

# ANGOC Gotong Royong

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*"Gotong Royong" is a concept familiar to many parts of Indonesia and Malaysia. Translated into English, it evokes the concepts of "reciprocity" and "mutual aid".*

*We use the term "Gotong Royong" to refer to the idea of doing things together and helping each other in the spirit of goodwill.*

Welcome to ANGOC Gotong Royong, the e-newsletter of the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC).

We welcome your feedback on any of the articles that appear here. We also invite you to send updates on your programs and on the socio-political situation in your country, as well as developments in agrarian reform, sustainable agriculture, and participatory governance, among others.

## Addressing natural resource conflicts

High-ranking political leaders of two provinces in Cambodia participated in STAR Kampuchea (SK)-organized provincial dialogue forums (PDFs) held from February to May 2008 to address natural resource conflicts. The PDF organized in Kratie Province was attended by representatives from Cambodia's major political parties, such as the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), FUNCINPEC, as well as the province's deputy governor, the chief of the Land Department, and a Forestry Department official.

The PDFs in general aim to: (1) educate people about their rights and responsibilities; (2) provide a venue where communities could meet with sympathetic legislators and local authorities in order to discuss local problems; (3) give legislators and government officials the opportunity to respond to issues raised by the communities, specifically by bringing up such concerns with the concerned government agencies; and (4) promote solidarity between rural communities and national leaders.

Apart from the PDFs, SK has launched a three-year project to build the capacity of its local partners to conduct advocacy in relation to natural resource management. The Advocacy Capacity Building (ACP) program started in 2007, with a baseline survey. Follow-up activities were held in January 2008. Thus far, the ACP program has had the following results:

- Collaborative partnerships with 31 communities in 10 provinces, on land, forestry and fishery issues. SK worked through 8 PANs and 11 community organizers;
- Improved relations between communities and commune and district officials;
- Greater participation by the women and youth; and
- Active participation by the PANs, and strengthening of their organizations, through more clearly defined roles and responsibilities of respective committees within the PANs.

SK has also provided legal assistance to NGOs and communities embroiled in legal cases stemming from natural resource conflicts.

## Promoting public participation in discussion and debate on draft laws

To promote public participation in discussions on Cambodia's draft laws, including the NGO draft law, SK has been working to secure copies of the draft bills from the relevant ministries and from "friendly" legislators.

The SK has procured copies of the draft laws on: "Protection and Promotion of Rights of the Disabled"; "Peaceful Demonstration"; "Cambodian Scale Technology"; and "Artificial Organism Management and Control of the Kingdom of Cambodia" (sic).

The SK is scheduled to hold a Public Forum on non-violent demonstration in July 2008 in Battambang Province, and another one, in November 2008, in Sihanoukville.

## Gender Mainstreaming

SK has beefed up its gender program by recruiting two staffmembers, who are tasked to help organizations to integrate gender concerns into their programs, and collect and disseminate information, among others.

SK has cited the accomplishments of one of the beneficiaries of its gender program, Ms. Koert Sokun.

Ms. Sokun, 36, lives in Omal village, Prasat commune, Preah Neit Preah district, Banteay Meanchey province. She has been an active participant of SK's activities, and as a result, she has been able to build a career for herself that is not typical of most Cambodian women.

She started as a volunteer worker in her commune, keeping track of expenses in infrastructure projects. At 28, she worked at the Women's Commune (Neary Khom), as the Gender Focal Point Person, to educate children and women on health, trafficking of women, domestic violence, drug use and HIV/Aids. Today, Ms. Sokun is a Council Member of Prasat Commune. Local and international NGOs implementing development programs in Prasat inevitably seek her out for advice.

"I wanted people to understand how natural resources and health are endangered. So I tried to explain to the parents how problems related to these concerns could be prevented. I am very happy to have been selected to help the people in my community," says Ms. Sokun.

## Human rights advocacy

SK conducted a survey in January 2008 to assess the human rights situation in 10 provinces. This survey is part of SK's Advocacy Action Program, which aims to educate and mobilize civil society to demand better governance from their officials and to ensure more stringent enforcement of laws.

While the survey was hampered by the smallness of the sample, its findings seem to point to an improving human rights situation in the country. The respondents proposed that SK holds more public fora, especially at the provincial level, to enable communities in conflict with each other to meet and find a peaceful resolution to their problems.

Source: STAR Kampuchea Half-Year Report, January to June 2008.