

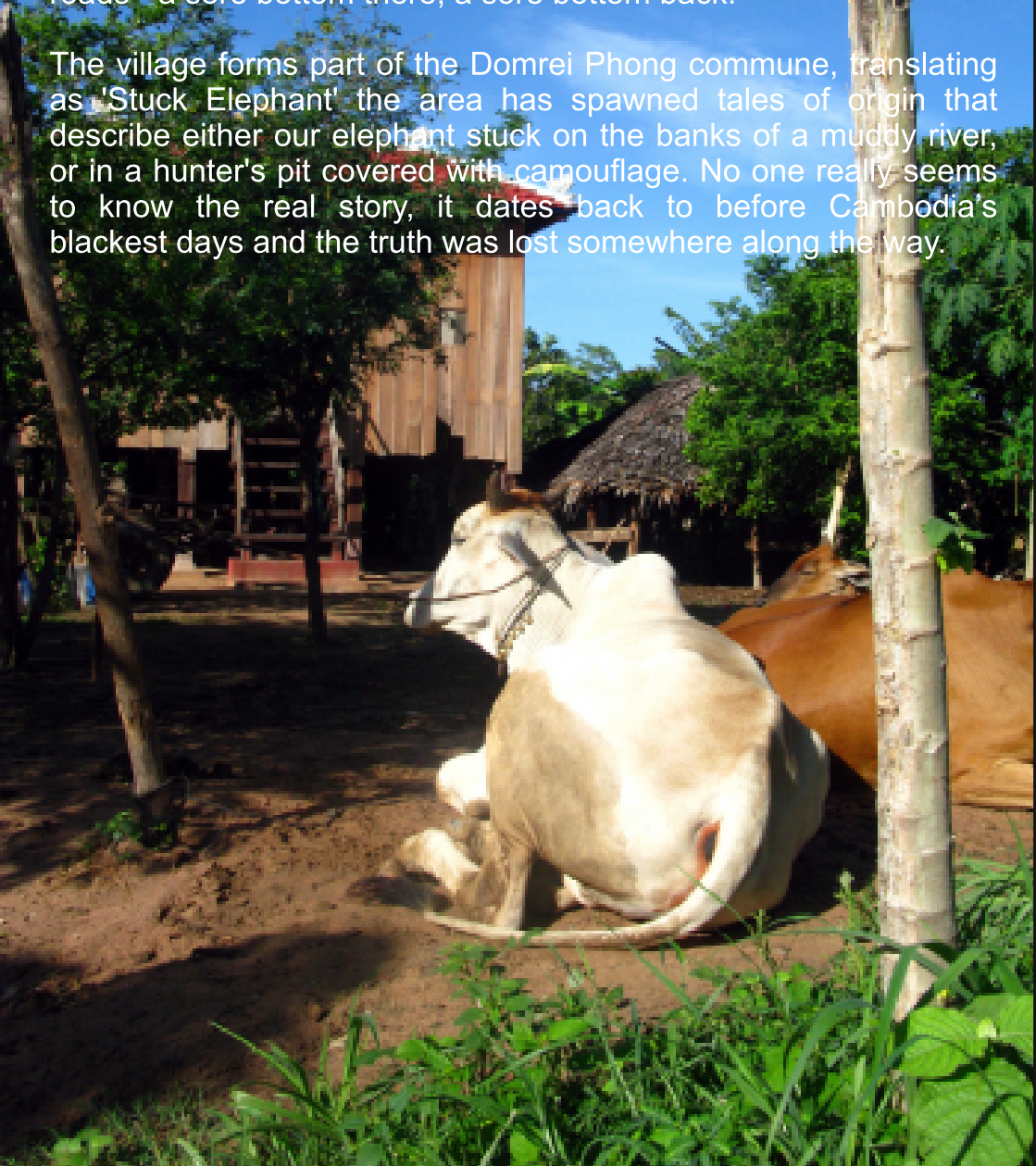
Kroach Village

A Tale of Two Families



Kroach Village or 'Orange' village, is supported by the Cambodian Rural Development Team, a livelihoods development NGO based in Kratie. It is an hour in a taxi to Chhlong and then 30 minutes on a moto down through emerald countryside and undulating dust roads - a sore bottom there, a sore bottom back.

