



## Innovative & sustainable development work

*Cambodian farmers and their families have for too long been an ignored and marginalised group of people, with no voice to raise their concerns and needs. But with the creation of Agriculture Cooperatives (ACs) farmers are enabled to seek membership of ACs, and via this group having a voice towards their local authorities. Commune Councils and Village Development Committees are now listening to farmers, and together they seek to find solutions to improve farmers' living and working conditions.*

ICC's community development project, PARCE, has been working in Preah Sdach district, Prey Veng province since 2008. Within the last six years PARCE has mobilised and facilitated farmers to create their own ACs, and a total of four ACs have been created in different communes in Preah Sdach district. The creation of ACs is an innovative approach in Cambodia, and for ICC, as only very few provinces have successful ACs up running. The structure and setup of an AC is approved by the government as community-based organisations (CBOs). This gives the ACs a status and recognition right from the beginning, which is very useful in the civil society and towards the authorities.

Since PARCE started working in Preah Sdach district a number of self help groups (SHGs) have been created. In the SHGs farmers and other community people are being trained and empowered to help each other. This includes running saving groups, which has resulted in members improving their livelihood. So far these SHGs have run independently, but from 2015 onwards PARCE has encouraged the SHGs to become members of the ACs, in order to link them to a recognised structure. Also they will have a stronger voice, as they are part of a bigger network. So far almost all SHGs have become members of ACs, and that makes them less depending on PARCE. Hence, this is seen as a successful localisation process, which will make the CBOs long term sustainable and run independently.

The ACs provide various services, and e.g. two of the ACs have decided to provide rice-mill service to their members and other farmers in their commune. When visiting the newly setup rice-mills and their committees, we meet a group of farmers who with pride and ownership tell and show us around. Even as they are not paid much for running the rice-mill they still do it with motivation and enthusiasm, because they know these rice-mills are very useful for the local farmers.

ACs also have vision and plans for the future, and one new service they would like to provide is machinery services for rice-production, such as tractors (incl. plow and harrow) and harvesters. Right now the supply of machinery service is limited in the area, and the ACs see a possibility to respond to the demand, with an even cheaper price, as they are local-based. Hence, the ACs are seeking investors to enable them to make this vision become reality.

Such vision and plans show that the ACs are long-term committed to their role and responsibility, and that they are inspired to contribute to the next step of innovative and sustainable development work in their communities.