

Empowering target-group



A group of regular rice-farmers in Svay Rieng province feel proud of themselves, because they have just completed the process of planning and setting up their own Agriculture Cooperative, based on regulations set by the government. The Agriculture Cooperative is now a reality, which will benefit farmers in various ways, and at the same time give status to the farmers. As the group of farmers expresses: "An Agriculture Cooperative is the legal framework for farmers in Cambodia, which give us confidence in our profession, and at the same time we are being recognised by the government".

These farmers, from one of the target communes of the ICC FAST project (Family And School Transformation), went on an exposure trip to visit an Agriculture Cooperative outside of their commune. They were excited about what they learned from this Agriculture Cooperative, and could envision that if they had their own Agriculture Cooperative it would create a legal framework for their farmers and for the 11 Self Help Groups in their commune. When they returned back to their commune, they started to explore how to set up an Agriculture Cooperative. The farmers sought advice from the FAST project, as ICC has experience from setting up Agriculture Cooperatives in another province.

The farmers decided that the purpose and functions of their Agriculture Cooperative should be:

- Agriculture product trading
- Savings service
- Networking and marketing

Each of these three functions are all meant to benefit local farmers in the commune, and especially the Agriculture Cooperative shareholders. It is of benefit for farmers, that they can buy agriculture products cheaper from the Agriculture Cooperative, compared to buying from middlemen. Farmers can save their money and/or make loans from the Agriculture Cooperative, with better conditions than if done via banks or micro-finance institutions. The Agriculture Cooperative transfers technical knowledge to farmers, which they themselves have learned from NGOs and government departments. Furthermore, the Agriculture Cooperative also helps farmers to sell their products at favourable prices and under fair conditions. The benefit for the shareholders is, among others, that they gain from the profit made by the Agriculture Cooperative.

The Department of Agriculture in Svay Rieng province plans to have one Agriculture Cooperative in each of the 80 communes in the province. So far 52 Agriculture Cooperatives have been set up either through the government or the civil society. The FAST project contributes to this process in their target communes, in order to ensure that the established Agriculture Cooperatives have a strong structure and will be sustainable long term. Furthermore, the FAST project wants to see that the running and functioning of Agriculture Cooperatives in their target communes is efficient and responds to the needs of the farmers.