



CASE STUDY: SUPPORTING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

MUNICIPAL PARTNERS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Case of the Women's Development Centre Project

I. GENDER IN THE CAMBODIAN DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

In 1998, having successfully established peace throughout the whole country, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) was faced with a number of critical development issues. An obvious challenge was widespread structural and gender-based inequality, which hindered women's participation in social and economic development activities. **Among the problems facing women were a culture and tradition of inequality; unequal access to and control of assets; a lack of opportunities for income generation; sexual harassment and domestic violence; unequal opportunities to influence decision-making; and low levels of literacy and education.** All of these factors limited the ability of women to access the better paid jobs in the growth sectors like garment and tourism, earn income from agriculture, gain access to common property resources, and obtain support to develop micro- and small-enterprise skills. Programs and facilities to address these issues and support their needs were limited in availability, scope and accessibility.

In 2004, the RGC requested technical assistance from ADB to formulate a pilot women's empowerment project, which

Municipal Partners for Economic Development (MPED) is a Federation of Canadian Municipalities' (FCM) program designed to support local governments and local government associations (LGAs) in seven developing countries to provide more effective local economic development (LED) services. MPED was established in 2010, with \$18.4million financial support provided by the Government of Canada. In Cambodia, MPED is co-managed and co-implemented by FCM and the National League of Communes/Sangkats (NLC/S). The two organizations work together to guide municipal development cooperation between the Canadian and Cambodian local government sectors, which includes municipalities and districts, sangkats/communes, NLC/S, central government and other stakeholders. The partners aim to address decentralization policies and processes—in addition to local government capacity building—which contribute to the efficient and effective achievement of MPED objectives in Cambodia.

This case study was developed to share best practices and lessons learned from a project implemented by the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) through the financial assistance from The Asian Development Bank (ADB) to members of NLC/S, the Provincial Association of Communes/Sangkats (PAC/S), and the Association of Cities of Vietnam (ACVN). Knowledge sharing is a key activity of the Asian component of MPED; it provides successful models from which LGAs can find new ideas, discover local economic development (LED) options, and learn practical steps that can then be applied and replicated.

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Financial support for this publication is provided by the Government of Canada through Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada.



would address the issue of gender in economic development. The government realized that supporting women's engagement in enterprises would improve family well-being and reduce household poverty. The project was developed in alignment with the RGC Rectangular Strategy for Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency, and Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) Strategic Plan.

II. THE WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT CENTRE PROJECT (WDC)

The WDC Project was a pilot economic empowerment project for women, which started in 2006 and ended in 2010. The project was implemented by MoWA with grant funding¹ from the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR) and was administered by ADB. The overall goal of the project was to reduce poverty by increasing access to services that support women's social and economic empowerment.

The project had three development objectives:

1. To facilitate human development for low-income women through life skills training and advocacy support.
2. To promote and support micro- and small entrepreneurship development by providing adequate information, facilitating access to credit, and enabling links to various organizations and resources.



Women producer group practices new bamboo crafting techniques oriented by the WDC-Kompong Chhnang staff.

¹The total cost of the project was approximately \$2,747,000. JFPR provided grant funding of \$1,747,000 and MoWA, the government and communities provided \$400,000 or equivalent in-kind in labour, office space and materials, counterpart staff and land.

²There are currently seven WIDs in Cambodia: one established in the mid-1990s, three in 2006, and three more in 2008. After the WDC project has finished, the government plans to establish one WDC in Kratie and one in Steung Treng Province. Existing WIDs are in the process of being upgraded into WDCs.

3. To build the capacity of institutions that promote woman-friendly entrepreneurial environment.

There were four components to the project:

1. The establishment of a WDC in Siem Reap and the upgrading of one in Kompong Chhnang.
2. Life skills training and advocacy support for women.
3. Micro- and small enterprise development and support.
4. Capacity building and project management support.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR WDC PROJECT DESIGN

To date, MoWA has provided training to women in eight provinces through the District Office of Women Affairs (DoWA) and the Women in Development Centre (WID).² In 2001, an International Labour Organization (ILO) assessment study found that WIDs were underperforming, underachieving, inefficient, and out of touch with both market demand and the dynamics of the labour market; therefore, WIDs had to be restructured, and the services they provided improved. Following a literature review of different approaches, the WDC project was adopted as an integrated approach to supporting women's social and economic empowerment. This was to be achieved by upgrading existing traditional WIDs, which were vocational training centres, into WDCs.

