



Poun Lue Reatrey Senchey

CASE STUDIES OF COLLECTIVE HOUSING IN ASIAN CITIES SERIES • NOVEMBER 2022

After surveying all the slums in the provincial city of Serey Sophoan, in the northwest corner of Cambodia, this little riverside squatter settlement, which had long faced floods and eviction threats, was prioritized by the community network as having the most urgent housing problems. After long negotiations, the city agreed to provide free government land and basic infrastructure, just 1.5 kilometers away, for resettlement, where the people worked with the UPDF, municipal officials and a team of community architects to design and build their own new community, with collective land rights.

- Project Poun Lue Reatrey Senchey
- Location Serey Sophoan, Banteay Meanchey Province, Cambodia
- Size 30 households
- Finished 2009
- Type Nearby relocation of a small community of riverside squatters to free government land, with new houses and collective land ownership

CONTEXT AND PROCESS

Housing the poor in Cambodian cities:

For the poor in Cambodia, already battered by decades of war and brutal regimes, the last forty years of peace have brought new waves of bad news, in the form of global investment and land speculation in the country. Because municipalities in Cambodia are still under central government control and have few resources of their own, their only bread and butter comes from the development of land within their constituencies. It's no surprise then that the housing needs of the poor get pushed way down the priority list. In fact, poor communities all over the country are being pushed off their land to make way for various kinds of development projects, most without any compensation or relocation. These evictions will keep happening if there is no mechanism to help poor people secure their housing and land before evictions happen. With no policies, no housing programs, no welfare systems or government departments to assist them, Cambodia's poor are left to survive and make their own housing as best they can, on whatever leftover bits of land they can find, where most live in insecurity, without toilets, water supply or drainage.

The city:

Serey Sophoan (Khmer for "Glorious and Auspicious") is a small city in Cambodia's northwestern corner and the capital of the Banteay Meanchey Province. The more commonly used name for the city - Sisophon - dates from the time when the area was part of Thailand. For truck drivers, train conductors and goods transport workers, the city has yet another name - Svay. Serey Sophoan is located just 50 kilometers from the Thai border town of Poipet, at the point where the main highway from Poipet splits into two - one heading east to Siem Reap and the other heading south to Phnom Penh. In many ways, Serey Sophoan is representative of the country's secondary cities, which are undergoing urbanization and attempting to navigate the opportunities, challenges, and inequalities that come with it.

According to a 2009 survey, over 7,300 people, or 17% of the city's population (which was around 90,000 at the time), were living in squalor, in 19 slum settlements across Serey Sophoan. These settlements were built precariously along rivers, roadsides, railway lines and on land under ambiguous ownership. As a result, the communities lived in isolation and insecurity, with limited access to basic services such as paved roads, piped water supply, electricity, working toilets or drainage systems. Many also have faced the threat - or the reality - of eviction, to make way for transportation projects, parks, and commercial developments. Most of these settlements were established by impoverished, traumatized, and war-weary people in 1979, immediately after the fall of the Pol Pot regime, when the entire country belonged to no one and was open for resettlement. These settlements have grown in size and density over time, as new migrants to the city have arrived from rural areas, seeking jobs and opportunities in the city.

The community process:

With assistance from the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), the Serey Sophoan District Authority, the national Community Savings Network of Cambodia (CSNC), and the Urban Poor Development Fund (UPDF), poor communities in the city began to come together and begin to look for solutions to some of these problems in 2005. The UPDF was founded in 1998 as a partnership between the ACHR, the Phnom Penh Municipality, and the Solidarity and Urban Poor Federation (SUPF) to assist a growing number of community-based savings groups - in Phnom Penh initially, and later in provincial cities around the country. In the early years of its collaboration with communities in Serey Sophoan, UPDF began working on the following activities:

Started savings groups: Collective savings was one of the first things the UPDF introduced to Serey Sophoan. In 2005, the UPDF brought a group of community network leaders from Phnom Penh to Serey Sophoan to help mobilize the local women and introduce them to their system of self-help savings and credit groups. Most were unfamiliar with the practice of collective savings, but were keen to try this collective strategy for addressing some of their problems themselves, using their own resources. After getting some simple training in accounting and fund management from their peers from Phnom Penh, they began forming groups and saving small amounts of money together in a common loan fund, which they managed themselves, giving their members loans for emergencies, household needs, livelihood and other purposes. By 2009, 208 families in four of the city's 19 poor settlements had formed savings groups and had accumulated about 10 million riels (US\$ 2,500) in their common fund.

Implemented small upgrading projects: With savings groups in place and a much clearer picture of the problems their settlements faced, the communities in Serey Sophoan began to plan and carry out small projects to improve common amenities and community infrastructure. The UPDF supported these small-scale upgrading projects in a couple of communities with small grants, working closely with residents to determine priorities, design the project, and help the community organize its implementation and

maintenance. Some communities opted to build community toilets - the first in their lives! - that are used by many families. In other places, people built paved walkways within their settlements to move around safely and avoid getting drenched in floodwaters during the rainy season.

