family's shopfront in Phneas village, Oddar Meanchey province. The 19-year-old is equally as attentive when discussing reproductive health.

# SAVING FOR CHANGE, A TURNING POINT IN MY LIFE



Cherng Sitha, 36, said the day her first daughter was born, she did not have enough money to go to hospital and was forced to borrow money at a high interest rate to afford to make the journey.

From year to year, she struggled to meet ends meet as a farmer and grocery seller, which is why she joined the Saving for Change (SfC) group in her home province of Pursat.

While at first Sitha thought SfC was simply a savings group that would only provide enough money for her to get by, after a few years in the group she now runs small but successful business and farms chickens and rice to supplement her income.

Sitha said joining SfC is like having a bank in her house. She can borrow the money from the savings group anytime she wants with a very low interest rate compared to the market rate.

Because of the easy workflow process of borrowing money, she is able to borrow money to improve her businesses whilst also having peace of mind.

“In the past I lived in a very small house, but now that house is used as a chicken coop,” Sitha said.

SfC has not only provided Sitha with a financial safety net, but has also empowered her with training sessions on gender, women’s leadership and business and farming techniques. She has been able to use this training in her personal and professional life.

People in her village have noticed the improvement in Sitha’s life thanks to SfC, with her being able to send her three children to school and university, and have asked if they too can join the program.

“My children are also members of the saving group, I told them they need to start saving from now so they will have enough money to continue their bachelor’s degree,” Sitha said.



As part of her free time, Sitha purchase fabric from the market and sew her clothes.

# SINAY TALKS: REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH



Sitting in the middle of a market in Siem Reap, 28-year-old Mery Sinay happily sells seasonal rice cereal. When she gets a quiet moment, she talks with her friends selling vegetables next door about the impacts of unexpected pregnancy.

It's a common scenario, but is rarely spoken of in public.

"We were told reproductive health was not a proper thing to talk about or share with others, it's an embarrassing topic," Sinay said.

Because of this embarrassment, Sinay said she didn't dare talk about birth control or how many children she wanted to have with her husband when they were first married four years ago.

But after learning about reproductive health from the Saving for Change (SfC) program, she tried to raise the topic with her husband. While at first Sinay said he did not seem interested, she convinced him that having children without the necessary financial planning would lead them to poverty.

"I still remembered his impression, 'Why just having kid has too many consequences?'" she said.

"But after some time, we discussed about having kids and birth control."

The couple now has a three-year-old daughter and Sinay is happy knowing she has enough time to manage her business and look after her daughter. Sinay said they agreed they will wait a few more years before having another child.

"Now I am on birth control because my husband and I want to focus on earning more money so we will be ready to have another kid in a few years," she said. .

Sinay has also discussed the topic with her neighbors, who wonder why she wanted to learn about something that is rarely spoken of openly, but she knows it is a vital conversation to have.

"There is nothing to be shy of and we need to be open so we don't take any risks later," she said.

"Sometimes we don't want to have children but we don't know how to prevent that."

Sinay knows it will take time to convince her neighbors to discuss reproductive health and family planning more openly. However she herself is happy and content, having a clear future plan for her family.

She also understands both women and men need to be aware of reproductive health, in order to have a more open and understanding marriage, and a safe and secure future.



# SAVING FOR MY KIDS



Leang Yat, 36, is a member of Saving for Change group. A married woman with three children, Yat plants rice, watermelon, and raise animals as part of her livelihood. Most of the time, she borrows money from the saving group for her farming.

Unlike her fellow farmers who usually migrate for job in the city or neighboring countries, Yat's family spends most of their time on their farm. Last year, she borrowed 1,000,000 Riels (US\$250) from the saving group for her watermelon farming

Last year, she borrowed 1,000,000 Riels (250 USD) from the saving group to plant watermelon. She was thrilled when she sold her watermelon for 4 million Riel (1,000 USD) and was able to use the cash to buy a cow, some chickens and have enough to cover her living expenses.

"At that time I didn't have enough money to buy the seed and fertilizer, so I decided to borrow money from the saving group," she said.

"As a member of a saving group, I don't have to go through a complicated process to borrow and the interest rate is very acceptable.