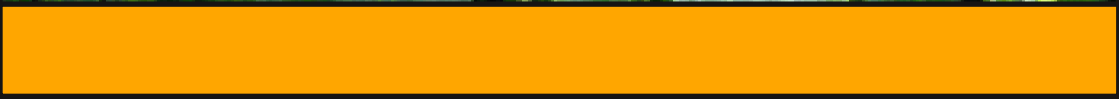
The village forms part of the Domrei Phong commune, translating as 'Stuck Elephant' the area has spawned tales of origin that describe either our elephant stuck on the banks of a muddy river, or in a hunter's pit covered with camouflage. No one really seems to know the real story, it dates back to before Cambodia's blackest days and the truth was lost somewhere along the way.





The scope of this little orange book you are holding is not to compare 'good' or 'bad', or even to portray a 'before & after' scenario, as not all people living in impoverished areas are able to commit the time and labour to alternative livelihood activities. But the aim is simply to show some daily tasks, a little life, of two families in a CRDT project village and how having a biodigester, or a chicken pen or a rainwater collector... can make village life that bit easier.

Srey Phoom



Srey Phoom is a proactive member of the community in Kroach Village, a CRDT beneficiary, she sports a toilet, a nearby vegetable garden, a rainwater collector and a biodigester. She is using CRDT's rice improvement techniques in their field behind the house, is a member of the vegetable growing executive committee in Kroach and also a member of the chicken raising committee. She has her very own chicken pen – half finished.

Am Seakleng lives about 500m further into the village with her granddaughter and is privy to only a shared toilet build by CRDT. She doesn't own the land her house is built on, but she did farm her own rice - up until recently when she got quite sick. She has had to rein in the hours she spends in the field due to high blood pressure and high cholesterol. She owns a couple of cows also.

Am Seakleng



The Dynamic Duo



One family is large, the other small. Srey Phoom is wife to Duth (actually Anh, but no one calls him that), mother of Heng and Huo (the dynamic duo) and daughter to Sim and Ouhen. They all live together as is the traditional way after a Khmer marriage.

Sim



Duth



Ouhen



Ina is Am Seakleng's granddaughter. Some years ago Ina's parents were divorced. Her mother was given custody of Ina's older brother. They left for Phnom Penh and have not been seen since. The father got Ina. He lives in Takeo province now, he's a drunk. He has only managed to visit Ina twice in the last two years. After having spent time with her it is clear she is screaming out for something, for someone. Her grandmother does her best to look after them both, but she is old and won't always be there for her. Spending time with Ina was as intensely sad as it was an absolute joy.

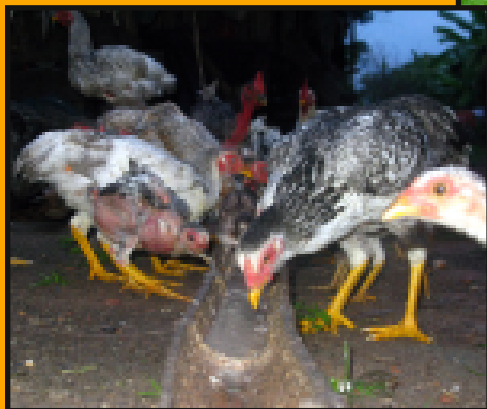


Ina



“My 10m x 5m vegetable garden has helped me a lot, my land is near the river so I don't have to go far to collect most vegetables. It's really helped to reduce the amount of money I spend at the market also, and all my veg is organic – before we were eating veg grown with chemicals. I was spending \$12.50 to \$15 a month before we had a vegetable garden. Now we spend \$2.50 to \$5 a month.”

Srey Phoom grows eggplants, long beans, cucumbers, chillies, spinach, mushrooms, many types of gourd, bananas, melons, papayas..... Most things are in her nearby veg garden or round the house. The only exception is the cucumbers. They are a 3.5km walk away in Srey Phoom's 'chamkar' (plantation), a journey she can make 2 or 3 times a day. We went together one day and it was a round trip of 2 hours to collect 6 cucumbers.





Am Seakleng doesn't grow her own vegetables, but her income is so low neither does she buy them, in fact she will rarely spend more than \$1.25 a week on vegetables. Her main source of income, and the task that takes up most of her day is making and selling Num Thnaut – a sweet snack made from sugar, palm fruit and flour.

"It takes 2 hours to prepare the flour and palm, then steaming it takes another 3 hours per day. I also have to take my two cows to the field and move them at least once, that takes 2 hours. I can't afford to buy much from the market, so I collect veg that grows wild in the forest, and sometimes borrow spinach from my neighbour. Depending on what I want, it can take an hour to collect veg from the forest near my house."



Num Thnaut



"Also I raise chickens! I can sell the eggs and the vegetables my family don't eat and make some extra money."