Linked into networks: Once the first few scattered upgrading projects began to take shape, the next step was for the new savings groups and upgraded communities in Serey Sophoan to link together as a network of poor communities, to create a citywide system of mutual support and sharing of ideas. At the same time, the new community network began cultivating working partnerships with different levels of government. The network's close collaboration with the city's Municipal Governor at the time, Mr. Oum Reatre, began during this time and continues until today. The savings, upgrading projects, networking and partnership building all worked together to transform a situation of isolation and hopelessness into a new sense of possibilities among the city's urban poor and a new confidence that they can deliver their own development solutions, with support from the government and other actors.

Set up a provincial network and Community Development Fund: The Banteay Meanchey Province (of which Serey Sophoan is the capital city) was the first in Cambodia to test the concept of a provincial-level Community Development Fund (CDF), in which various actors contribute to a fund and use it as a mechanism to connect poor communities within the whole province. The CDF in Banteay Meanchey Province was established in 2006, through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was signed by the Provincial Governor, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Municipality of Serey Sophoan, UPDF and ACHR. The savings network in Banteay Meanchey Province now connects many communities across four districts - some in Serey Sophoan and the border town of Poipet, and some in rural areas. The province-level CDF, which is jointly managed by community savings group leaders and local government officials, allows poor communities to collaborate with local NGOs and municipal and provincial authorities to support various livelihood, community upgrading and welfare projects that are designed and implemented by communities.

Initiating the project:

In January 2009, the Serey Sophoan Community Network conducted a new citywide survey, to collect information about existing slum settlements in the city, with help from UPDF, Phnom Penh community leaders and local authorities. According to that survey, at least 7,306 people (in 3,134 households) were living in 19 slum communities in the city. That means about nine percent of the city's population of 90,279 people were living in squalor and insecurity. Most of these informal settlements were built on public land along roadsides, railway tracks and the river, with a few on private property. The survey also confirmed that most of these slum communities had been there for more than 20 years, with only one community having been established more recently. This long history showed that these communities represented an important stock of housing and social support for the city's poorest citizens. Even so, the housing and environmental conditions in these settlements were bad. The survey found that nearly 40% of the poor households covered by the survey lacked access to private or community toilets, and none of the settlements had legal access to the city's piped water supply system.

After the 2009 slum survey in Serey Sophoan, it became clear that, in addition to a lack of services and infrastructure, the threat of eviction was a major impediment to people's ability to develop their lives and housing conditions and needed to be addressed immediately. With this in mind, the CDF committee, the community network, and the municipality reviewed the survey results and maps to determine which settlements were in the most serious need of more secure housing. Two settlements that were facing the immediate threat of eviction were at the top of the list. The first community was Poun Lea Meanchey - a large riverside settlement of 387 households that was facing eviction to make way for the expansion of a bus station. The second community was Monorom - a much smaller settlement of 30 households that was also built along the river, right across from Poun Lea Meanchey.

The Monorom community:

The residents of Monorom had settled many years earlier along the banks of the Serey Sophoan River, which winds through the middle of the city, and had built their makeshift houses out of bamboo, timber, thatch and scraps of tar paper and tin sheets. The housing conditions were poor, but the location in the center of the city had a lot of advantages. The community was close to one of the bridges that connect the two sides of the river and residents could easily walk or cycle to other parts of town for work and errands. Many of the people in Monorom worked as pushcart vendors, casino employees, motorcycle taxi drivers and recyclable trash collectors. The community's biggest disadvantage, though, was flooding. The riverbank settlement used to experience such severe flooding every year that people's homes were frequently washed away. After several exhausting attempts to rebuild their homes in the same location, the community started thinking it was time to relocate to a more secure place.

An opportunity to take action to address the problems in these two eviction-threatened communities came in 2009, when ACHR launched an unconventional program called the Asian Coalition for Community Action (ACCA). The ACCA program helped vulnerable communities in cities all over Asia to organize themselves, form networks, pool their resources through collective savings and negotiate with their city governments to address poverty and housing issues on a citywide scale. A key component of the program was the development of city-based mechanisms that could continue to address those issues after the ACCA program's intervention had ended. The ACCA program's strategies drew on the collective experience of several Asian countries to build poor people's capacities, not through workshops and training sessions, but by empowering them to plan and implement actual projects to address urgent needs and to improve people's housing and common infrastructure, in collaboration with their city governments.

The ACCA project in Serey Sophoan was launched in 2009, and aimed to strengthen the collaborative development process that had already begun in the city. The project to resettle the Monorom community to new land became a key part of the ACCA intervention in the city. In addition to that housing project, the ACCA program supported several small-scale upgrading projects, which allowed more of the city's poor communities to plan and implement projects to address their most urgent needs, such as water supply, toilets, walkways, drainage systems and community centers.

