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## Climbing into the Saddle



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### A Special Family

It was a teary group that gathered at the World Renew office on September 14 as my predecessor Rick and his wife Edith DeGraaf left for the airport. Almost all the staff showed up to pray for them and wish them well, despite the many other farewell events that had been scheduled. As I felt the depth of the staff's love and trust for Rick and Edith, I realized several things:

- World Renew Cambodia is not just a team of colleagues working together on common goals, it is family in which there is a deep level of trust, caring, and respect.
- Rick has left me a great gift—a chance to sustain and grow strong, productive relationships among the staff.
- While I have left one family behind in Canada, I now have another in Cambodia.



*Staff Pray for Rick and Edith*

Encouraged by the very special nature of World Renew Cambodia, I took the plunge on my first day as country consultant to gather the staff and share with them some of the key experiences and learning that have shaped me, and how I felt God has prepared me for this position. It was a deeply personal testimony, as I shared some profound losses I have experienced as well as the many ways God has blessed me. I was touched by the way the staff responded and expressed their appreciation for my honesty.

### A Day in the Life

Before I left Canada, a few people asked me, "What will a day look like in your new job"? Here's a small introduction to my everyday life in Cambodia.

**Devotions:** Each day starts at 8 AM with a half-hour of devotions. There is a comfortable rhythm to these times, as songs are sung, prayer items are discussed, and prayer and scripture are shared. Everyone who is in the office attends and over time, we share the joys and burdens of each staff member and—especially since the July election—we pray for the tense political situation in Cambodia.

**Meetings:** Program staff meet weekly to reflect on what is happening in their respective communities. We discuss how they can improve results that are being achieved in their communities, what they are learning, and how to ensure that they are on track with their reports, agreements, and budgets. Both the management team and admin team meet every two weeks. Meetings are lively and the 'to do' lists that are generated from them can be quite daunting.

**Reports:** The program team is now finalizing the program management framework that guides the work we do in our communities. As we do integrated community development, our work spans governance, livelihoods, health and sanitation, and education. Every result we seek to achieve is carefully defined as are the indicators we use to track the results. This data is collected quarterly by World Renew's partners and forwarded to our program staff, and then to me and on to home office. There have been many hours spent poring over this framework and the data collected by

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the field. It all works to keep us focused on working with communities to increase their ability to be more resilient and sustainable.



*Above: Women's Literacy Group  
Below: Rice Paddy*



**In the Field:** Our office is in the capital of Phnom Penh, but the work we do is in 93 rural communities in four provinces. Partner NGOs, whose offices are in towns in the provinces, do the day-to-day work of community development. Our program officers spend up to half their time in the field providing support and training to partners. I go for special events and meetings and can expect to spend about one week per month in the field.

### What's on the Horizon?

**Meeting with Directors:** In the next few weeks, I will be travelling to the field to meet with all of the directors of our partners to

build my personal relationship with them and to get their input into how our partnership can be strengthened over time. I will propose working together with them on a comprehensive governance review of their boards.



*Meeting with Pastor Pareak,  
Director of a Partner*

**Exposure Trip:** This month the World Renew Cambodia staff have organized a three-day exposure trip in which about 145 partner staff and community leaders will travel to the target area of one of our partners to learn from their experience. The partner will show how they have created and strengthened the community-based organizations in their target communities, and how these organizations work with the commune council and local authorities to improve access to information and to public services. The partner will also show how model farmers are teaching community members to diversify their crops and enhance livelihoods so that they can resist the constant pull towards migration to jobs in urban areas.

**Baseline Study:** We have invited and received proposals for a baseline study for our next three-year plan. We expect to award that contract this week and by December we should have good baseline data to track results in all of the sectors in which we and our partners work.

**The Larger Network:** There are plenty of opportunities to reflect on our work and how we can strengthen it and the theological and spiritual framework on which it is based.

From October 10 - 13, I joined 15 members of Christian Reform World Missions (CRWM) who are based throughout the region and their families for a retreat.

At the end of the month, World Renew colleagues in Bangladesh and Laos, as well as our team leader from Grand Rapids, will meet in Bangkok to learn from each other and support each other in our work.

In January, there will be a large Assembly of World Renew and World Mission staff from Asia who will meet in Siem Reap for a three-day event. With our staff, partners, invited donors, and some students joining us, we will have about 107 people at this event. I am on the logistics and program committees responsible for organizing the assembly.

### But What is it Really Like to Live in Phnom Penh?

My answer to that question is a moving target. When I came for a one-month visit in July, I was overwhelmed by the intensity of the heat, the crazy traffic, the dense activity on the sidewalks, and the general chaos and numerous shops that all left me a bit dazed. Now that I am back, settled more into the job and into my own apartment, it looks quite different.

It is rainy season and the weather is very pleasant. It only rains briefly every day and the rest of the day there are clear blue skies, comfortable temperatures, and nice breezes. I have not had the AC on in my apartment since I arrived at the beginning of September.

I am now seeing past the busy streets to discover some nice French colonial architecture, diverse restaurants offering just about every kind of food and décor you can imagine, bountiful markets with fresh produce every few blocks, temples which are a beehive of activity in every neighborhood, street vendors selling wonderfully-fresh soups, fried chicken, spiced eggs, and a lot of other things I have yet to discover.

I have been out driving a few times with our driver and am now driving the CRV on my own, but still not venturing far. The traffic is challenging.

I have joined a world-class fitness center down the street and go nearly every morning from 6 to 7 am for yoga and/or a workout. I also found an off-road biking company that offers some great day trips from Phnom Penh and longer trips as well.



# Homestead Income Helps Send Kids to School

## A Story of Transformation

Mrs. Sao Thorn is becoming known as a very successful and entrepreneurial farmer in the village of Thom, Cambodia. It all began a few years ago when at 53 years old, Sao began to participate in agriculture training that was arranged by one of World Renew's local partners in Cambodia, Light New for Unity (LNU).

Sao says that after she took a class in chicken-raising, she set up a backyard chicken coop. She was very serious and conscientious about the project, making sure that she used the techniques she learned. This included keeping the coop very clean and feeding her chickens properly. In

addition, LNU staff visited her regularly to provide the support and encouragement that increased her confidence.

As a direct result of her agriculture work, Sao now earns more income for her family by working from home. It has enabled her to send her two children to school. She can sell some of her chickens every two months and earns about 160,000 riel (\$40) each time.

In addition, to the chicken-raising, Sao also grows vegetables in a small garden plot on her property. She planted morning glories, gourds,

long beans, and bananas. From selling her garden produce, Sao earns her 20,000 to 25,000 riel (about US\$5) every day during the dry season when vegetables are less available. During the rainy season, vegetable production is lower but she can still earn around 20,000 riel every two or three days.

Since she started attending LNU training in 2010, Sao has also participated in a pig-raising project and organic vegetable-growing training. Today, her hard work and success are making her a role model in her village.



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## Prayer Items

- Thanks for Rick's thoughtful and astute arrangements, and for the generous and open nature of the staff, which have made the leadership transition very smooth.
- Thanks for our welcoming international church where I am making friends and have even been offered a chance to play a 7-foot grand Yamaha piano at some of our church services.
- Pray for peace to prevail through the turbulence and demonstrations following the July election in Cambodia.
- Pray that a resolution will be found that will enable the ruling party and the opposition to work together to run the country despite the impasse we face as a result of alleged voting irregularities.