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Looking Back on Our Time in Cambodia

by Rachel Brink & Rick De Graaf

“Transitions are opportunities for growth—don’t waste them!” One of the speakers said this during a leadership retreat that Rachel attended a few months ago, and it really struck a chord. It is true and, while we are both finding it difficult to say goodbye to the close friends we’ve made and the place that has become home over the course of the last few years, we are also excited and anxious to see how God will use this time to help us grow and how He will use us in the future.

Transitions are also a great time to reflect on the good things that have happened and the ways God has brought blessings into our lives. We praise God for the way He has used people and experiences in Cambodia to grow and shape us and for the ways that he has used us to contribute to the lives of those around us. We’d like to share a few of our highlights with you (we both made individual lists, but some were the same):

- **Working with our local staff:** We’ve been privileged to work with a great group of people in Cambodia. Everyone brings something different to the team and we have worked well together and learned from one another despite our flaws. We are really going to miss this family. (Rick and Rachel)
- **Agriculture:** This has been one of my favorite areas of involvement during my time in Cambodia. I’ve enjoyed seeing the concepts that are taught in the Farmer Field Schools and

during other agriculture training events being put into practice and helping the farmers to improve their standards of living and health. Things like the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) and Soil Improvement are simple, but have had major effects in the lives of those who try them. (Rachel)

- **Improvement and growth** in our partners, both in number and in capacity: At the end of 2010 our partners were working in 60 villages. As of June 2013, they are working in 93 villages. In addition to the increased numbers, our partners have gained confidence, and established better systems and work in such a way that they have a larger, more sustainable impact on the communities they serve. (Rachel)



Rick and Kao leading a workshop on sustainable agriculture for local partners

- **The support partnerships:** Mission Alliance (Norway) staff seconded to us and the close collaboration and support of Tom Post, our Directors, Tone Lindheim (Mission Alliance International Programs); David Crooks (International Programs TearFund (UK); Bev Abma and later Angela Boss (Foods Resource Bank). (Rick)
- **Starting our days** at the office as a staff family with daily devotions—walking through the parables, the heroes of faith, the Acts, the Gospels—the leadership of a different person in charge every day—the 10-minutes-each rhythm of song, prayer and scripture reading—and the questions individuals would ask afterwards were all special and encouraging. (Rick)
- **The program team meetings** that sometimes went on and on—including the fun we had reporting our monthly OPS—our “on” or “off” plan scores! (Rick)



Farmer field school in Kompong-Speu



- **Savings Groups:** During my time in Cambodia, Tanzania, and Bangladesh, I have learned a lot about how people who save their own money can make an impact on their own lives. I have been very excited to see people get energized and have greater hope for the future when they use their own resources to bring about change. I see this as a key strategy for the future of development. (Rachel)
- **Witnessing God increasing** the competency of key national staff leaders and program staff and thinking that I may have played a part in the building of these wonderful people! I know we grew in appreciation of each other. (Rick)
- **Team development:** From rugged individualism and criticism to appreciating and listening to each other—plus a developing paradigm of servant leadership in place of ‘patron-client’ relationships. (“You rub my back and I’ll be sure to rub yours.”). (Rick)
- **Monday lunchtime English lessons:** About two years ago our staff requested more English Training. I agreed to hold classes with them on Mondays during lunchtime. We have had a lot of fun learning about the crazy English language together, and I’ve seen some improvement in their English, too! (Rachel)
- The privilege of facilitating several **book studies** with staff and with Partner Directors—how deep we sometimes shared! (Rick)
- **Church partners:** Pastors and community organizers from eight rural churches coming to World Renew for a 1-day monthly forum, in ten out of twelve months of the year, for learning and co-ordination. How our fellowship deepened over time! (Rick)
- **Annual trips to Norway** (three times): To conference with Country Directors from Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Liberia, Vietnam, China, and the Philippines. Spending a week with each other and sometimes even getting lost in the woods with our Norwegian guides and even being invited to preach in a popular Oslo Lutheran cathedral/church.

How inspiring an experience that was. (Rick)

- **Free A Family:** I had the opportunity to visit and write updates about the Yang Taeng family for three years as part of World Renew’s Free A Family program. It was great to meet the same family repeatedly, see what their lives are really like, and what they struggle with on a daily basis. It was also great to see people in North America supporting World Renew’s work with families like the Yang Taengs and learning about life in another country. (Rachel)
- **International Christian Fellowship:** We have enjoyed being part of a community of believers at ICF. It has been a great opportunity to meet people who are in Cambodia for a variety of reasons and worship together regularly. We’ve also had the opportunity to serve in the areas of church finances and worship. Rick preached occasionally and both of us were involved as techies as well. (Rachel and Rick)
- **Fellowship:** We’ve enjoyed meeting on a monthly basis with a great group of believers for Bible study, prayer, and fellowship. The group was started by CRWM colleagues Gil and Joyce Suh. Meeting with this group has been a huge support during both good times and hard times. (Rick and Rachel)
- **Guests, Visitors, Volunteers:** We have had quite a few visitors in Cambodia over the past few years. Family members (Rachel’s Parents, Rick and Edith’s adult children) and friends have visited as well as representatives from our various donors, Calvin College interim groups, and others. It has been fun to show



Rachel and Henrietta cooking together

them around and see things through new eyes again. We have also had some great volunteers that it has been a privilege to work with and get to know. Two of them, Stacey and Henrietta, have also lived with Rachel, which has been fun. (Rachel and Rick)

- The **wedding** of our youngest, Curtis, to Kira on the Mekong River with Gil and Joyce Suh officiating! (Rick)
- **Game nights with friends:** I’ve met some amazing friends here, and my favorite activity to do on weekends was hosting board game nights at my apartment. It has been fun to satisfy my competitive side and enjoy the fel-

lowship of good friends. We’ve also eaten some great food! (Rachel)

- **Participating** in the Agriculture and Livelihoods working groups: I’ve had the opportunity to be part of the Agriculture and Food Security Working Group as well as the Improving Livelihoods Working Group in World Renew. These groups meet monthly and are comprised of World Renew staff working in various countries around the world. Our purpose is to discuss how World Renew can continue to make a greater impact in these areas. I also had the opportunity to be part of an evaluation of World Renew’s livelihoods programs over the last ten years. I have learned a great deal through being a part of these groups and I also hope that I have contributed in some way. (Rachel)
- **Asia Ministry Team Meetings:** There are some amazing people working for World Renew in Asia. It has been great to meet with them and learn from them during our semi-annual Asia Team Meetings in Bangkok. (Rachel)
- **Staff family retreats:** We celebrated the weddings of four staff and of those, three have been blessed with a child.



When we include Anna, a firstborn for Knut and Bente, our Norwegian staff couple, our family retreats have blessed with growth and age diversity! Our retreats have been a great way to get to know the families of our staff! (Rick)

Thank you very much for your support over the last several years—through prayer, encouragement, and finances. You have been an important part of the World Renew Cambodia support team. We hope that you will continue to pray for and support the World Renew Team in Cambodia.

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Prayer items

- for Kathleen Lauder and the rest of the World Renew Cambodia Team as they adjust to the new team dynamics.
- for good reentry to life in North America.
- for clear direction as to where God would have us serve next.
- for peace in Cambodia as the dust is still settling after the recent elections.