ACCA-supported small infrastructure projects in Serey Sophoan:

The small projects implemented in Serey Sophoan all arose from a remarkably detailed list of who requires what small improvements, which was compiled as part of the community network's citywide survey. According to that list, 419 households required electricity, 222 required toilets, 497 required a water supply, 5 communities required wells, 15 communities required "greening" (4,500 trees to be planted), and 5,220 meters of paved walkways needed to be built. These are some of the 18 small projects supported by a total of US\$ 20,000 that were implemented as part of the ACCA project:

- A total of 276 trees were planted along the city's national road as part of a joint project between the CDF network and the local government. The intervention cost 10 million riels (US\$ 2,500), of which 2 million riels (US\$ 500) came from the ACCA budget, and the rest was given by the government.
- In the Ang Tropaing Thmor community (327 households), a 248-meter road was improved and widened to four meters. The project cost a total of 7.2 million riels (US\$ 1,800), with the community contributing 3.2 million riels (US\$ 800) and ACCA contributing 4 million riels (US\$ 1,000).
- The dwellers of the Toek Thla settlement (877 households) conceived, planned and built a training center for manufacturing compressed earth blocks, with which they aimed to make repairs to their houses. The total cost for this was 4.5 million riels (US\$ 1,125), with 2.1 million riels (US\$ 525) coming from the ACCA budget and the rest from the community's savings.

With support from the growing community network, the Monorom residents began the land negotiation process. And these negotiations brought about a solution to their serious housing and land problem that would not have been possible before, when people lived in isolation without organization or planning. The community's advocacy eventually led to the Provincial Government agreeing to grant them a piece of land (including basic infrastructure) that was just 1.5 kilometers away from the Monorom settlement, to build their new houses in a better and safer way. To mark their fresh start in the new place, the people decided to call their new community *Poun Lue Reatrey Senchey*.

SUPPORT GROUPS AND PARTNERS IN THE PROJECT

- **Urban Poor Development Fund (UPDF)** has supported the community-driven development process in Serey Sophoan with loans, grants, and organizing support already since 2005. It played an important role in mobilizing slum dwellers, forming savings groups, conducting a citywide slum survey, and assisting with various aspects of the housing project.
- **Community Savings Network of Cambodia (CSNC)** is a national network of community savings groups in about 30 towns and cities across Cambodia that works with its member communities and city networks to strengthen community-driven savings and finance management as critical tools for community-driven development.
- **Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR)** is a regional coalition of community organizations, NGOs, and housing professionals around Asia supporting community-led housing and development processes. ACHR has supported the community development process in Cambodia and Serey Sophoan, through UPDF and CSNC, since 1992. In 2009, ACHR resumed close engagement with Serey Sophoan to implement the ACCA program.

- **Asian Coalition for Community Action (ACCA) Program** was a 5-year program (2009-2015) of ACHR that supported a process of citywide and community-driven slum upgrading in 215 Asian cities in 19 Asian countries, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. In 2009, Serey Sophoan became one of the cities supported by the program, with grants to support citywide upgrading and partnership-building, as well as loan capital for the Poun Lue Reatrey Senchey housing project.
- **The Banteay Meanchey Provincial Government** paid 600 million riels (US\$ 150,000) for a 7.4-acre plot of land and made it available for free to the community for resettlement.
- **The Municipality of Serey Sophoan** supported the community's new settlement by financing land clearing and filling and implementing some infrastructure on-site, such as a new access road. Mr. Oum Reatrey, the Municipal Governor at the time, was especially helpful in negotiating a piece of land on which to resettle the community.
- **Community architects and architecture students:** Under the supervision of UPDF's team of in-house community architects, a group of young architects and students from the local university in Serey Sophoan conducted design workshops with the prospective residents to determine the settlement layout and housing typology for the project.
- **Poun Lue Reatrey Senchey community members:** The community members took part in the citywide survey, negotiated for a plot of land with their local authorities, contributed and tested ideas during the design workshops, and took on the entire construction of their new housing units.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT

Legal background and legal status:

Landlessness has long been a problem in Cambodia, with the number of landless people increasing even during the decades of peace and relative stability which followed the end of the Khmer Rouge regime. To partly respond to the problem, the government has implemented a program to redistribute government-owned land or negotiate for private sector land to be given to the landless or land-poor. The 2001 Land Law introduced and established a system of "Social Land Concessions," under which beneficiaries (individuals or groups of people) would be permitted to farm and/or build houses on state-owned land. People would essentially have the same rights as an owner for the duration of the concession period. This new system was followed by additional land policies and declarations in 2002 and 2009 to further strengthen the equitable distribution of land. In the case of the former Monorom community, the 30 families were squatting on public land with no rental agreements or documents. Using the "Social Land Concessions" system, the Provincial government provided the land to the community for resettlement, finally lifting them out of the precarious position that informality implied in terms of tenure security.