"It is tough to borrow money from other villagers or microfinances if you don't have anything for them as collateral."

Yat is happy to have the saving group in her village, as it not only allows her to borrow money, but provides training on gender and women's empowerment, reproductive health and financial and business techniques.

Thanks to this training, Yat was able to come up with the idea of supplying clean drinking water to her community in the dry season and will borrow money from the savings group to buy a small truck to transport the water and keep the water clean.

"Though I don't have enough money now, I know I can borrow money from the saving group to invest in this business," she said.

In the future, Yat also wants her two children to join the saving group so they can have enough money to finish high school and go to university.

"My biggest dream is to see my children go to Phnom Penh and study at university like others and I believe that Saving for Change can help me and my children achieve this dream," she said.



Yat is feeding her ducks in a small duck house surrounded by fishing net.

# SAVINGS AND LOANS

## HELP FARMERS SURVIVE DROUGHT



Hot days and lack of rain bring difficult times to farmers in Cambodia, but one man uses a loan to pipe in the water he needs.

It's early morning, and already about 38 degree Celsius (95F). A man with a prosthetic leg is carrying a pump to a pond located in the middle of a dry rice field about 800 meters (500 yards) away from his house in Siem Reap province.

His name is Im Dein, a 56-year old farmer who lost his leg in the civil war with the Khmer Rouge in the early 1980s. He says for four or five months his village has been suffering from a severe drought, and all the farmers and their families have been struggling to find enough water.

Dein says the pump is not heavy, and he's grateful to have it now. He joined a Saving for Change (SfC) group organized by Oxfam's partner RACHA a few years ago, which allowed him to borrow the money to buy the pump and piping he needs to move water to his home and fields. It's saving him, his wife, daughter, and granddaughter the effort of carrying water all that distance.

Dein's face changes completely when he talks about the drought. He said decades ago when he first arrived in his village of Pong Ro Thme, it was

surrounded by a very thick forest with big trees. There was frequent rainfall and the village had water and a lot of fish in nearby streams. These days he says it's very hot, water is hard to find for almost half the year, and the fields are very dry. "No water means we can't survive," Dein says. He blames widespread deforestation and climate change for the higher temperatures and lack of rain.

### Struggling with drought

In Cambodia, drought and water shortages are affecting 18 of the country's 25 provinces. More than a quarter of a million families, mostly farmers are affected by the drought according to the National Committee for Disaster Management. In addition, the local media reports the drought has killed tons of fish and hundreds of other animals.

In Dein's village, the drought has people waiting in long lines for hours to collect water. "There is only one well that has water we can use," he says. "I went to collect water at 7pm; I was able to get the water back home at 11 or 12." Sometimes, he says, he sleeps at the well in order to be there when there is water in the morning. The closest well to his house, about 200 meters away, is now completely dry.



Dein says he is now starting to look for water sources farther and farther away from his village – he can walk four or five kilometers in search of it. Some days, he says he has to buy water for him and his family and animals to drink. This can cost as much as US\$6.50.

The lack of rain is making growing rice very difficult, according to Dein, because his village has no reservoir for storing water. “This year, I received only eight sacks of rice because the rain started very late in the cultivation season.” His normal yield is 20 sacks.

### Savings help farmers cope with drought

Oxfam’s partner RACHA began organizing SfC groups in Dein’s village in 2012. These groups combine their modest savings, loan each other money, and charge low interest rates. In 2015 Dein says he decided to join a SfC group because he could see his neighbors had money to renovate their homes, send their children to school, and buy new motorbikes. Dein says he likes the low interest rates, and the ease with which he can get a loan. “If I borrow money from some other micro-finance institution, I have to pay a higher interest rate, and I need legal documents like a land title for the bank,” Dein says.

Oxfam’s Saving for Change program in Cambodia is now reaching 140,476

people, 80 percent of whom are women.

To cope with the drought, and particularly the difficulty transporting water, Dein borrowed US\$250 from his Saving for Change group to buy the pipe and pump to bring water from the pond 800 meters away from his home.