The project to upgrade WIDs into WDCs was designed around two basic concepts:

1. To address various issues relating to WIDs, i.e. that they were centres focusing on traditional skills but whose courses limited the skills that their staff were able to share. In addition, the training provided had low relevance to the job market; and only those who could afford to be away from their home for



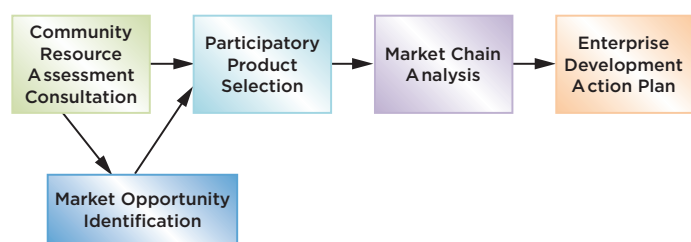
A show room is designed to advertise and act as a point of sale for local made products.

an extended period were able to receive training. They also provided little or no support for turning vocational skills into viable livelihoods.

2. To pilot the WDCs, which use an innovative approach, and whose key elements go far beyond traditional skills training. Among these are (i) market-oriented skills training; (ii) entrepreneurship and micro-enterprise development support; (iii) socio-cultural empowerment; and, (iv) shared facilities for information, production and marketing. In addition, these services were provided at the community level.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

Throughout the project, the Participatory, Market-Oriented Approach to Enterprise Development (PMED) was used. The PMED approach focuses on interventions at the various points of the market chain for traditional local products. It also addresses the socio-cultural barriers faced by women when operating their enterprises. The approach used a series of participatory activities, interconnecting from one stage to another:



1. **Community Selection:** Identification of the community with existing skills and products that can potentially be developed.
2. **Community Resource Assessments (CRA):**³ Identification of local resources (physical and human), market options and trends to explore the existing resource, skills and perceived opportunities.
3. **Market Opportunity Identification Studies (MOI):** Evaluation of demand and buying conditions for the priority products identified in the CRAs. There were two main concepts: 1) input on product design and opportunities to transform existing products

to reach new markets; and, 2) assessment of market opportunities for existing and potential new products.

4. **Participatory Product Selection:** Following Participatory Product Selection Workshops, the findings from the MOI were reported back to communities, and the participant identified selection criteria and filtered the products at three levels:
 Filter 1: Obvious discard—cannot be grown or produced, too risky, high investment required.
 Filter 2: Selection matrices based on enterprise criteria: production, marketing, profitability.
 Filter 3: Selection in consultation with client group.
5. **Market/Value Chain Analysis (VCA):** Priority products identified by the client group would then be carried out by interviewing key informants at each stage of the market chain, i.e., suppliers, producers, middlemen, wholesalers/processors, retailers and consumers; mapping out the production process; and identifying gaps or weakness in the market chain.
6. **Enterprise Development Action Plans (EDAPs):** These were formulated to guide the strengthening of market chains, which include interventions at various points in the value chain, not just at the producer level.
7. **Community Training:** Identification of required skills training and micro-enterprise development modules in the EDAPs. Lifeskills elements were also incorporated into these plans to address the socio-cultural barriers faced by women in effectively operating their enterprises.

V. ACHIEVEMENT OF PROJECT OUTPUTS

5.1. Site Selection

An area-based approach was used to identify the geographic areas in which MSE development training and support would be provided. Information was collected at the district, commune and village level to check against selection criteria.⁴ The provinces were selected in advance as a result of ongoing projects.⁵ To guide the selection of districts, the Project Coordination Unit (PCU) collected secondary data from economic profiles at the provincial level, information from the 2003-2004 Cambodian Socio-Economic Survey (CSES), as well as statistics from other national and provincial sources on population, employment, business, agriculture and poverty. At the commune and village levels, the project worked with the Ministry of Planning and local authorities to collect similar complementary information to guide the selection of communes and villages, since there was no profile of primary livelihood activities. As a result, in Siem Reap, the project was implemented in 28 villages, three communes and two districts; in Kompong Chhnang, it was implemented in three communes in two districts.

³Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools were used extensively in the CRA workshop including seasonal calendars, resource mapping, market mapping, brainstorming and product ranking.

⁴Key criteria for community selection includes rural, average level of poverty, some diversity of economic activity, potential for scale-up of activities, potential for impact, area where (potential) partners are working and interested producers open to working together for mutual benefit.

