



Project Completion Report

Expansion of Employment Opportunities for Young Women (EEOYW)

Phase I
1 March 2007 – 28 Feb 2010

Miss Sok Sony, aged 16, a literacy student from Sitha Por Village, Preah Vihear Province, practicing bamboo basket weaving while feeding her cows. She learnt to weave from observing one of the project's training classes.

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This document reports on the three-year EEOYW project which concluded on 28 Feb 2010. A brief Executive Summary covers the project's problems, solutions and achievements. An introduction provides an overview, and the four main sections – Project success and achievement, Challenges and dealing with them, Lessons and development in Phase II, and Conclusion – describe the project's changes and its future direction.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cambodia is one of the world's poorest countries. 68% of the population lives on less than \$2 a day,¹ most of them living in rural areas. The problems they face include: low agricultural productivity, correspondingly limited economies of scale, lack of access to financial services, a limited skill base to diversify agricultural and off-farm income, and lack of long term business planning at a household level.

Young people represent a large and increasing proportion of Cambodia's population with 60 percent under 25 years of age². This 'youth bulge' is a major challenge to the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) and other service providers, to meet the health, education and other social development needs of young people. Social and economic difficulties are compounded for women: Cambodia is ranked 118th out of 154 ranked countries on the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Gender-Related Development Index³. Gender inequalities compound the poverty and deprivation experienced by young women and girls. This limits their access to basic services, their influence over decisions that affect them at family, community and governance levels, and the legal protection of their rights.

The three-year project, "Expansion of Employment Opportunities for Young Women" (EEOYW) has successfully addressed both FLD's and RCG's priorities in 84 villages in four Cambodian provinces. By the end of the project 669 young women had graduated from literacy classes – the target was 660. From that number 422 graduated from vocational skill training courses – the target was 428. In all, 1,149 young women (87.71%) graduated from skill training over the three years, and 810 (70.5%) increased their incomes – the direct outcome of applying their training.

Scholarships were provided to 52 destitute young women to attend advanced skill training, including: food preparation and processing, hospitality, university study, and small business management. In addition, 783 vocational training graduates received a small business management course, leading to 649 (82.89%) trainees increasing their income. The overall and broader positive result – based on the national average family size of 4.5 – means that a total of 5,170 indirect beneficiaries gained from the project.

A small proportion of the budget provided loans to 312 trainees, managed by FLD's micro-credit operation. The loans were interest free for the first three months to build up their confidence in applying their skill. The trainees were encouraged to form business groups during the project and 72 groups were established with a total membership of 660. Some young women had the confidence to work individually, and others moved to villages outside the project area.

Local exposure visits were organised for 86 trainees, enabling them to learn from successful businessmen in other Cambodian marketplaces; another 24 observed skilled business management in Thailand and Vietnam.

Indicator	Number
Young women literacy graduates	669
Young women vocational skill graduates	1149
Young women small business management graduates	783
Young women scholars	52
Young women on international exposure visit	24
Young women in local exposure visits	86
Young women receiving micro-finance loans	312
Young women groups	72
Young women group members	660
Young women with increased income from applying their newfound skills	810
Total of indirect beneficiaries (average family membership – 4.5)	5170

¹ UNDP (2008), *Human Development Report*, www.hdr.undp.org

² National Institute of Statistics, 2004, Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey

³ UNDP (2008), *Human Development Report*, www.hdr.undp.org

The above statistics show that the EEOYW project achieved significant success. It reached all its targets and made an immediate, positive impact on the lives of hundreds of young women and their families.

I. INTRODUCTION

The EEOYW project has been successfully implemented with finance from CAF Australia since February 2007. It concluded in February 2010 and assisted young women in 84 villages of four provinces: Kandal, Kompong Speu, Siem Reap, Preah Vihear. Village selection began by first meeting the respective provincial governors, who made information available and recommended districts to work in. District governors then provided information and data on suitable communes and, in turn, commune councils recommended the poorest villages for the programme to work in. Community Development Facilitators then met with the chief of each village to verify its poor status and discuss potential beneficiaries. All this information was fed back to FLD's project team to make the final village selection.

The project's components included literacy classes, practical vocational skills courses, small business management training, and market linkages for their products – all designed to improve the lives and livelihoods of disadvantaged young rural women, aged between 18 and 27.