“I have to pay back the interest of US\$5 in every saving meeting,” Dein says, adding that with the extra time he now has he can focus on making money for supporting his family and paying back the loan and interest to his Saving for Change group. “I am planning to borrow another US\$125 to invest in raising pigs... I want to raise 9 to 10 pigs, and I’ll use the money to buy feed for them,” Dein says.



# SAVING TO BECOME A DOCTOR



“Becoming a doctor, it’s my big dream and a long journey,” said Gnoun Daro a 14-year-old boy from the rural village of Beateay Thmey in Ouchrov district of Bateay Meanchey province. This year, he is studying in grade 6 in Ak Pek Wat primary school, and has already begun that journey.

Daro was introduced to the Saving for Change (SfC) program by his grandfather in early 2016. He was immediately interested in the program because he thought it would help him achieve his goal of saving money for his education to ultimately become a doctor.

After joining a savings group, Daro was a completely different boy. Before he said he liked going out with his friends and buy unnecessary things such as toys, T-shirts, and shoes. Since joining the group, Daro has learned to restrict his expenses and save for the future.

“In the past I never cared about saving, but now I can see the benefit of it. Buying clothes or shoes can’t return any interest or income to me. If I save money in the saving group I can earn the interest. This saving can allow other SfC members and I to borrow money to invest in other business or to buy school materials, especially when I reach secondary school next school year.”

Daro’s SfC group meets every week on Tuesday at noon to save the money. Before the saving started, every group member agreed voluntarily to

contribute some money as part of a social fund. Daro said each member in his SfC group normally contributes 500 Riel (\$0.125). And their saving is starting from 5000 Riel (\$1.25) to 25,000 Riel (\$6.25).

Daro does not have a job. All of his savings come from the daily school per-diem that his mother gives him. “My mother gives me 2000 Riel per day. I spend 1000 riel to buy orange juice or sweets and I keep the remaining for the saving,” said Daro.

In addition to providing a savings and lending platform, the SfC program helps young people like Daro learn how to manage their expense and incomes. “Whatever I spend I have to think about if this expense is necessary or can return me any benefits,” said Daro.

To date, Daro has saved around 500,000 riel (\$125). In the next six months, the first circle of his saving group will end and they will divide the money and interest.

“When I have my saving and interest, I am planning to buy school materials and a computer for the upcoming school year in secondary high school. I am learning English right now and I want to use the computer to help me with that. I want to learn how to use email and to learn English by watching English teaching on youtube,” said Daro.

Daro has encouraged some of his friends to join his SfC group and promotes the program among his school mates. He says some of his friends are very interested to join the savings group but others, aren't allowed by their parents because they live far away.

"I want to have more young people be part of SfC. I've shared the benefits of this model at school. I told young people at my school and community that when you reach secondary school if you don't have a bicycle to ride to school you can borrow money from the savings group or use your own savings to buy one."

In the future Daro wants to be a medical doctor. He wants to help treat poor people with illnesses from his community. "To fulfill my dream of being a doctor, I have to work hard on my studies and stop going out. Most importantly, I have to save money for my studies," said Daro.



Daro and his friend do an exercise his home in Banteay Thmey village along Cambodian-Thai border.

# SAVING FOR CASSAVA



24-year old farmer Laum Phally, who lives along Cambodian-Thai border in ChhorkChey village of Banteay Meanchey province, has a very strong commitment to expanding her cassava business and helping her community learn how to save money.

Phally decided to quit school when she was in grade six to support her parents in producing rice and cassava. She believes that learning how to save money has helped her to resist the urge to migrate away from her village to seek employment as many others have done.

Phally married when she was 22 years old, and now has a son. In 2015, her son was seriously ill, and she did not have the money to bring him to the hospital. Phally's entire family also did not have the money on hand so she could not even borrow money from her relatives to treat her son. She finally decided to borrow 400,000 Riel (\$100) from a local money lender to pay for her son's treatment. The interest rate was 40,000 Riel (\$10) per month. "This high interest rate brought hardship to my family," she said. "It took me almost a year to pay off the debt."