Land tenure:

The land was given to the community for free, with a collective land certificate. At that time, there was no legal mechanism in place for collective ownership of land in Cambodia, so this collective land certificate was a pioneering gesture on the part of the Banteay Meanchey provincial government to support the idea of land being owned or used officially by communities, rather than by individual community members. Several other urban poor housing projects supported by UPDF and the national savings network around Cambodia have been given free government land in similar ways, with collective ownership or user-rights certificates. In this way, a new form of collective land ownership was established through practice on the ground, and it is now being accepted by various levels of the Cambodian government. The agreement in the new community is that nobody can sell their land to outsiders, only back to the community if they want to move away.

Government support:

The relocation of the Poun Lue Reatrey Senchey community drew a lot of support from provincial and municipal officials. The Banteay Meanchey Provincial Governor and the Municipal Governor of Serey Sophoan (Mr. Oum Reatrey) became strong supporters of the community process, assisting in the negotiations for land and the establishment of the unusual collective land title. The municipality assisted the project in the site development phase with land-filling and internal roads and provided basic infrastructure for the new settlement.

PROJECT FINANCING

Project costs and who paid for what?

The Poun Lue Reatrey Senchey housing project demonstrated the cost-sharing model that many hope to see replicated around Cambodia, as a solution for housing the poor in Cambodian cities, in which the government provides free land and infrastructure, and the people design and build their own houses, with housing loans from UPDF or other finance sources. This rare resettlement project was made possible by grant funding from the ACCA program and additional loans from UPDF. The Provincial Government gave the land; the Municipality provided the site development and basic infrastructure, the residents contributed 10% of the value of the houses from their own savings and provided all the labor, and the UPDF provided the housing loans.

Land: The 7.4-acre (3-hectare) plot of land – which was a low-lying paddy field – was purchased by the Provincial Government for 600 million (US\$ 150,000) and given to the community for free, under its “Social Land Concession” program.

Houses: The construction of each 35-square-meter house cost 6 million riels (US\$ 1,500) x 30 houses = 180 million riels (US\$ 45,000). Out of this total amount, 160 million riels (US\$ 40,000) was given to the community as a bulk loan from ACCA funds, through the CDF, and people contributed their own savings to cover the remaining 20 million riels (US\$ 5,000), which amounted to about 10% of the total cost of constructing the house. In addition to the construction costs, the UPDF supported the house design workshops with UPDF community architects with 1.2 million riels (US\$ 300).

Site development and infrastructure: The cost of preparing the new land and infrastructure development came to 64 million riels (US\$ 16,000). Of this amount, 36 million riels (US\$ 9,000) was provided by the municipality, 24 million riels (US\$ 6,000) came from the ACCA budget for small infrastructure upgrading projects, and 4 million (US\$ 1,000) from the community’s collective savings. This is the breakdown of the infrastructure costs:

- **Landfilling:** The Serey Sophoan Municipality bore the cost of clearing the new land and filling it by two meters, to above-flood levels, which cost 20 million riels (US\$ 5,000).
- **Access road:** The Municipality also partially supported the installation of an access road and infrastructure on the new site, at a cost of 16 million riels (US\$ 4,000).
- **Toilets:** Each house got its own private toilet, which cost 600,000 riels (US\$ 150), or a total of 18 million riels (US\$ 4,500) for all 30 houses. This amount came as a grant from ACCA (US\$ 4,000) and UPDF funds (US\$ 500), channeled through the CDF.
- **Community center:** The ACCA project also supported 4 million riels (US\$ 1,000) for the construction of the foundation (concrete slab) for a future community center at the settlement’s entrance. The residents would complete the construction of the building once they had enough savings or other funding sources.
- **Tree planting:** During the project inauguration event, 300 trees were planted throughout the community. The seedlings cost 6 million riels (US\$ 1,500). 4 million riels (US\$ 1,000) of this amount was covered by the ACCA funds, and the other 2 million riels (US\$ 500) came from community savings.

Financing:

All funds from the ACCA Program (for small infrastructure and big housing projects) were first transferred to the national CDF (called “CDF-Cam”) and then to the provincial-level CDFs, which already existed in many provinces. The money was then distributed by the Banteay Meanchey provincial CDF to the communities implementing the projects. The network in Serey Sophoan decided to use the ACCA small project funds as grants when the improvements were communal (like roads, water supply or drains), but as loans when the improvements are individual (like toilets or individual electricity connections). The small-project loans would be repayable in two years at 2% annual interest.

The housing loans for the Poun Lue Reatrey Senchey housing project were repaid to the provincial-level fund and then returned to the national “CDF-Cam,” which served as a kind of national bank for the poor. As the national-level funds revolve, they can be used by other communities across the country for other housing or infrastructure development projects. The housing loans were to be repaid over a 15-year term, with each family paying 8% annual interest, which is used as shown below:

- 4% went to the national level CDF Foundation, to cover its support costs
- 1% went into the national-level community welfare fund
- 2% went to support the management expenses of the provincial-level CDF
- 1% stayed with the community savings group.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

House design and layout plans:

The new land was 30,000 square meters in size (7.4 acres). With help from UPDF, a team of young, idealistic community architects was brought in to work with the Monorom community to facilitate a participatory process to design the layout of their new community and plan their new houses. During a series of lively design workshops, the community members tried out various possibilities, switching between working on a small scale, with colored paper cutouts and markers, and working at full scale, with tapes to measure the space needed for each room or activity.