The project was a practical confirmation of FLD's mission statement: *'work with targeted communities on improving productivity, promoting and creating jobs, and improving micro and small enterprise practices for the betterment of food security and living conditions.'* The EEOYW approach matches the government's priorities, to increase livelihood options of targeted young women by creating opportunities for income generating activity.

The project provides literacy and vocational skills training. The latter includes courses on chicken raising, pig rearing, mushroom production, rattan and bamboo basket weaving, hairdressing, sewing, cooking, food processing and stone carving. It also provides scholarships up to secondary or high school level, certificate and advanced training courses or associate degrees. Market support was also provided to sell products made by the newly formed young women business groups. The project's activities conform to its design and FLD's mission. Equally important, EEOYW stimulates integration with other existing FLD projects.

II. PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

1 March 2007 - 28 February 2010

Output I: Literacy

44 Literacy classes produced 669 graduates – 422 attended vocational skills classes

Indicator	Planned Milestones				Achievement
	Year 1	Year2	Year3	Total	
Number of villages	25	17	42	84	84
Number of literacy classes	12	14	10	36	44
Number of illiterate young women attending literacy classes	180	280	200	660	669
Number of literacy students who attended vocational skills training	90	196	142	428	422

A lack of literacy was identified as a fundamental constraint to improving potential trainee capability. FLD worked closely with each province's Department of Informal Education, the department who provide literacy education for young women, with trained teachers and inspectors. FLD staff coordinated throughout and provided quality assurance. The department provided literacy books during each six- to eight-month course and at its conclusion each graduate received a certificate of completion.

To qualify for the literacy courses the young women are aged between 12 and 17, and for vocational training, 18 to 27. In the project's third year, with reference to ILO Convention 138 on the Minimum Age for Employment and Work, they could be selected for vocational training at age 15.

During the entire project, literacy teaching was provided to 669 illiterate young women in 44 different courses. Of them, 422 went on to vocational skill training, which required minimum numeracy and literacy skills. As in the project evaluation and monitoring reports for year I and II, the impact of literacy teaching is provided below.

In Year I, of those who only received literacy training, 80% applied those skills in some way: reading text books, wedding invitations, magazines, writing and calculating. Nearly 17% taught their siblings or children. Those who went on to vocational training used their calculation skills to measure the profits from their business.

The monitoring report for Year II, showed that 60 (61%) of the 98 students read books and text books. Ten students (10.2%) said that they read newspapers or magazines, 42 (42.9%) read wedding invitations and letters, 38 (38.8%) applied their writing lessons, and 35 (35.7%) taught their children or siblings at home. For social benefits, 13 (13.3%) said that the major advantage from their literacy skills was in improving their general knowledge; 17 (17.3%) said they have received greater respect from others, 20 (20.4%) gained new friends and 4 (4.1%) increased their social activities. Only 14 (14.3%) encouraged family members to study, and 28 (28.6%) said that domestic violence has been greatly reduced. Economically, 20 students (20.4%) benefited most through the expansion of their businesses, 18 (18.4%) were now able to calculate their income and expenses quickly, 19 (19.4%) found it easier to find a job, and another 18 said that as a result of their literacy training, their monthly income had increased.

Monitoring for year III showed that 60% of the respondents used their new skills to read books and texts; 13% read newspapers or magazines; 12% either wrote letters or in a note book; 24% were able to calculate, but only 15% taught their children or siblings at home. 16% of the respondents confirmed that they *improved their general knowledge* by gaining literacy skills; 20% *gained friendship with other friends*, and 22% encouraged family members to study.

Overall, the most important outcome of the provision of literacy skills was providing the young women with vocational skills training, thereby connecting them to social and economic activities. And though it linked them with income generating activities, just as important is the broad base the teaching provided which is helping them interact with others in their daily lives.

Output 2: Vocational Skills Training
1,149 vocational training graduates – 810 (70.5%) increased their income

Indicator	Planned Milestones				Achievement
	Year I	Year2	Year3	Total	
Number of villages	25	17	42	84	84
Number of young women skills training graduates	375	575	360	1310	1149
Number of skills graduates who increased their income	225	403	216	844	810
Number of young women who received scholarships	10	20	17	47	52

Vocational skills are a sustainable means of stabilising young women’s incomes in remote areas. They provide value-added skills that improve productivity and give robust income earning opportunities. FLD provided a list of potential vocational skills and the young women registered their interest by choosing up to three skills from the options⁴. The options were the result of annual market surveys in each of the four provinces that determined demand and the required skills.