## Joining for good

Phally joined the Saving for Change (SfC) program through Oxfam's partner CHRDI in February 2016 when she saw the livelihood improvement of SfC



Phally at her cassava farm, ChhorkChey village, Banteay Meanchey province

members in her village. “Month by month, their money kept increasing, and I saw that they had the money to start small livelihood alternatives such as expanding their farm, raising animals, and buying school materials for their children,” said Phally.

Joining and learning about the SfC model really helped Phally to cope. In her savings group, every member voluntarily contributes 500 Reil (\$0.125) weekly to the social fund. This social fund is available to the SfC members during any emergency and contributes to development activities in the village.

Phally said that the SfC program provides a space for farmers like her to save and borrow money from the group to use for many purposes. She decided to borrow some money to expand her investment in the cassava farm. Even though this savings group is small and has not yet built up a large fund, it is rare to have any savings at all in this poor rural community.

“So far, I borrowed 300,000 Reil (\$75) to remove the weeds in my cassava farm, and I have to pay the interest of 6,000 Riel (\$1.5), which is not high if we compare with local moneylender, microfinance institution, or bank. In this coming harvest time, I will take another loan of 500,000 Riel (\$125), and hope to return it back after selling the cassava,” said Phally. “Before taking a new loan, first I have to pay off the previous loan,” she added.

As part of being involved in this SfC group, Phally had a chance to join training on Community-Based Enterprise Development (C-BED), through which she learned how to start a small business and expand her agriculture investment. “It is the most interesting part of the C-BED training because it helps me to think seriously about what I am planning to do in the future. It taught me how to analyze my resources and find ways to reach my goal,” said Phally.

Phally currently has a hectare of farmland to grow cassava. In the future, she wants to expand her cassava farm, dig a pond for raising fish, and grow more vegetables to increase her annual income.

“The knowledge that I learned from SfC, how to manage the expense and income of my family, is really important, which not only benefits me but benefits everyone, especially young people in my village, if they start joining the savings group today.”

Phally, who has very strong hopes for SfC, wants to give a message to every youth in her community to stop using drugs and alcohol and start learning to save the money for the future.

“Youths have to follow me and save money. They should join the SfC to learn about family financial management. It really helped us improve our incomes and directed us toward the right direction in the future.”

# HOW THE SFC HELPED

## ONE WOMAN ACHIEVE HER DREAM



“Two hundred dollars isn’t a small amount of money by any means,” Hov Sreyoeng said.

Sreyoeng and her husband Soeun Moeu received a \$200 loan as part of the Saving for Change (SfC) group in Beng Village, northwest Cambodia. They used the money to help start a grocery store to sell their wares to villagers in the community, and Mrs. Sreyoeng also received training and coaching on the importance of saving and business concepts as part of the program. The grocery store now makes up to \$25 net income per day.

In this small village of 539 people, 98 percent of the population are farmers and most depend on raising animals, crop production, and small-scale agriculture as their main source of income. Before the Saving for Change program began, villagers did not have access to the skills, knowledge, and opportunities that could improve their household finances. Many of the local residents were forced to migrate illegally to neighbouring countries in the hope of finding jobs in construction or labor that would pay high enough wages to pay off debts accumulated in the village.

Oxfam’s partner YCC implemented the Saving for Change program in Beng village in 2015. SfC groups use a savings-led microfinance model pioneered by Oxfam to expand financial options for the poor in Cambodia. At the

beginning, the concept of saving was new. But according to Sreyoeng, this SfC group has transformed the lives of those considered to be the poorest in the community.

Before joining the SfC group Sreyoeng said her family was very concerned about their daily livelihood and debts that needed to be paid every month. They were unaware of any potential opportunities to improve their situation besides rice farming, using traditional practices which only generated a low yield.

“Since we joined the SfC group we have been able to solve our debts and start the business. My family is happy and our living condition continues to improve. We don’t have to worry about debt or be concerned with our daily livelihood anymore, and we plan to scale-up and expand our business in the community,” Sreyoeng said.

She said several families from the SfC group have begun saving and lending, and many have already put money aside to start businesses expanding their rice and cassava far

The Beng Commune’s SfC group facilitator, Mr. Thong Dear, said these positive results stem from an internal change in attitude towards

improving livelihood conditions at the family level, alongside a commitment to positively impact other SfC group members in the wider community. The program has spread over two districts, Samrong and Banteay Ampil, and five communes with a total of 807 members, of whom 650 are women. Total savings have reached \$23,796.90, of which \$17,316 has been loaned to members for purposes including healthcare, education for their children, food, home gardens, growing rice, raising livestock, small businesses, and debt repayment.

