

Empowering target-group



Cambodian women are breaking out of their traditional role as house-wives and mothers, who used to take care of shopping, cooking, cleaning, laundry and raising children. A group of mainly female youth and adults in a small village in Takeo province have formed their own sewing group, where they sew, among other things, small washing clothes needed for car and motorbike washing-places. They believe that they have the ability to do more than just taking care of the home and children, but also to develop a skill that can be used to earn money. By contributing to the family income, the women gain self-worth and self-confidence. Furthermore their spouses and relatives are considering them as more equal to men, and treat them with higher respect and dignity.

These women in Takeo province started their sewing group a year ago. The group has 19 members: 12 female adults, 3 female youth and 4 male youth. Anyone from the village is welcome to join, but so far it is mainly members from the local church who have joined. The group has four sewing machines placed at the group leader's house, and group members take turns to sew when they are free. Organisations and businesses are placing orders, and the group ensures that they have the product ready to deliver on time. Some members have more time to sew than others, depending on their house-work and children. One of the advantages of this sewing group, is that women can sew in-between their daily work at home, and they are still in the village to look after their children.

The ICC-VIDP (Village Integrated Development Project) is working with local churches and their extended communities to identify own resources, that can be utilised to improve the individual villager's livelihood and strengthen the whole community. The women in the sewing group have realised that they have potential and abilities to run a small business and can earn an additional income for their household. This is a new way of thinking of women in rural areas, and women are slowly breaking free from old traditional culture and norms, which have limited their opportunities to make their own free decisions for themselves.

The sewing group members value their group, because they are able to generate an income, they have fellowship, and they want to promote unity between youth and adults in their village. The sewing group is not making a huge profit so far on the sewing business, but by having a joint task a network among the members is being created. This network is used to support each other, and it is a space where members can discuss domestic problems, parenting challenges, social issues and other problems.

The adult female members do not spend their extra income on themselves, but instead on their children's education e.g. school-uniforms and school materials. The youth members are using their income on their own education, so that they do not need to ask their parents for money.

The leader of the sewing group (picture above) has a vision and many ambitions for her village. Besides the sewing group, she has also been involved in starting up a chicken-raising group, a vegetable-growing group and a saving group. These are all local-based initiatives that are contributing to improving the community and the livelihood of villagers.