After a lot of discussion and revision, the people came up with a layout plan in which 30% of the land (16,500 square meters) would be used for infrastructure (roads and public open spaces), and 60% of the land (13,500 square meters) would be for the 30 house generous house plots. In the final layout, the 30 house plots were arranged in three rows, with roads and space for a community center at the entrance.

There was much debate about the layout and placement of houses and other amenities on the generously sized "self-sufficiency" plots that each family got. The idea behind the big 455-square-meter (13 m x 35 m) "self-sufficiency" plots was to provide enough space for each family to have a house, but also to have other things which could potentially allow them to be self-sufficient in food production and livelihood. The plots had enough room for a vegetable garden, fruit trees, a fish-rearing pond, places to keep cattle and poultry, and even running a small business. After the community members decided on three of the most popular "self-sufficiency" plot layout plans, the architects created scale models to help everyone visualize how the various approaches would look and work. The models were excellent tools for studying various options, and they were widely exhibited and used to build support for the project. The models are still displayed in City Hall as a reminder of this important concept for housing in small provincial cities where the rural and urban are still inextricably linked, and land is more easily available.

After establishing the layout of the "self-sufficiency" plots, community members and architects next began designing the houses. Although the land was filled to above normal flood levels, it was agreed that raising the houses on tall pre-cast concrete columns would be practical, because in a watery country like Cambodia, everyone understood that eventually, the community would face floods. A timber staircase led to a large veranda on the upper floor, where much of the family's daily life took place, such as cooking, resting, and doing chores. The core house was about 30 square meters in size, and its structural parts were made of wood, while the walls were finished with either timber boards or fiber cement boards. Following Khmer tradition, the houses are designed to catch the rain during the monsoon season and channel it into big pots around the house, which provide water for drinking and washing in the dry season.

Construction process:

Because the plot was previously a low-lying paddy field, the first step in the resettlement process was to clear the land and fill it to above-flood levels. In November 2009, the municipal government paid to have earth brought in to fill part of the land for the access and internal roads, as well as part of the housing site. Some of the land between the two rows of houses was left un-filled and later became a common pond, which in the rainy season provided the community with a water reservoir and fish-farming amenity.

After that, it was time to start building the houses. The first ten families set up temporary shelters on the new site to oversee the construction of their new houses. The Poun Lou Reatrey Senchey settlement was built using very simple, long-established Khmer building techniques and materials, and as a result, the construction went very quickly, with a few carpenters doing all the main work and community members assisting them. Mr. Yim Chay Ly, Cambodia's Deputy Prime Minister, came up to Serey Sophoan to inaugurate the first completed houses in a gala ceremony on December 22, 2009. During the ceremony, 300 trees were planted on the site, and all of the remaining houses' columns were blessed and raised. The construction was completed within a year, and people began moving in at the end of 2010.

PROJECT TIMELINE

1979: After the end of the Pol Pot regime, people start settling into slum communities in Serey Sophoan.

2005: The UPDF begins working in Serey Sophoan, setting up savings groups, supporting small upgrading projects and forming a citywide network of communities.

- 2006:** A province-level Community Development Fund (CDF) is established under an MOU between the Governor, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, UPDF, and ACHR. This is the first provincial-level CDF to be formed in Cambodia, linking both urban and rural communities.
- 2009:** In January, a citywide survey of slums is conducted in Serey Sophoan, identifying 19 settlements. The Monorom community is prioritized for resettlement, and land negotiations begin once the ACCA project is approved for the city. UPDF, ACHR, and community architects help the community plan their new settlement and houses. In November, the landfilling begins, and by December, the first four houses are completed and inaugurated with a big celebration.
- 2010:** The construction of the new settlement continues. In September, a big team from the ACCA program visits the community to check in on the progress. Construction is completed soon after, and the 30 families move into their new houses.
- 2019:** In May, a team of Thais, Nepalis and Cambodians from ACHR visit Poun Lue Reatrey Senchey, as part of an action-research project on food security in low-income communities. By that time, many families have upgraded and expanded their houses

IMPACTS OF THE PROJECT

Successes:

Poor people can live well: For decades, the Monorom community was caught between a rock and a hard place, with the constant threat of eviction and catastrophic annual floods that washed away their houses. Their relocation to better and safer land, with secure tenure and plenty of space, was a big change in their lives. This resettlement project showed that providing decent housing for the poor does not require big resources, when communities are at the center of the process and their self-development energy is supported by the local government and other stakeholders with land and access to finance. Since the project was finished, the Monorom residents have been living in a secure, well-organized and fully-serviced community, where they are surrounded by friends and can continue developing their lives and livelihoods.