YCC will continue to support the SfC model and add training on leadership and reproductive health for the community. They hope to create more opportunities for community members, especially among the poorest, to improve living conditions and generate more sustainable household incomes.



Sreynoeng with her son in her grocery shop, Beng commune, Oddar Meanchey province. Photo: YCC

# WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

## ENCOURAGES SAVINGS GROUP SUCCESS



In Kirivorn village, Cambodia, the Saving for Change (SfC) program is improving entrepreneurial development opportunities for women and strengthening gender equality. Women and Youth Creating Their Own Economic Opportunity was launched in 2015 by Oxfam and local partner YCC.

Ath Sreynich decided to join the community SfC group when it was first advertised in the village. YCC helped her community to implement the SfC group model and provided financial and leadership training. Sreynich explained that the group increased her business and health knowledge and increased her contribution to the community and family decisions.

“Before joining the group, I had no power at home. Every decision was made by my parents and family. I am happy that I can be part of the group’s decision making. My parents did not support me at the beginning, but now they have participated in the group with me,” Sreynich said.

Sreynich’s parents originally prohibited her contribution to the savings group. Sreynich worked in her family’s grocery store, but she found that saving was difficult at the beginning. However, the skills she learned at

the group meetings gave her ideas about minimizing expenses and she subsequently saved \$2.50 per week.

Regular group meetings and training sessions at the local primary school increased the community’s knowledge around entrepreneurship, reproductive health, and the SfC methodology. Sreynich’s confidence and her parents’ acceptance of the SfC model grew, and she was later selected as the group’s secretary.

Other members of this SfC group expressed similar stories of elder members of the family struggling to support a new concept, but a clear message was that Sreynich’s leadership has encouraged participation and raised capital.

Samnang Dane, 19, is a member of the group and she explained “I love having Sreynich as a group leader because I believe she is helpful, accountable and has a strong commitment to the group.”

“I appreciate and respect Sreynich because even though she did not get support from her family at first, she still performed well as a leader and led the group on a path to success,” group member Mr. Thai Hong added.



Elders of the village were able to see the benefits of the SfC group as the number of participants increased and it was able to make an impact on the community. The SfC group now regularly supplies its members with funding for raising and buying animals, small-scale farms, and trading. There are now 37 members in Kirivorn village, and Sreynich has reached out to start two new savings groups.

“I am really happy and proud of support from the organization and donors who made this huge change for my family and community, especially now that I am able to assist and successfully form new SfC groups,” Sreynich said. With the knowledge she gained through her own experience, Sreynich provided training for the management of the two new groups, and she hopes to continue to improve the groups so that one day they will be successful enough to act as the village bank.

“I am sure that I can mobilize more people to participate in saving money. In the future, SfC groups will be like a bank which can support both project and non-project families,” she said.



Sreynich at C-BED training. Photo: YCC

# BEYOND CAMBODIA: OXFAM'S SFC

## SET TO REACH THE REGION



As Oxfam's Saving for Change (SfC) program continues to support poverty alleviation in Cambodia, the model is on its way to communities throughout the region, reaching neighbouring countries Laos, Timor-Leste and Myanmar. Seven local Oxfam partners in Cambodia are currently involved in the SfC project which responds in two-year capacity building cycles and in the coming months a pilot project in Laos will be implemented in partnership with Laos Women's Union.

After completing a year of feasibility studies and translation of the SfC manual, Laos SfC Program Officer Lathdavone Lasachak said the team is looking forward to interpret the SfC manual into the Lao context and pilot a saving model in their target areas to ensure a sustainable venture for communities in order to increase the ownership over their finances. However, Lathdavone also highlighted the unforeseen challenges the team expects to change communities behavior from the usual saving group model to understand the long term benefits of the innovative SfC structure that encourages further community involvement but requires individual.

