



Clean Water for Cambodia's Great Lake Communities

The Tonle Sap is the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia, but provinces around it have limited access to safe water and sanitation. An ADB project is providing a solution.



Pursat - Farmer Vorn Mao used to collect water for her family from foul smelling and hazardous streams in a remote village in Cambodia.

In the dry season, the 36 year-old mother of two would resort to digging a hole near her house in search of water, or trekking two kilometers or more to streams where many people also washed their clothes or bathed.

Without the means to treat the water, she and her family often suffered from diarrhea, fever, and skin problems.

Now, times have changed and Vorn Mao and her family and neighbors have safe, clean, and readily accessible water supplies, thanks to a deep well pump installed as part of the Tonle Sap Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project.

The project is funded by ADB through an US\$18 million grant from the ADF. It forms part of the Tonle Sap initiative launched by ADB in 2002, which aims to promote sustainable economic growth, especially for poor households; provide access to assets; and help effectively manage natural resources.

Tonle Sap is the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia, covering an area of 2,500-3,000 square kilometers during the dry season. The resources found in it underpin food security and employment in surrounding regions, and efforts to conserve its wide-ranging biodiversity are of global importance.

The ADB-financed project provides safe water sources and sanitation facilities in remote rural areas of five provinces around the Tonle Sap lake.

Reduction in Sickness

"With this new water source we have noticed a reduction in sickness especially for children. We get water from the deep well pump for drinking, for washing clothes, for all our needs," said 40-year old Ly Ho, a farmer and father of four, who lives in a village that benefits from the project.

Vorn Mao agrees. "I'm very happy we now have a water well. Because of the reduction in sickness, we spend less on medicine."

The two live in separate villages in Chheu Tom commune, some 75 kilometers from the provincial capital of Pursat province. Pursat is one of five provinces surrounding the Tonle Sap lake to benefit from the project. The others are Battambang, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Thom, and Siem Reap.

Responding to the development needs of rural dwellers is a major pillar of ADB's 2005-2009 Country Strategy and Program for Cambodia, with the poverty rate in rural areas, estimated at 40.1%, well above the 29.7% level in urban areas. In addition, many rural regions show high rates of waterborne and water-related diseases.

Since approving a national water and sanitation policy in 2003, the Government of Cambodia has been working to ensure that every rural dweller has access to safe water and sanitation by 2025. It has committed to water supply coverage in rural areas of 50% and sanitation coverage of 30%, by 2015, in line with the country's Millennium Development Goals.

However, while the number of people with access to safe water and sanitation in Cambodia has improved since 1989, mainly due to external assistance, rural water supply coverage in the country remains the second lowest in Asia.

The Tonle Sap project aims to address some of the unfulfilled need and, by the time it is completed in 2011, it aims to

provide rural water supply and sanitation facilities to about 1,760 villages, benefiting a total of 1.81 million people in the five target provinces.

Community Participation

A key element of the project is the active participation of the rural communities that benefit from the project. These communities help select, plan, share the cost, implement, operate, and maintain the facilities.

In the case of deep well pumps, which cost an average of \$1,800 to set up, 10% of the cost is shouldered either through cash contributions or in kind by the beneficiaries, who in turn take part in managing the facility through a Water and Sanitation User Group (WSUG).

WSUG members are drawn from the heads of user households with five members appointed to a board. The WSUGs contribute to the capital and maintenance costs of the facilities.

"We have a plan to protect the facility from any mold. Then I also collect money from the user families to cover maintenance costs. So if there are minor problems, we can have the facility fixed," said Vorn Mao, who is a WSUG board member.

The Tonle Sap project also provides one latrine to each family-beneficiary, in order to improve sanitation.

The implementation process though, has not been without hurdles.

"We need more time to explain to them the benefits of using safe water and in using the toilet also. Rural people just use the outside areas of their homes - they do not use the toilets. It takes time to train them to use the new methods," said Ky Seng Ha, manager of the project implementation unit of the Provincial Department of the Ministry of Rural Development in Pursat.

Another difficulty has been gauging where to drill wells in order to tap ground water. In some instances drilling has reached depths of 210 meters without striking water.

"In 2008, we will look for adequate information on the situation of ground water first before we start constructing the wells," said Ky Seng Ha.

Despite these hiccups, both the beneficiaries and proponents have been heartened by the gains so far.

"With these achievements those implementing the project are very happy and are willing to continue this work. The people benefiting from the project are happy too and they contribute to the project in cash and kind for the construction work," Ky Seng Ha said.

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