⁵Siem Reap and Kompong Chhnang Provinces were purposefully selected because the WDC Project is a part of the ADB's Tonle Sap Livelihood Strengthening Project. The key reasons are that two provinces are geographically close to the Tonle Sap Lake and rich in traditional handicrafts (bamboo, sedge mats, rochek mats).

5.2. Community Resource Assessment (CRA)

CRA workshops were organized in six communes: 367 people participated in these workshops (187 women), including representatives from each of the 28 villages selected to participate in project activities, as well as village development committee and commune council members.

The CRA in the six communes identified the key priorities as being market opportunities to sell products (agricultural products and handicrafts); improving the quality of local products (equipment and design) to meet market needs; and improving business management skills. For life skills, the participants identified food processing for household consumption and sale, and household and family management skills.

The project selected its intervention by forming producer groups to be a mechanism for its EDAP implementation. The producer group was responsible for joint marketing, facilitating linkages with suppliers, introducing new designs for local products, facilitating linkages with buyers, and introducing new technologies to improve quality and decrease time needed to produce handicrafts.

CRS FINDINGS	KOMPONG CHHNANG	SIEM REAP
Technical Skills	• traditional design and production techniques	• improve traditional techniques
Equipment	• know little about equipment that might improve product quality and productivity	• improve the quality of products (equipment and design)
Marketing	• know little about the product market-design, package, demand information	• market opportunities to sell products
Business Management	• weak — no record of capital, labour, materials, price, profit and demand	• improve business skills
Technical Assistance	• none — marketing and training	• no technical assistance
Priority to Products	• low levels of labour input and technology, marketable.	• low levels of labour input and technology, marketable.

Districts	KOMPONG CHHNANG		SIEM REAP	
	Rolea B'ier	Kompong Leaeng	SotrNikom	Angkor Thom
No. of Communes	9	9	10	4
No. of Villages	86	44	113	26
Percentage of Households below Poverty Line (2004)	35%	32%	58%	85%
Diversity of Economic Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rice (wet & dry) • raising livestock • vegetables • small business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rice (wet & dry) • raising livestock • vegetables • small business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rice (wet) • raising livestock • vegetables • small business • non-timber forestry • fishing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rice (wet) • raising livestock • vegetables • migration to Siem Reap (sell labour & small business) • business • handicrafts
Other Economic Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pottery • mats • bamboo baskets • palm sugar • rice wine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • palm sugar • mats 		
Potential Partners	CCD CEDAC Neang Kong Rea Associaton LMDS HEKS	WVC	DANIDA ADA Padek CheaSak Hatha KasekorAmrith Cambodia Economic AMK	Plan RIDA Padek
Local Government Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • market information • raw materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • credit • market information • improving mat quality • shift to dry rice cultivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • education/school • infrastructure • increase employment • improve livestock raising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduce migration to Siem Reap • develop ecotourism • increase employment • improve market information

5.3. Project Interventions

Facilities Development

The WDC in Siem Reap Province has adequate facilities to operate as per the project plan. It has an administration and marketing building, two training buildings, a dyeing/drying area, a cafeteria/day care, a dormitory, a shower room and supported facilities. The WDC in Kompong Chhnang Province added a food processing building to its existing facilities and has renovated the cafeteria/kitchen. More importantly, the project constructed Commune Producer Group Buildings⁶ at the target communes; these are for the use of women to work together to develop their products, and will reduce travel costs and the time lost by producers that live far away from the WDCs.



The Women's Development Center building in Siem Reap Province.

Life Skills and Advocacy Support

This aimed to increase women's confidence and dignity, and improve their ability to meet their needs at home, at work, and in their communities.

Life skills were designed to complement livelihood initiatives and were based on needs identified by communities. The communities were trained in important domestic skills such as home safety and the repair and maintenance of small machines,⁷ i.e. electric generators, water pumps, motorcycles and sewing machines.⁸ In the CRA workshop, most households identified a lack of skills, knowledge and experience in processing food for their families or for sale. This included skills such as making candied fruits and vegetables, i.e. sweet potatoes, pumpkin, papaya, coconut meat, bitter melon, kontout



Women are trained on vegetable growing through a life skill component of the WDC project — Siem Reap.



⁶The producer group building had an open work space to accommodate a shared production line, in addition to toilet facilities and a well.

⁷The fact that nearly all of the participants in these workshops were men is not surprising. Anything to do with machines is traditionally considered to be "men's work". Nevertheless, the interest shown by women in the initial workshops in Kompong Chhnang provides some indication that some women are willing to challenge this gender stereotype.

⁸Most participants in activities under this component were producer group members or closely related to group members.