Oxfam Cambodia SfC Coordinator, Mr Cheth Phay said the similar context of the communities that have benefited from the project in Cambodia and

those expected to receive the training in Laos, encourages an expected optimistic outcome. The SfC model differs from the traditionally grant-driven saving groups, to ensure communities "own" the saving group from the beginning, creating a platform of financial inclusion for the poor and encouraging development of independent financial management skills. "If it is their own money, it is their own power," Cheth said.

Oxfam Cambodia will support the Laos team with technical support, including methodology training, exposure to successful projects, and visits to ensure the project is implemented as initially planned. Oxfam team in Laos in partnership with Lao Women Union will then provide a formal training to partners in Laos to build their capacity and be able to provide training for the communities in the target areas.

"We are working with the Lao women union which aimed to pilot saving for change groups in two target areas and if those pilot model are functioning, then we will consider to integrate this methodology into other Oxfam Laos projects" Lathdavone said.

Oxfam in Cambodia continues to work with local partners and as an extension has been advised of replicate models throughout the country.

Oxfam’s commitment to phase out their involvement after two years of providing training to communities makes data on the amount of SfC groups started difficult to obtain, however contact with SfC leaders from communities around Cambodia continues to highlight the extensive reach of the program. The approach has been identified by international NGOs such as Caritas as a vital financial building approach to improve the livelihoods of people living in poverty. In April 2016, Oxfam’s SfC team provided training to Caritas Australia and ten of their partners to share information about the program and the successful outcomes in Cambodia.

“It’s not appropriate only for Laos but this model can apply in everywhere because It is a sustainable way for community to save money on their own, what’s more this methodology also play an important role on encouraging them to be high responsible and create solidarity among the Lathdavone said.

Myanmar is the next target demographic for the program, with a field trip from the Oxfam Myanmar team and partners to visit successful projects in Cambodia later this year.



Lathdavone Lasachak (second right) asked the group about the process of loan disbursement and advantages of being a member of SfC group, Kampong Speu province.

# HARD WORK AND WATER GROW A BUSINESS



In Cambodia, a way to save money helps a farmer start a new business and improve her standard of living.

## BY CHRIS HUFSTADER

In southeastern Cambodia, about 30 miles from the border with Vietnam, Svay Mon is at her vegetable field watching her son and daughter-in-law transplant lettuce seedlings. They have just prepared the growing beds: they hoed out the rows, added fertilizer, and they are now placing each tiny seedling by hand into the fertile soil.

The late afternoon light is warm, the air is sweet, and all the tiny rice fields around Mon are active with farmers working. Even the dragonflies buzz about purposefully.

Next to the garden is a 5-by-10-meter pond (roughly 15 by 30 feet) about half full of water. “Last year I hired someone with heavy equipment to dig the pond; it cost \$250,” Mon says. “I want to grow more vegetables, and without the pond I would not be able to store water for the dry season.”

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Mon says that she takes out a small loan from her Saving for Change group for each crop of lettuces, cucumbers, or peppers she plants. She can sell a lettuce crop for about \$175. After she accounts for fertilizer and other inputs, and pays back her loan, the net profit is \$75. Mon says she can plant six or seven crops in a year if she has the water, especially crucial in the dry season.

Previously, Mon and her family just grew rice for family consumption, but since she joined a Saving for Change group, she used her savings and borrowed a little money to dig the pond. She has now expanded her farming to actually earn an income. “The living conditions of my family are improving; with the extra activities like growing vegetables we are getting more income,” she says at her home, about 30 minutes by foot from her garden. She says she built a proper latrine and can take care of food and education expenses a lot more easily.

“Now I have a toilet, a motorbike, a bike for my grandson, a pond, and a vegetable garden,” she says at her home as the members of her savings group arrive for a meeting.



ABOVE: Svay Mon's son, Ker Heoun, 37, waters newly transplanted lettuce seedlings at the family's vegetable garden. He gets the water from the pond a few steps away. Patrick Brown / Panos for Oxfam America

## SAVINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Oxfam's Saving for Change program helps villagers form savings groups of up to 25 people. At first they just save small amounts at weekly meetings. When the group has enough in its fund, it starts to make loans to the members so they can, at first, take care of emergencies like buying medicine for sick children or covering funeral expenses. Group members then often start small businesses, and as they pay back their loans plus interest the group funds grow. At the close of a fiscal cycle, usually 12 months ending right before harvest time (often when children have to go back to school), the group disburses its funds to the members. Last year, that was when Svay Mon dug her pond.