Consolidating a province-level CDF: The ACCA project's implementation, particularly the requirement to use the housing budget as a revolving fund, was critical in consolidating the provincial-level CDF in Banteay Meanchey Province. This was Cambodia's first provincial-level CDF and was a significant milestone for accessible and affordable finance, controlled by poor communities themselves, with good support from the local government. Since then, savings group leaders from Serey Sophoan have joined several study tours to Phnom Penh and other cities to share experiences and advise others. By 2014, the province had 31 collective savings groups, with 981 saving members and collective savings of 114,876,800 riels (US\$ 28,720), which is in constant circulation in loans to poor communities for small businesses and housing repairs.

Spreading out the opportunities that came with the ACCA intervention: In Serey Sophoan, as in most Cambodian cities that took part in the ACCA program, the communities sat together to plan how they would use the project's modest resources (only about US\$ 60,000 per city) to get the most benefit and spread the opportunity for small upgrading projects to as many communities as possible. In most cities, the small projects were funded by grants of about US\$ 3,000 from the ACCA budget. But the community network in Serey Sophoan prepared a detailed list of infrastructure needs in the city and decided to stretch the approved budget of US\$ 20,000 to support many more initiatives. The community network identified 18 projects for ACCA support, with the majority costing far less than the US\$ 3,000 ceiling. The network's rule was that communities contribute at least 20% (in cash, materials, and labor), the local or provincial authority or national government, and other actors contribute at least 20%, and the remaining 50-60% would come from ACCA program funds. This approach gave nearly every poor community in the city the opportunity to plan and implement some collective improvements to their common infrastructure, such as roads, drains, water supply, and community toilets.

Social and political impacts:

Citywide learning and confidence-building: By expanding upgrading projects to many communities and opening up the process to create learning opportunities for the citywide network, many more people began to feel confident enough to develop their own upgrading and housing projects, using program funds, the city's revolving fund, or other resources that they could draw on. Communities shared ideas, learned by doing, assisted one another in completing projects, and were proud of their accomplishments. This milestone in Cambodia's struggle to find practical, collaborative, and community-driven solutions to the country's serious land and housing problems was the focal point of a national workshop on housing

upgrading and community design in December 2009. The workshop brought together community groups and government officials from all ACCA cities, demonstrating how practices and lessons can be transferred from community to community, city to city, and country to country, benefiting Asia's regional network.

The importance of collective organization: The most important thing these small and big upgrading projects in Serey Sophoan demonstrate is that these problems *can be solved* by people themselves when they work together. When poor communities have the strength of their own networks and a mechanism that links all the poor in the city into systems of mutual learning, mutual help, and collaboration with the city, they can feel the confidence to continue to find creative, win-win solutions to problems of poverty and housing in their city. And they feel empowered to draw down the resources they need from the government and other sources and to build up a mechanism that can eventually upgrade and secure all the communities in the city.

Changing relationships in the city: Getting people to work with the authorities on several upgrading projects was one of the most powerful ways of developing a new relationship between poor communities and the city. Serey Sophoan makes one of the most vivid illustrations of how readily conflicts between the city's development needs and its poorer citizens' land and housing needs can be resolved when the poor and the city authorities work together. As the Municipal Governor became a strong supporter and partner for the community network in Serey Sophoan, people began to negotiate with the city from a position of strength and togetherness to get a better deal out of their city's development. This collaboration which started with hesitation and uncertainty around 2002, grew stronger and stronger and notched up several major achievements over time.

Problems:

Disruptions in income generation: Once the Poun Lue Reatrey Senchey community members had settled in their new community, they faced the challenge of maintaining their employment and income levels, which is an all-too-common problem in resettlement projects. In response, the CDF provided income-generation loans to each of the 30 families to assist them in resuming their earnings at the new location. Every household was eligible for a loan of around 500,000 riels (US\$ 125) from the CDF, totaling 15 million riels (US\$ 3,750) - a small but significant investment to help these families get back on their feet. The loans were funded in part by ACCA funds and in part by UPDF funds.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

This case study was written in November 2022 by Marina Kolovou Kouri at ACHR, drawing on various documents and notes from the ACHR archive and from the ACCA program.

For more information about the Poun Lue Reatrey Senchey project, please contact ACHR

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More details on the larger community-driven development process in Cambodia - can be found in the first yearly report of ACHR ACCA (Asian Coalition for Community Action) Program, in December 2009. The report can be downloaded from the ACHR website at this link:

http://achr.net/upload/downloads/file_22122013014030.pdf



Serey Sophoan, a small and bustling provincial capital city, is typical in many ways of Cambodia's secondary cities.



Nearly a quarter of the city's population cannot afford formal housing and have no choice but to make their own homes in the city's many slums.



The pioneering Community Development Fund in Serey Sophoan was launched in 2006, with good collaboration from the city government.



The houses of the old Monorom squatter settlement were built on stilts on the banks of the Serey Sophoan River, in the center of town.



This is what the community looked like from the dirt road that ran along the river banks. The community experienced bad floods every year.