(a local berry) and tomatoes. The project contracted local experts to train the WDC Staff. Once this had been completed, the WDC staff trained the communities.

The advocacy support project provided training on women workers' rights to the communities. This training course was not identified by the communities, but was developed following a research study on the situation of women workers engaged in paid employment in the area, and a local needs assessment carried out during the course. The respondents reported that the training was useful and said they had applied the knowledge they acquired with their families; they also shared what they had learned with other villagers, particularly on topics such as the consequences of migration, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence and child rights. Approximately 3,500 participants were trained on different subjects.

Micro- and Small Enterprise Development

This component built on the existing resources, skills and interests of communities to design packages of services to help groups of women to develop market-oriented and sustainable livelihoods.

At the start of the project, a Gender and Enterprise workshop was organized to introduce women from the community to the basic principles of enterprise development and entrepreneurship. The training provided them with knowledge of how to run a business, calculate labour costs when setting prices for products, and display creativity with items such as sedge mats or rice. The next step was to form producer groups, through various meetings with local stakeholders, then form a management committee,⁹ and identify ways to improve the quality of products. The project selected sedge mats in Trangnel and Toek Hout Communes, bamboo

handicrafts in Chheung Krio Commune (both in Kompong Chhnang Province), and romchek and praomats in Siem Reap Province.

In Kompong Chhnang, the emphasis of the project was on building traditional skills and products to reach new markets: In Trangel and Teuk Hot Communes, women have traditionally learned skills from elders to produce bamboo handicrafts and weaved sedge mats. For years, they have produced the same products using the same techniques—without knowing what the market wanted or paying much attention to quality. In the CRA workshop, the women participants indicated that they needed to improve the quality of their bamboo handicrafts and sedge mats; therefore, the WDC introduced them to the kome design and dyeing technique. With these new techniques, the women are able to produce colourful products that are more popular on the local market. This positive experience has encouraged them to learn and implement different techniques, and to ask for more technical support on product development. Based on market research, WDC identified other products that might be in demand, including women's handbags and a new bamboo handicraft design (see picture). The WDC staff and some producers increased their skills and capacity to train other producers in the community. Some became master producers, and trained producer group members in the community or in other provinces. With this new capacity, the producer groups created varied sources of income for their families, and strengthened the production chain within the villages.

In Siem Reap, the project aimed to increase the share of locally produced products in rapidly growing tourism markets: Svay Chek Commune in Angkor Thom District is close to Siem Reap Provincial Town. This geographic advantage enables young women to commute there on a daily basis for work. The lack of income generating



Learning new bamboo design techniques.



The silk products made by women producer group display at the show room of the WDC — Siem Reap province.

⁹The producer group was made up of a representative from each of the 15 villages, and assistants or deputy group leaders.

options in the commune led WDC to undertake research into study traditional products that might be suitable for product and market development. The community identified romcheak leaf products, which have been made by older women and sold for a small profit at the local market for a long time, as a potential product for development. WDC staff organized a ten-day workshop on the design and dyeing of romcheak in the commune, which was facilitated by master trainers in dyeing and served to improve the design, color and quality of the product. In addition, a Phnom Penh-based expert in sewing handbags, Ms. Sem Sothy, was contracted to prepare prototypes and provide training to make handbags for romcheak dyeing. The participants, mostly young women, were pleased with the new colors they could produce, and excited by the introduction of products that can be made from a romcheak mat. This newly designed romcheak mat was more profitable, and the handbags proved to be more popular for tourist souvenirs at the local markets.

Having provided support for the development of the products, the project also provided marketing support for the new designs by supplying and selling them at the Phnom Penh Night Bazaar Market, and elsewhere. In Siem Reap, WDC worked with private sector tour companies to bring tourists in to see how products are made, and to buy the products in Siem Reap and other provinces. The WDCs also designed a product brand to market 'WiSe', approved by the Minister of MoWA and registered in the Ministry of Commerce, and developed additional marketing materials such as brochures, swing tags and a webpage.

Finally, the project strengthened the coordination of WDC and MoWA staff with NGOs, local government institutions and the private sector to support producer

groups. The workshop on family livelihood and income generation increased understanding of WDC's role and responsibilities, addressed the issues of the producer groups, increased cooperation and support from MoWA management and collected input from the private sector and NGOs to improve the quality of products and marketing.

Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening

This component is the cornerstone of project implementation for establishing and transforming existing WIDs into integrated WDCs. It started with institutional strengthening for the MoWA/Economic Development Department (EDD) and WDC by providing technical assistance, which included advising, mentoring, management, and facilities upgrades. In addition, core, basic and technical skills training was provided to staff at all levels who were involved in PMED implementation. Capacity building used a train-the-trainer approach.

EDD received training in a wide range of technical and management skills in order to help it effectively carry out its technical responsibilities within the framework of a community-based, participatory approach to enterprise development and women's economic empowerment.

The first step was for management staff to build their capacity to execute their responsibilities to support the development of the WDCs. Next, EDD employees were trained in core skills, i.e., facilitation skills, data gathering and analysis, participatory rural appraisal (PRA), gender and enterprise). As the program developed, new skills were added, including gender and enterprise, gender and economic development, facilitation skills, data collection and analysis, PRA, on-the-job training in data collection, and CRA design, operations and data entry at the EDD. **EDD staff also received training**



Traditional bamboo products made by villagers at home.



A show room to display local products made by the producer group and community, WDC — Kompong Chhnang.

in facilitating community-level workshops as participants in train-the-trainer workshops held at the provincial level on the themes of home safety, food processing, good nutrition and sanitation, and women worker's rights. A core group of capable trainers were subsequently identified and had their capacity built to be able to train DoWA and WDC staff at Siem Reap and Kompong Chhnang Province.

Example: Upgrading a WID into a WDC in Kompong Chhnang Province

From 1986–2006, the WID in Kompong Chhnang served as a centre that provided vocational training in areas such as sewing, weaving, beauty salon skills and food processing to vulnerable women, widows and disadvantaged girls. These women were poor, orphans, handicapped, responsible for large families or victims of domestic violence. In 2006, the WID was upgraded to a WDC through the ADB project. The project aimed to improve its in-house training for the local community and provide better service delivery for women entrepreneurs.

The project upgraded existing facilities and constructed more buildings (i.e. a showroom, a training building and a working office) in which to provide in-house training, internal staff training, and marketing. The project hired an advisor to strengthen the institutional capacity of the WDCs; this primarily targeted WDC managers, who received training on management and administration skills through ongoing mentoring. Through the progressive stage, the project also improved staff knowledge and skills, such as basic skills (i.e. facilitation, data gathering and analysis, communication) at the area identification stage; core skills (i.e. CRS, PRA, gender and enterprise, business advice) at the project intervention design stage; and technical skills (i.e. product design, marketing, food processing techniques, and training) at the training stage. Last but not least, the project helped to define clear roles and responsibilities for the WDC, strengthen the relationship between the Provincial Department of Women's Affairs (PDWA) and WDC and build good cooperation with the line departments at the province, NGOs and private sectors.

Now, WDC employees have a good understanding of gender and enterprise, gained a lot of training experience in the community, and improved their training capacity on life, business and especially technical skills such as dyeing, products with kome design, and acting as market intermediaries between the producers and the sellers. Management and staff capacity has also increased to be able to address the challenges faced by producer groups.

Interview with Ms. Men En
WDC Director, Kompong Chhnang Province

VI. PROJECT IMPACTS

The project has had positive impacts on the livelihoods of women entrepreneurs, households and communities. Producer group members have learned new techniques to improve their traditional products; have more market-based ideas to develop new products; now use equipment that is better designed to lower the production costs; and, sell the product at a higher price. The new economic role of women in project target areas was

achieved in their households; men have supported women's participation in economic activities by sharing some household responsibilities. Having the producer group and facility in the commune made it easier for women to gain advanced knowledge that could be shared, and to commit to thinking about product innovations. The project increased the earning capacity of women. It supported women to increase their LED potential by demonstrating the benefits of self-improvement and peer-to-peer learning.

Example: A producer group improves skills and increases earning capacity in Cheung Krio Commune

In the past, we made baskets using the same techniques our ancestors had used. We borrowed money and sold our baskets to the middlemen for a gate price. We didn't know who bought the baskets or how much they would sell them for. We lived that way for a long time. We just made our baskets without knowing how much we would earn from a long day's work, working every week, every month. What we did know was that we didn't have much money for food, to send our children to school or to buy bamboo. When the centre came and brought us together as a group, our lives changed. We learned new techniques to make handicrafts with new designs, shapes and sizes. At the start, we were a bit discouraged; it was difficult to learn new techniques and designs (the kome technique) and, sometimes, we wanted to quit. However, we overcame all obstacles and are reaping the rewards of the training. We can calculate how much it costs to make a basket, what revenue we can generate, and we can increase our income by using a production chain. We use less material, save costs and time; buying material for new products was almost more expensive than what we would get for the traditional bamboo baskets. For example, one bamboo tree cost us 20,000 Riel; we would only earn 25,000 riel from selling three baskets. Now, we only spend 2,000 riel on smaller pieces of bamboo.