The following are some of the skill options:

- handicrafts – weaving, stone carving, jewellery (silver and appliqué)
- agriculture – mushroom production, rice growing, livestock-raising

⁴ The skill options were determined by market surveys, conducted in Year I and II by the project manager and in Year III by the Farmer Market Development Officers

- services – hairdressing, make up, wedding clothes, cooking (Asian and European), waiting skills, wine-making, tour guiding, hospitality
- other - languages (English, Japanese, French), computer skills
- food processing (banana, taro and yam chips)

The young women then rated their level of interest: 1 – very interested, 2 – interested, 3 – fair. They were then selected on the basis of their skill choice, education and ability. An additional factor was sufficient interest from within that area to have enough to attend a class. Depending on the skill, this was a minimum of 15 up to 25. The families and the beneficiaries then had to sign a contract committing them to the full duration of the training.

Trainers were selected locally or, where appropriate, from other provinces, to ensure that the training was of a high standard. Usually, female trainers had professional experience in their respective expertise including business experience. It was expected that they could deliver both technical skills and business management concepts during the course.

Over the three years, 1,149 young women (87.71%) graduated from vocational skill training. As a direct result of that training 810 (70.5%) increased their income. Scholarships were also provided so that 52 destitute young women could attend advanced skill training in subjects that included food preparation, hospitality, university study, and small business management. In addition, 783 vocational skill graduates undertook a short-term small business management course. Of them, 649 (82.89%) increased their incomes. The project evaluation and monitoring reports for years I and II, and the impact of this training, is described below.

Interviews with 231 in the Year I monitoring report revealed that their family's average monthly income was around 17,3874riel (US\$43.46), but the monthly average income *after* they graduated was 21,0950riel (US\$52.73). At the same time, many more families had expanded their income generating activities; most likely the result of extra income from *their daughter who participated in skill training*.

The 476 Year II respondents showed that the average family monthly income was around 176,347 Riel (US\$44.08), but *after* graduation it was 187,755riel (US\$46.93). This means that more young women's families expanded their income generating activities with extra income from *their daughter who participated in skill training*. A decrease in the average income of the young women's families in Year II, compared with Year I was the effect of the 2008 global economic crisis.

The Year III statistics showed that at least 316 respondents who had applied their skills could earn an average of 40,800riel (US\$9.95), in addition to 123,00riel (US\$30.19), as income from other sources per month. The average monthly income from other sources of two young women (318 minus 316 respondents) who did not apply their skill, decreased to 123,800 Riel (US\$30.19); before they attended training this was 140,000 Riel (US\$34.14). Vocational skill training provided US\$6.00 on average to the trained young women's monthly income, and ensured income security for their household as well. *Early assessments have shown an increasing trend, which will hopefully continue upwards in the future...*

Overall, vocational skill training directly increased the incomes of 70.5% of those who have been trained on an occasional or regular basis. The level of increase varied, depending on the skill. The balance of the former trainees (29.5%) indicated that after training, for the sake of the family's survival, they used their original skill or labour to address food security.

Output 3: Small Business Management Training

**783 young women graduated from small business management training courses.
649 put this to good use, making a profit from their businesses.**

Indicator	Planned Milestones				Achievement
	Year I	Year2	Year3	Total	
Number of villages	25	17	42	84	84
Skills training graduates who attended small business training	180	403	200	783	783
Skills training graduates who used a loan to start their business	375	303	100	778	312
Young women who applied these skills and increased their income	90	328	176	594	649

Small business management training was added to skills courses to give more confidence to apply the training. The provision of a loan was then added to ensure they could begin their business activities. Over the three years, 783 (68.15%) vocational graduates finished their learning with a small business management course. Of them, 649 have made practical use of the new knowledge and skill and established profitable businesses.