One of the first steps in preparing for the re-settlement project was to set up a savings group in Monorom, which was led by the women.



The process of planning the resettlement housing project called for lots and lots of community meetings like this one.



The new land, which was provided free by the Provincial Government, was just 1.5 kilometers away from the old Monorom settlement.



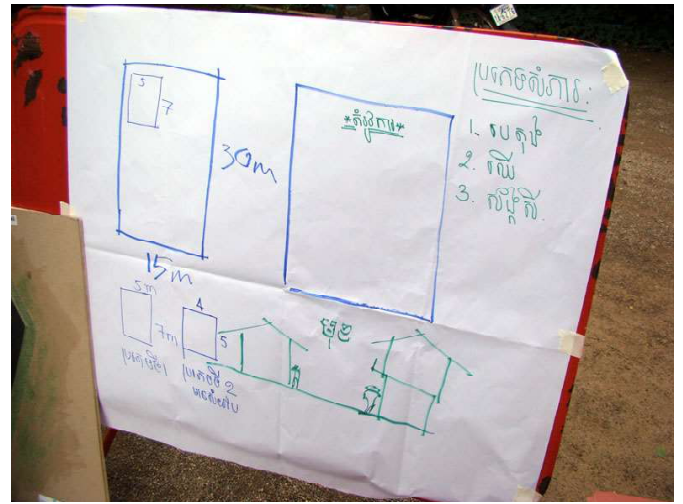
These photos were taken during one of the first trips the community made to see and measure the new site, where they would soon be building their new community. A team of young and idealistic community architects worked with the people from start to finish.



The municipal government paid to have earth brought in to fill the land for the access and internal roads, and part of the housing site.



Another happy visit to the site after the land filling had been completed (to above flood levels) and the construction could begin.



The team of community architects worked with the Monorom community to organize a series of participatory design workshops to plan the new community. Here, the architects begin the discussion about how to arrange the house and other facilities on the generous 450 m² plots.



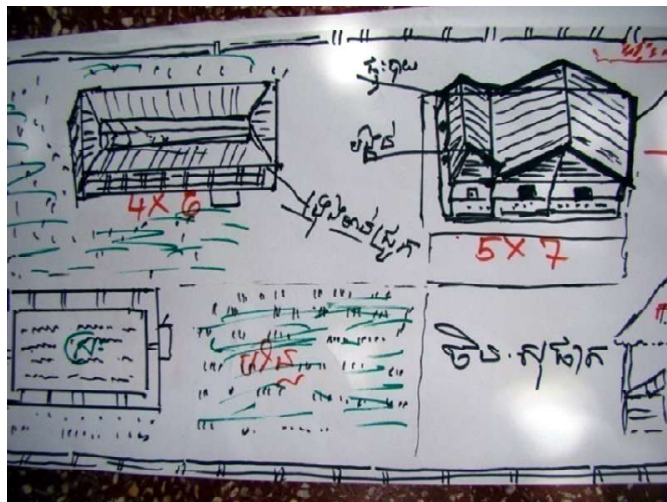
More photos from the layout planning workshop. The community members worked partly on small-scale plans, with colored papers, and partly at full scale, with tape measurers, to get a better sense of how big things would really be.



A lot of the planning and discussion went into figuring out how to arrange things on the big 450 m² plots, which had enough room for a house (red), a fish pond (blue), a vegetable garden (pink) and an enclosure for keeping chickens and pigs (yellow).



Here the community members present their ideas for how to position the houses and other amenities on the big plots on the new land, which was just outside the town but still quite rural.



Here the plot layout sketches are getting more specific, and the architects have added dimensions in red to see how things fit.



The community's many children participated fully and enthusiastically in the design workshops.



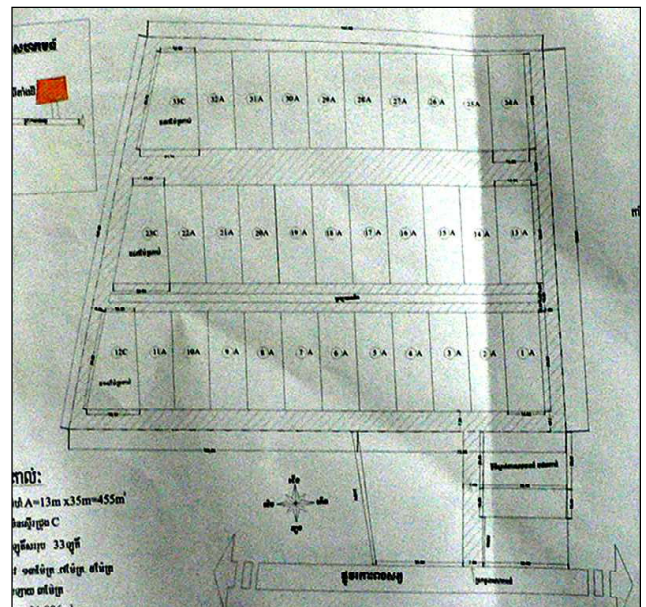
A more refined drawing which shows clearly the concept of the "self sufficiency" planning, where each plot can potentially provide vegetables, fruits, fish and some income to the families.