Focus group discussion with six members of the bamboo producer group in Cheung Krio Commune.



Male youth joins in the bamboo production line taking place at the producer group center, Kompong Chhnang Province.

Example: A producer group makes a positive change

Ms. Pen Sinat is 50 years old; her husband works as a carpenter and farmer, and they have one dependent child. She has been a producer group leader from the start of the project. She says the producer group is a new way of working, which increases local earning capacity and productivity. The producer group brought together villagers with varying levels of bamboo production skills to receive training on new techniques and to learn new product designs to meet the market demand. The members were given different parts to make on a production chain; then, they had to assemble the various parts and check for quality. The production unit was given the order from the market to work from; the WDC in Kompong Chhnang organized the order and then delivered the completed products to sellers in Phnom Penh for export to Japan. The revenue was shared among the members according to the number of units they had produced. After each order, 500 riel was subtracted from the payment and used to purchase the next load of bamboo. As a result of using this system, the villagers produced more in less time, and sold the products for a better price. The average monthly income for a producer group member was \$100–\$120 per month.

In addition, the members were able to share and learn new techniques, encourage each other to increase the difficulty of the new product design, and continue to improve the quality of the product. Some of the group became master producers and trainers for other producer groups in the communes and in other provinces. The commune has developed pride in producing a unique product and it has become part of its identity.

VII. LESSONS LEARNED

Upgrading the WIDs into WDCs improved their institutional capacity to empower women's participation in economic development. The WDCs were able to improve women's livelihoods and roles in an integrated way by improving staff capacity and the centre's service delivery. In turn, this enabled women to increase their earning capacity, develop a better living and provide a conducive environment for a supportive, innovative, market-based, and competitive business.

The WDC has become a centre for training, product development, marketing, technical assistance, and business facilitation.

The PMED approach was effective locally for the design of project interventions and community training. This approach was community-led, bottom-up, and market-based; its design allowed local insights to be understood and interventions to be tailored to existing needs and interests, as well as the capacity of skills and team work, and market demand. **Interventions were well integrated to build business skills and mentor women entrepreneurs to remove barriers to their playing an active role in the economic development of their family and community.** Change was implemented step by step, which was essential for strengthening the producer groups' skill sets and building their teamwork. Master producers emerged and were used to provide training to others.



Man assists women with physical labour, such as breaking and smoothing bamboo.

Building the capacity of staff is the cornerstone of a good project and of sustainability. The PMED approach emphasized the importance of good skills and training at every step; this provided EDD/WDC staff with the capacity to carry out their activities effectively. The train-the-trainer approach used in the project was important for transferring skills from a senior to a junior level and helping the communities absorb the new methods.

The producer group was an applicable model to use in the context of the rural areas involved in the project. It has made a substantial difference to the lives of women entrepreneurs. Women were able to work together at the group production centre or at a colleague's house; they had their eyes opened to the possibilities of new knowledge, new ways of working and living. Together



Daily life in rural Cambodia — the woman pictured at left is a member of the producer group of the WDC project in Siemreap province.

with training on life skills, business and gender as well as teamwork, they embedded capacity and pursue business opportunities.

VIII. CHALLENGES

Upgrading WIDs into WDCs required business-minded managers and staff who had business experience and skills and were able to act flexibly and in a timely fashion.

Where local livelihoods are concerned, there are always competing priorities. For example, during the farming or rainy season, most women go to work in paddy fields. The producer groups lose members, and their absence affects the production line and supplying capacity. MPED was a new approach and it was very successful in building women's economic empowerment; however, it is only effective if the capacity of staff is properly built, the institution is adequately strengthened, and the target beneficiaries understand its values and are committed to meaningful participation.

IX. CONCLUSION

The project achieved its objectives, which were to upgrade existing WIDs into integrated WDCs. This meant a substantial shift in the activities of the centre, expensive institutional strengthening and capacity building, and introduced an effective working system at the commune level with the potentiality for production, knowledge sharing and creativity.

Women's capacity increased, which resulted in higher incomes, a more important economic role in the family, and recognition in the community. Thanks to the project's enabling environment, women entrepreneurs made unique, innovative products that honoured their community and were in demand on the market.