Mon's group is in its fourth year now.

After its third annual cycle, the group disbursed \$11,500 in savings and interest. Mon got about \$500. The members are now saving more and more; Mon's group has some members capable of keeping written records, so the members can save different amounts. (Many groups can't keep written records but have smart ways to keep track as long as members all deposit the same amounts. The group then disburses the funds equally at the end of the cycle.)

In Mon's group, members are saving between \$1.50 and \$7.50 each week. They might save from \$220 to \$500 over the course of a year, and they can access larger loans as they save more. Mon says loans from the group are the best option for financing: "Before, if I needed money to grow cucumbers I would borrow from a microfinance institution. The {Saving for Change} group is better because if we borrow from the group the interest goes back to ourselves. When we borrow from the microfinance institution, the interest goes out to others."

Oxfam is working with 17 partner organizations in Cambodia that have helped people form 6,119 groups across the country. Together they have more than 101,000 members, and have saved \$5.06 million.

"Our research is showing that Saving for Change groups are filling an important gap in rural communities," says Socheata Sou, Oxfam's Saving for Change project officer in Cambodia. "It has created a way to help people save money, and borrow at relatively low interest rates. It is also helping people to think more long term, and have the confidence that they can invest and earn more money."

As Mon puts it: “Before joining the group we had no savings, and we did not generate any income regularly, like we are now growing vegetables.” Her success is encouraging her to think big: “I want to make the pond 10 meters by 10 meters,” she says. “And I want at least 30 beds.” This would probably double the size of her cultivation area, and she would certainly like to double her income. With enough water, she just might.



# SAVINGS FOR CHANGE



Three quarters of the world's poorest people do not have a formal bank account. With few viable means to save, these families are vulnerable to any hardship.

Oxfam's Saving for Change (SfC) project supports community-based saving groups. They provide a secure place to save; the opportunity to borrow in small amounts on flexible terms; and a network of solidarity.

18 years old Kit comes from a farmer family in Angkorl village, in south-west Cambodia. It was her mother who introduced her to SfC and convinced her to join.

Nary has been part of a saving group for two years now, to support a crab business she started herself. She buys crabs, takes the meat apart and then sells it. She first borrowed 60,000 riel (less than 15 dollars) and 100,000 riel (25 dollars) in a second phase to increase her business.

"In the beginning we thought it would be hard [to create a savings group] because there is no money to save. Then we saw that little by little, the money was growing and it was only from us!"

Beside the economic benefits, the saving group is also a means to share knowledge and experiences.

"Since I have been part of the group I have started to save money and reduce unnecessary expenses. Maybe one day I will be able to open a make-up shop,"

The saving group has given a girl like Kit Nary, who dropped school halfway, the confidence and knowledge to tackle her dreams.



Nary and her mom .





"I could start my own crab business and earn my own income. I buy crab then I take the meat apart and sell them,"  
Kit Nary, 18, Angkoul village, Keb province.





"I expanded my chicken farm with the loan from saving group"  
Chan Sdeang, 29, Kampot province.





“Before joining the group I did not know how to save money. The more money I have the more I spend”  
Ro, 12, Oddor Meanchey province.



39

“I used the loan to invest in vegetable growing. The income from this will be used to support my younger sister and brother to school. I don’t want them to quit school like me” Toum Sopheak, 24, Oddor Meanchey province



45

40

“After joining saving group for 12 months, I saved up to US\$125. I used the money to buy pigs.”  
Romdul, 18, Oddor Meanchey province









**Oxfam Cambodia**

No. 94, Russian Boulevard, Teuk Laak I, Toul Kork, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

**Telephone:** (855) 23 885 412

**Fax:** (855) 23 885 452

**Email:** [Info.Cambodia@oxfam.org](mailto:Info.Cambodia@oxfam.org)

**Website:** <http://cambodia.oxfam.org>



**OXFAM**