Srey Phoom walking to the chamkar

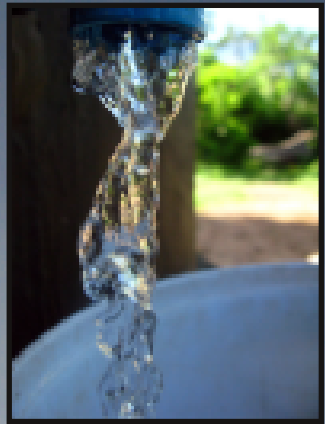
"It's difficult for villagers to go to the hospital, the road is very bad and I don't have a moto. I've heard about people falling from motos and dying on the way to the hospital because they couldn't get there fast enough."



Like most rural people, Am Seakleng worries about her and Ina's health. That's where a healthy diet packed with as many vitamins as possible can make a difference. Many times a day Ina and Seakleng go to the river to collect water for drinking, cooking and cleaning. The water she and Ina drinks is yellow, not boiled and not filtered.

Am Seakleng says that she isn't worried about the water, all the villagers drink it, she why shouldn't she? The food we ate that evening was all cooked in water collected by Ina.





"I have a rainwater storage tank, a water filter and a toilet from CRDT. It's quite different from using river water. Before we spent a lot of money on medicine because we often became ill, we still get ill from time to time, but much less. The rainwater storage reduces the time spent collecting water, it's 60m to the river and it would take about 20 minutes to collect a days water. Once it's filtered it's easy for the children to get water when they want it."





"It's normal for me to drink the river water, it doesn't seem to affect my health. We often get diarrhoea but this is normal. We have a shared CRDT toilet now that the other villagers use as well. Before this I had to go to the forest 20m away. It was very hard during the night, I couldn't see and I was afraid of the insects, snakes and scorpions."



"It produces home lighting and burning gas for cooking and boiling water. I collect animal waste from around the house and put it into the biodigester's inlet. That's all we have to do."

Srey Phoom is the proud owner of a biodigester that produces lighting and cooking gas from the natural gases created by animal effluence. They really are the sort of technology that changes lives, and the by-products can be used as an aid to agriculture. Their use reduces dependence on unsustainable forest timber, cleans up the environment and adds an hour or two to the lives of rural women tasked with cooking and all associated jobs. Can't be bad.

"I used to use firewood for cooking, I'd get it from the forest 2km away. It takes all morning to collect and then you have to chop it up into small pieces. The firewood for 2 – 4 weeks takes 2 people 2 whole days to cut down to size. So now I don't have to do that I feel like I am cleaning the environment, and the slurry helps the vegetable garden. I feel like it is better for my family's health. I used to spend money on medicine after I went to the forest often and got malaria. Everything is so easy now."

Am Seakleng uses firewood found around the village and cut from the forest





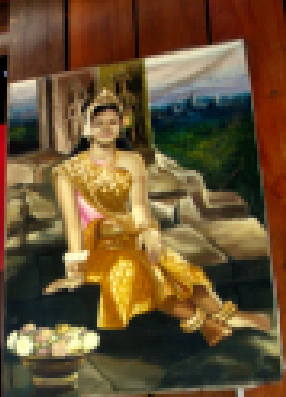
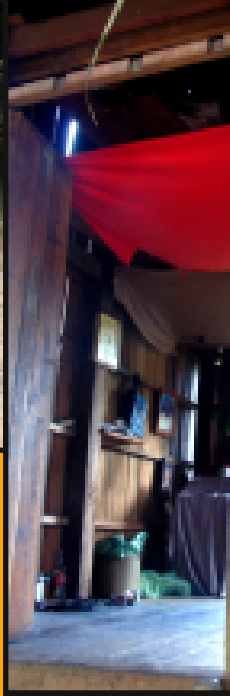
"Since we have had a biodigester and we can have lighting at night, I've noticed that the amount of neighbours that come round to chat has really increased! We eat together and talk about life, sometimes there are up to 10 people huddled together. In the past we bought lamp oil and car batteries, a battery cost \$70 new, and 2 days charge was about \$0.75."

"Recently I attended a CRDT workshop about Climate Change. Humans affect the Earth's climate by chopping down trees, it gets hotter."



With all biodigester installations CRDT provide an ongoing environmental education workshop.

Srey Phoom's house and yours aren't that different...



Am Seakleng's house. A boy in the village painted that

"It takes me an hour to collect wood from the forest near my house, it lasts about 2 days. I never cut wood from the trees, but other villagers do. I take dead and dry branches from the forest floor. It used to be very easy but lately I have noticed that the wood is running out."

"I've never heard of Climate Change, or renewable energy. But I have seen Srey Phoom's biodigester. She says it's easy to get gas and light, but I worry about explosions from the gas."





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