The effectiveness of the small business management courses was demonstrated by an April-July 2009 survey on Knowledge, Skills and Attitude (KSA). Of the 524 trained in 2007-8, 225 showed that persistence, commitment and self-confidence were the attributes the young women mastered more than any others. Persuasion was the least managed. The survey also showed that skills, resources, demand, price, costing and location are most often practiced, with business networking the least practiced.

The KSA survey also examined potential increase in income and business expansion. The biggest group to have increased their income did this by only a small amount, and the expansion of their businesses for the majority was very similar.

In Year I providing loans enabled 216 women to develop their businesses. Conversely, in Year III some young women were unable to start their businesses without loan capital. As stated earlier, only three young women defaulted on repayments: one left the village; the other two suffered ill health. Providing the loan's first 3 months interest free certainly removes the pressure. Many also noted that 2.5% interest was better than bank terms in their area, which is borne out by 2009's project evaluation.

A revolving fund provided access to 312 vocational trainees, thanks to the loan fund allocated in the budget to cope with the huge demand. The loans accelerated business transactions and provided greater turnover in chicken rearing, pig production and sewing activities.

Output 4: Market Linkage

Established 72 young women business groups with 660 members

Indicator	Planned Milestone				Achievement
	Year I	Year2	Year3	Total	
Number of villages	25	17	42	84	84
Young women's groups formed	6	17	18	41	72
Local trade fairs organised and participated in	1	1	1	3	5
Young women who participated in local study visits	17	16	18	51	86
Young women in international study trips (a Year III trip was canceled)	12	12	12	36	24

The vocational trainees were encouraged to form business groups during their training; from 660 young women, 72 groups were established. Others had the confidence to work as individuals, and a few moved out of the project area. Local exposure visits were organised for 86 trainees to learn hands-on skills from successful business people in other Cambodian marketplaces. Another 24 observed various business management skills from successful entrepreneurs in Thailand and Vietnam.

FLD's Small Business Development Advisor was able to connect the application of the women's learned skills to local and overseas markets through the Farmer Market Development Model and shop. This has been a very positive move, especially in the way it strengthens young women's business groups.

As quoted in the project evaluation report, groups enable young women to share their experience and work together. This provides comradeship and support – at work and in personal situations. They also stated that they feel a lot more confident in knowing that FLD is supporting them by finding markets for their products, which keeps them in their groups – *motivated, activated and busy*. Some groups have had success selling clothes, snack foods or baskets to their own customers. Others raise chickens or grow mushrooms to sell in their villages. A good example is in Kandal Province where, due to many orders from Phnom Penh and their own area, the local authorities have noted a reduction in migration. Some of the groups and individuals now have sustainable incomes from FLD's shop and other customers.

More facts are in another table in the annex – Consolidated table of beneficiaries, 28 February 2010.

III. CHALLENGES AND HOW WE DEALT WITH THEM

<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Solutions</i>
Although the price of fuel fell at different times during the project, food prices remained high. However, when fuel prices soared again, food prices sharply increased. This contributed to an increase in absenteeism among the students as they looked for extra income to pay for food.	The project provided a US\$15 monthly stipend to trainees who stayed on the course. It also sought cooperation and support from their parent to keep their daughter on the course until it was successfully completed. They were finally convinced that time invested in the course was an investment in their future. Trainers and trainees were encouraged to discuss and agree on flexibility in training time to avoidable absenteeism during the growing season, Khmer New Year and other public holidays.
The border dispute between Cambodia-Thailand continues and has affected our project. Many young women dropped out of literacy classes in Preah Vihear because of security issues, moving near the border to live with their soldier-husbands.	On several occasions field staff advised them to remain in the literacy training course, but they were influenced by their husbands and couldn't be stopped. More trainees were then recruited from the village and the classes kept going.
The young woman beneficiaries were from remote areas and many lacked education or had had only a little. They often faced destitution and were at risk of being overwhelmed by family issues. These conditions strongly influenced their participation in the course.	The project provided a choice of desirable and marketable courses. For those supporting their family's livelihood, and who could not attend a six-month course, they could attend a 2-week course over a three-month period. Some skills accommodated low literacy, enabling attendance at chicken, pig and mushroom raising courses.
The low quality of some products can make it difficult to capture markets in a competitive environment. Also, their confidence in selling services or producing goods has not been high.	Trainees were assisted to form business groups to provide mutual support on quality control. FLD's Farmer Market Development Model was established to retail their products at different market outlets in Phnom Penh and elsewhere. This would provide more orders for groups, giving them the opportunity to fine-tune their products.
Finding highly qualified people to run courses in remote areas for poorly educated students is often very difficult. This limits course outcomes, with poorly trained young women producing low quality products for very competitive markets.	Trainers were given 'Training the Trainer' skills prior to working with vocational trainees. The mentoring method was adopted in most cases. The project also provided refresher courses to 'Training the Trainer' graduates to increase their confidence.

