

## A Young Couple's Story: Improving Production for Food Security

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Mrs. Chai Sokea and Mr. Hong Pean live in Pech Roat village of Kampong Trabek district in Prey Veng province. Sokea is 25 years old and her husband Pean is 33. Together they have one daughter who is about 2 years old. The couple is part of the Young Couples group through CEDAC's project, "Improving Food Security for the Most Vulnerable Families of Prey Veng Province (IFS-PV)." This project was funded by the European Union (EU) to work with Village-based Farmer Associations (VFAs) and selected Farmer Promoters (FPs) to enhance the food security of beneficiaries in 3 districts of Prey Veng province.

In addition to fostering food security, CEDAC's project also delivered training sessions about nutrition and sanitation, organized saving groups for participating farmers, and worked with commune councils, some of which have included improved food security and nutrition planning into their Commune Investment Program.

Sokea said that she specifically joined CEDAC's project because she was interested in learning about multi-purpose farming/integrated farming and wanted to be involved in a saving group. Sokea and her husband have cooperated with CEDAC since July of 2005, and have seen their living conditions improve as a result.

### Prior Background & Changes:

Prior to joining CEDAC's project, the couple was still new to farming and knew very little. The couple used conventional practices for rice and vegetable farming. Due to their lack of experience and agricultural knowledge, they often had to rely on outside producers to supplement their diets. Sokea's husband also frequently had to work as a labourer to cover their general expenses.

Additionally, Sokea remarked that before CEDAC's intervention she felt somewhat isolated. She didn't know other people in neighbouring villages let alone her own community.

Over the course of the few years that Sokea and Pean have cooperated with CEDAC, their lives have changed for the better. Today they own a homestead of 0.5 hectares (ha) and a rice field of 1 ha outright. In the past they only had 0.25 ha of land for farming. The couple sold some pigs and cattle in order to purchase their land, which cost 1,500 US dollars. The couple's annual income has risen and their sources of income are now diversified.

Currently, their main income source is from selling vegetables, through which they earn roughly 12,000 riel (USD 3) per day, year round. During their first year of farming with CEDAC, Sokea and Pean could produce 2.5 tons of rice per ha annually. With more land, they are now able to increase their annual production to approximately 3.3 tons of rice per ha (a total of 825 kg). Of that figure, 325 kg is sold at the price of 840 riel (about 21 US cents) per kg, whereas 500 kg is for consumption.

They also currently own about 30-40 chickens, and earn 75 US dollars per year from selling chickens. However, most of the chickens are used for consumption. They also raise and sell ducks, receiving an income of about 55 US dollars per year from that.

Sokea feels more connected as she now meets regularly with community members and other farmers in her village. In fact, she is a very active member in her community. She is the secretary of her Village-based Farmer Association (VFA), and is a Women Promoter (WP) and Farmer Promoter (FP). Moreover, Sokea provides trainings on nutrition to other farmers in neighbouring villages for CEDAC, and for this she receives 86,000 riels (USD 21.50) per round of trainings. Each round consists of training 10 villages and these rounds are conducted twice per year. She has provided nutrition trainings to 10 villages so far, of which 5 to 6 villages successfully understood and implemented their newfound knowledge. Moreover, she has educated her immediate family and relatives about nutrition.

Sokea feels more confident as an individual as she serves her community as a role model for neighbouring farmers. She takes pride in regularly communicating with commune council members and will soon be a member of a local rice mill cooperative as well. Through her engagement in community affairs, she has also improved her reading and writing skills. Further changes that have extended into Sokea and Pean's everyday lives include nutritional and healthy habits. For example, she and her husband now cook food with sterile, boiled water. Pean also feels healthier these days as he is no longer around agro-chemicals like he used to be, when he used conventional farming practices. In general, they have fewer expenses on health services now.

### What's Next

Sokea and Pean are looking forward to expanding their production. They want to expand the size of their plot for growing vegetables and want to buy 2 piglets to start raising pigs. Sokea remarked that even once CEDAC finishes its project in Prey Veng province, she and her husband intend to continue using the innovative agricultural practices they gained through CEDAC's trainings, and furthermore, will continue being a part of saving groups. As for family-planning, she and her husband plan on having no more children as they want to focus on sending their daughter to school all the way through university.