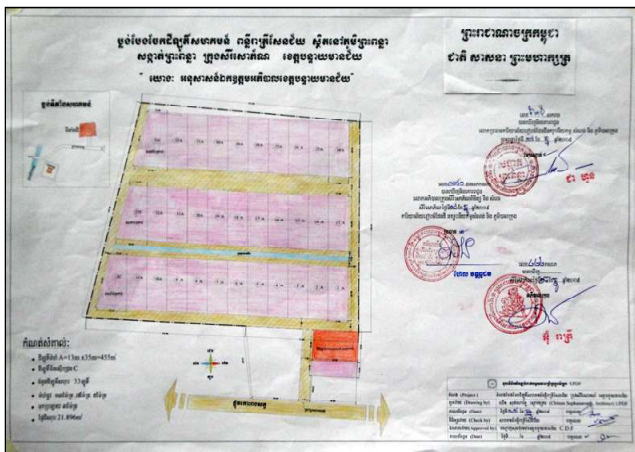
After the community members settled on three of the most popular "self-sufficiency" plot layout plans, the architects built scale models of the three of them. These models were much examined and much-used to build support for the project. The models still sit in a position of honor in City Hall.



This was one of the earlier drafts of the layout plan for the entire new settlement, with 39 house plots and a ring of roads.



This is the final layout plan that everyone agreed to, with 13m x 35m plots and a ring of roads around the edge of the site.



Here is the document which shows that the people's final layout plan has been accepted and approved - and stamped three times! - by the municipal and provincial authorities.



A model of the new community made by the architects, to help explain the project and show everyone what goes where.



In the next workshop, the team of community architects worked with the community members to design a set of house models, which could be built inexpensively on the new site, within the budget limits of the US\$ 1,500 housing loan from UPDF.





Because the new land will likely flood at some point (as most of the country of Cambodia does every year), the community members were all in agreement that the house models should be built up on high stilts, to keep well above the coming and going flood waters.



That's the Municipal Governor, Mr. Oum Reatrey, discussing some different features of three house models the architects had built, based on people's ideas. Mr. Reatrey was a strong supporter of the project from start to finish.



Community members study models of the three house designs, which have been set on "self-sufficiency" plots.



More photos from the participatory house design workshops in the old riverside Monorom community, which members of all 30 families joined, along with the team of community architects, UPDF staff and friends from the municipal government.



In this ceremony, the Provincial Governor is ceremonially handing over the new land (which was purchased by the "Social Land Concession" program) to the community.



And here the first housing loans from UPDF (in stacks of cash) are being handed to community members, so the house construction can start.



The first few completed houses were inaugurated by the Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Yim Chay Ly, in a gala ceremony on December 22, 2009, with the Provincial Governor and Municipal Governor joining all the community members and well-wishers from UPDF and the community architects team.



As part of the December 2009 inauguration celebrations, 300 trees were planted on the site and the columns of all the remaining houses were blessed and raised.





Since only the roads and part of the housing plots had been filled to above flood levels, the decision to raise the houses on tall pre-cast concrete columns was a practical one, and based on people's good understanding of the realities of weather.



The new houses in Poun Lou Reatrey Senchey were built using very simple, long-established Khmer building techniques and materials, and because of that, the construction went very quickly, with a few skilled carpenters and community members providing all the unskilled labor.



Some of the families used fiber cement sheets for wall cladding, and some used timber boards, like the row of houses shown above.

Part of the land at the back, between the two rows of houses, was dug up and used to fill the portion of the site where the houses would be. This allowed the community to develop a kind of reservoir at the back, which becomes a fish pond and water source in the rainy season.



In September 2010, when the new housing project was almost finished, a group of international visitors from ACHR's ACCA Program came to visit the project and learn about how this intrepid little community made it happen, with good support from the Municipality.



The shady upstairs verandah on the houses, with wooden floors and protection from the rains, is where a lot of family life goes on.

Inside one of the upstairs rooms, with high ceilings and small gaps between the floorboards, to increase air circulation in the hot, muggy climate.



The September 2010 visit took place at the tail end of the rainy season, and many of the families had put curtains across the verandah openings, to keep out the rain or the hot afternoon sun.



Ten years later: the lower part of this house has been partly enclosed, and a bathroom and cattle shed have been added to the sides.



The lower part of this house is in the process of getting a deluxe upgrading, with a full masonry-enclosed ground floor and addition at the back.



Traditional Khmer houses are always designed to catch the rain during the monsoon season and channel it into big pots around the house, which provide water for drinking and washing in the dry season. The houses in the new project are keeping alive this time-tested solution.



Here is the shared lake at the back of the houses, which becomes a common water source and fish farm during the rainy season.



Here the children of Poun Lue Reatrey Senchey play on the paved foundation where the community center will eventually be built.