IV. LESSONS LEARNED AND DEVELOPMENT OF PHASE II

- The project addressed specific issues that affect poor and disadvantaged young rural women. Providing literacy and vocational skills changed the lives of many once destitute young women, who have now become socially and economically empowered. (+)
- The skills introduced to the groups depended on a balance of their preference and market demand. Consequently various products were supplied, but good marketing activity means ‘the right product at the right time;’ achieving that can take longer than a project’s time frame allows. (+/-)
- In reality, micro-businesses are volatile and vulnerable in a changeable market environment. Chicken raising, pig rearing and mushroom production always respond to market demand, both short- and long-term. Other skills such as sewing, basket weaving, stone carving, food processing, and hairdressing are more susceptible to market fluctuation. (+/-)
- The project’s Phase II has been designed to further support skills training by strengthening both the business groups and marketing activities. The idea is to develop local markets for products made with those skills and create sustainable supplies for future market expansion. The long term impact will depend on the strength of each business group and its ability to manage and sustain supplies, high skill levels and respond to market demands – quality, price, appearance ... (+)
- Long term project support for the business groups is necessary to build confidence in their skills and developing markets. Both have a positive impact on income sustainability. (+)
- Success of the Expansion of Employment Opportunities for Young Women Project depends largely on selecting the right women, providing them with the right skills, and overseeing links with appropriate market opportunities. (+)

The following are recommendations for future implementation:

- a. Trainee selection: would-be trainees need to be carefully screened with preset criteria, ensuring that they completely understand the project’s activities and objects. Although this has been done in the past, further emphasis is required. This means that all external and internal aspects must be taken into account. All of their background: education, living conditions, involvement with debts, family status and income generation history is to be considered.
- b. Vocational skill training: In addition to previous approaches and efforts, training should be carried out by highly qualified people who can respond to the demands of a changeable market. The training approach should be embedded in the notion of client-oriented production. In this regard, trainers should play a broader role as mentors rather than just being a trainer. And quality control should be given a high priority at the start of each training/mentoring programme. Moreover, trainees should have access to information on developments and trends in the market for their products, and the impact on consumers. The group approach should then be strengthened to raise awareness of young women’s products and, therefore, develop local markets.
- c. Loan provision: A loan is needed to establish a successful business. But so far the loans that the project and FLD’s micro-finance service have provided access to have not been fully utilised for income earning activities. They have used it for other purposes: repayment of debt, food, medication, and some income earning activity. A well assessed record for making loans available is critical to success in their businesses. Loan funds should be provided to enable them get their learned skills established, but in a proportionate amount of total investment cost. This way, young women will gain a vested interest in their business.
- d. Market linkage: markets for young women’s products have to be expanded, both within and beyond the project’s boundaries. This is essential to financially sustain the established supporting structure – the Farmer Market Development Model. More promotional strategies need to be developed to bring product information to customers, along with capacity building for sales staff. A market outlet at commune level is necessary, and the business groups should be encouraged to manage it, along with assistance from the project team. Product branding, packing, and quality control are essential areas to work on in the project’s next phase.

CONCLUSION

Providing vocational skill training and mentoring to young women is the key to ensuring the project's success. This is not just defined as achieving planned outputs – i.e. over 70%. We have demonstrated that the project has achieved its planned milestones, along with the immediate impact or micro effect from 87.71% of the young women vocational skill graduates, and the 70.5% who have increased their incomes. Although the increase remains smaller, but early assessments have shown an increasing trend, which will hopefully continue upwards in the future. The links between providing vocational skill training, micro-credit access, and then market support, are absolutely essential. Gaps between these are noted to eliminate possible defects while considering the continuing success of this extremely important project.

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