



JULY 2022 | ISSUE 1

PROJECT UPDATE

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE NEXT GENERATION
AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION PROJECT



Welcome

FROM BRIAN COOK
PHOTOS: PAO YIM

Welcome to the first newsletter of the *Next Generation Agricultural Extension Project: Social relations for practice change*. This is a quarterly newsletter which informs you of project updates from the research team. This quarter we have been busy preparing for field work activities to commence, expanding the research team in Cambodia and working with our donor, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) to extend the length of the project until 2026.

Project Overview

FROM CAITLIN FINLAYSON

This project aims to produce an innovative model of agricultural extension founded on expanding enabling social relations, which will complement and/or replace existing models of extension based on the provision of technology, capital and information.

Duration: January 2021 to December 2026
Target Areas: Cambodia
Budget: A\$4.5million
Project Leader: Dr Brian Cook, University of Melbourne

Research team grows

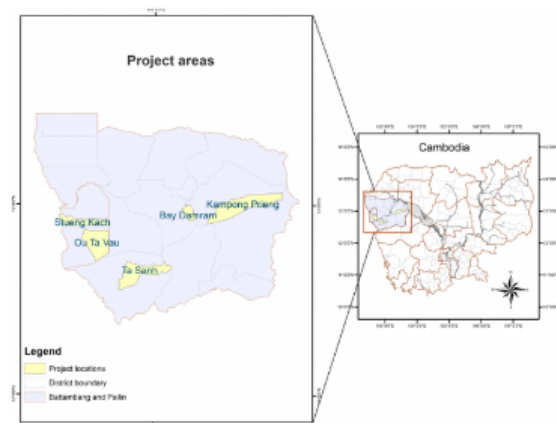
PHOTOS: VAN TOUCH

Eight Cambodian research assistants joined the research team for the Next Generation Agricultural Extension Project. Welcome to the team: Sinouan, Sao, Bunnarath, Lita, Saroeut, Sophea, Chariya and Pherom. These researchers have a range of disciplinary backgrounds and many years of experience working with farmers and communities.

Here is the team with University of Melbourne Research Fellow, Dr Van Touch, Pailin Department of Agriculture's Sophanara Phan, a village leader and representatives from our project partner, Partners for Rural Development, including the Country Director Sokunthea Nuon and Finance and Administration Manager, Manika Yim.

The team has already begun collecting household census data from more than 100 households, with the target of gathering data from 3158 households. The household census aims to provide an understanding of the socio-geographical and economic contexts of agriculture extension and rural livelihoods. The team is scheduled to complete data collection by late October 2022. Once the census data collection is completed, the team will be conducting field crop surveys with approximately 300 cassava, maize, and rice farmers.

The research team has visited five communes in the provinces of Battambang and Pailin in northwest Cambodia. Dr. Ariane Utomo, a Senior Lecturer from the University of Melbourne, joined them in the last week of July. We look forward to their updates in the next newsletter.



What are the socio-ecological contexts and infrastructures that may hinder or enable smallholders households in northwest Cambodia to thrive?
- Activity 2 Research Question



Spotlight on Partners for Rural Development

PHOTOS: BRIAN COOK

Partners for Rural Development (PRD) is a woman-led non-governmental organization leading development initiatives in northwest Cambodia. Projects span education, environment and conservation, gender, health and agriculture.

PRD has been a partner with the University of Melbourne and ACIAR since 2017, when the Country Director, Sokunthea Nuon started the organisation.

Since this partnership began, Sokunthea's knowledge about cassava planting and farm management has increased significantly.

Farmers tell her that often they do not know where to go when they have problems.

The relations that she has built within the community, and the knowledge that she has gained about soil condition and pests and diseases means that Sokunthea and PRD can now respond to farmers' needs. Giving back to farmers and the community is a priority for PRD. Here we see a photo of Sokunthea working together with cassava farmers during the harvest.

Sokunthea is looking forward to PRD's further engagement with the *Next Generation Agricultural Extension project* and seeing what new knowledge is produced.



Cassava farmers feel happy when we share concerns and solutions with them.

– Sokunthea Nuon

Activity I: extension as a social process

FROM CAITLIN FINLAYSON AND VAN TOUCH

Since December 2021, 3 members of the research team, Dr. Paula Satizabál, Dr. Van Touch and more recently, Dr. Caitlin Finlayson have been conducting interviews with international experts on agricultural extension in Southeast Asia.

We have been discussing with experts how the issue of agricultural extension and agrarian change in Southeast Asia is understood and how it has evolved over time.

As we begin to analyse the interview data, we share with you some insights. As expressed by one expert: "Agriculture cannot stand alone". There are processes which can influence farmers including digitalisation, collective action, reproduction and care, land tenure, natural resource governance, finance and debt, ageing labour force and migration. Our interviewees highlighted how these processes intersect, influence social relations and cannot be understood unless one takes a step back from the farm as a unit of production.

Equally, there are actors including farmers' cooperatives, value chain operators, financial institutions, village chiefs, as well as farmers and farmer households themselves which all have agency and can effect the success and failure of agricultural projects.

We look forward to discovering and sharing more from the data about the embedded social and relational aspects of extension efforts in Southeast Asia.

It takes a village to support a successful farmer. The farmer doesn't do it on their own. They're part of a community, they're in a social matrix.
– Activity I international expert interviewee



However useful or valuable the particular technology or innovation might be, if the social relations aren't there to underpin it, then it will be that much harder to drive change. – Activity I international expert interviewee

Project Partners



Resources

Check out the latest articles, blogs and research outputs which are shaping the project

Advisory support and learning on non-technical aspects of farming

Laurens Klerkx from the Knowledge, Technology and Innovation Group, Wageningen University, writes about the need for more research on how extension and education systems go beyond supporting farmers technical knowledge, skills, competences and capacities.

Agriculture 4.0

A group of authors critique narratives surrounding agriculture 4.0 and argue for greater inclusion of people alongside benefits for productivity and the environment. They outline a framework of multi-actor co-innovation to guide responsible socio-technical transitions. [Read more.](#)



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