QSA Notes

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Reflections on the 2022/23 project year: Highlights and priorities

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Farmers in Uganda work to improve nutrition, achieve year-round food security and increase income.
Source: St Jude Family Projects

The year ending June 2023 was another busy but successful year for QSA's international development projects focused on the interrelated areas of poverty reduction, food, and water security; 10,339 people directly participated in six ANCP projects in Cambodia, Uganda, and India, of whom 57 per cent were women and girls.

QSA is a long-standing participant in the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP)[1], the Australian Government's longest running and most extensive NGO program. Despite being one of the ANCP's smallest NGOs, QSA continues supporting in-country partners to achieve great results for their communities.

Here are some highlights from the 2023/24 project year and insights into our project partners priorities.

[1] QSA's receives support for overseas development projects in Cambodia, Uganda, and India (Tamil Nadu) from the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP)

Trialling new ideas

QSA has supported Bunrany Hun Sen Development Center (BRHS) in Pursat, Cambodia, for almost ten years; initially, it was a handicrafts training centre, then a more commercial operation focusing on handicraft production and marketing, purchasing handicrafts from producers in rural areas, and providing handicrafts training. The Centre was adversely impacted by COVID-19, exacerbating a trend of declining sales and reduced training numbers.

It was recognised in 2022 that the Centre needed to become a self-sustaining social enterprise providing skills training and employment, and a consultant was engaged to create a new business unit. It was recognised that introducing new arrangements across the existing organisation would interrupt production, training, and sales activities and may seem threatening to current production and management staff.

Known as the Enterprise Project (EP), the new unit is a separate production and sales operation, implementing new employment practices and production processes, new designs, and innovative marketing and sales systems. The EP aims to demonstrate new approaches and methods BRHS can adopt to achieve future self-sufficiency.

Chickens are a vital element of the permaculture project in Pursat. Source: Department of Women's Affairs

Demonstrating inclusiveness

A key objective for Khmer Community Development (KCD) is improving relations between the majority Khmer and ethnic Vietnamese communities who face significant disadvantage and discrimination. KCD uses participatory processes throughout its project planning and implementation so that all community members can participate in discussions and leadership. Inclusive community discussions are a robust governance method for needs assessment, awareness-raising, and problem-solving. KCD also consciously recruits Vietnamese speakers to help facilitate these processes and their work.

KCD has also partnered with a specialist NGO to improve the participation of people with disabilities in KCD's work. Practical activities are also integrated into project work to

enable participants to increase their awareness and support for people with disabilities. Home visits with training and materials to generate income and improve family nutrition are options available to participants with disabilities, as well as study visits to the Phnom Penh Centre for Independent Living to enable participants to share their experiences.

In 2023, KCD focused on enhancing its strategic approach to gender, increasing its capacity to understand and improve gender equality in its development programs. This included activities with women to gather information about their experiences and concerns and raise awareness and support for gender issues in local authorities and communities.

KCD workshop to gather information about the concerns and experiences of rural women in Cambodia. Source: QSA

Working with local partners

QSA's relationship with its partners is informed and guided by Quaker teachings that espouse equality as one of its fundamental principles. Partner organisations tend to have a geographic focus and, depending on the partner, either consult with community leaders or are led by the communities with whom they work to select project areas. Their work is shaped or informed by specific local issues, and they have the expertise to address gaps, interests and needs identified by the community.

Most project participants across QSA's work are women, with many initiatives aimed at female empowerment, including encouragement and support for involvement, coordination and leadership in groups and at community levels. QSA supports its partners in engaging their communities and facilitating grassroots initiatives that are ultimately informed and owned by the communities.

An example is a long-standing partner, the Department of Women's Affairs (DWA), in Pursat Province, Cambodia. Each commune in the province prepares an annual "Investment Plan" that identifies community needs across a wide range of issues, including health, education, road infrastructure, and policing. Provincial authorities, including the DWA, discuss these plans with the communes to review and select communities based on criteria considering social and economic factors such as poverty levels and market access. Local community representatives, including women's groups, support and invite participants.

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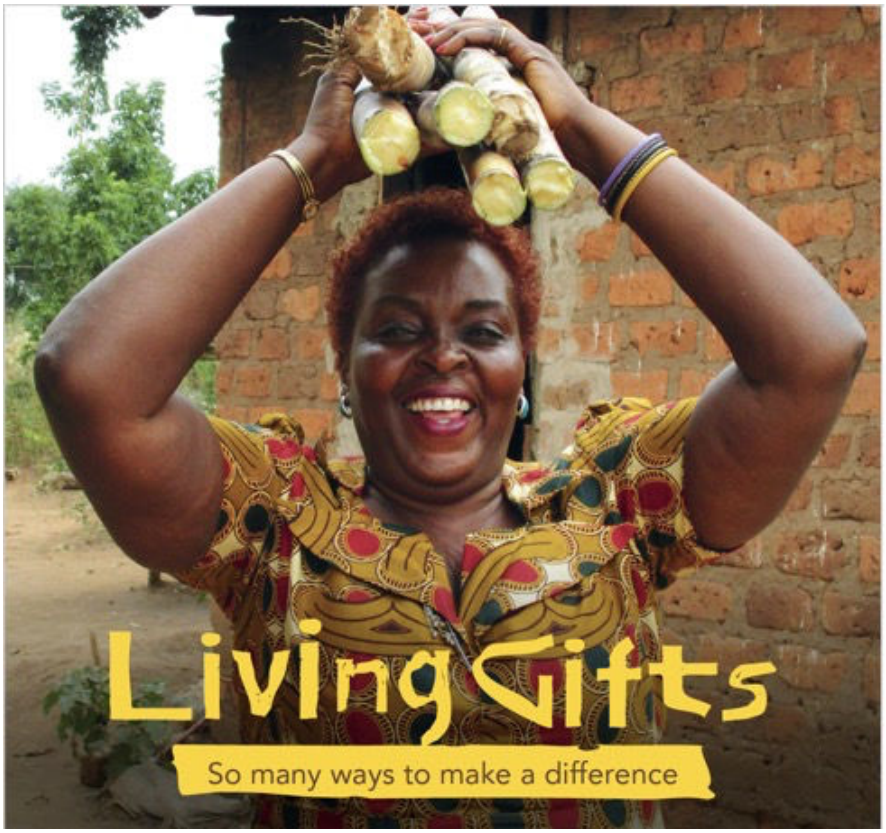

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