

## Transferring Skills Villager to Villager – Alleviating Poverty Through Peer Training in Cambodia

### The Challenge

When the ILO Disability Resource Team (DRT) project in Cambodia sought to integrate people with disabilities into provincial and other training centres in 1997, it came up against a tough challenge – by 1999, the project had become too successful! The number of disabled trainees increased from 3.5 per cent to approximately 15 per cent in the three targeted provincial training centres where the project operated. The project was so popular that more than 100 applicants with disabilities were waiting for services. Other problems surfaced as well. With distance and transportation as barriers, many people with disabilities could not reach the training centres. In addition, despite the project's promise of benefits, some people feared the separation from family, farm and income-generating activities. Moreover, some people lacked a basic education and were thus unqualified for the project's formal vocational training.

The dilemma was significant. Given its personnel and resource constraints, how could the project meet the high demand for vocational training and address the many barriers that posed obstacles to rural people with disabilities?

### Meeting the Challenge

The solution called for creating “training without walls”. In a methodology labelled Success Case Replication (SCR), the project locates villagers with successful businesses and relies on them to train others. The ILO tested the method in Cambodia and whittled down the DRT waiting list by addressing the mismatch between the needs of people with disabilities and existing training opportunities. When funding for the ILO project ended nine months later, the SCR component showed enough promise that the Finnish Embassy funded a longer-term project that began in 2002. Named Alleviating Poverty Through Peer Training (APPT), the project focuses on applying the SCR model more widely.

**The Good Practice:** Helping people with disabilities start small businesses by using local entrepreneurs as trainers and providing business start-up support.



### • Background •

The Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) originally developed the SCR model for a general population. From June 1994 to June 1999, this SCR pilot project achieved a 71 per cent success rate and helped more than 2,350 families in eight Asia and Pacific countries increase their annual incomes by an average of almost US\$450. The DRT project in Cambodia represented SCR's first application to people with disabilities. Given that the Cambodian people have traditionally transferred skills on an informal and personal basis, the advantages of the SCR approach seemed apparent to the DRT field staff. While the SCR methodology can never fully replace the system of formal, classroom-based vocational training, it does offer certain benefits, especially for poor rural people with disabilities (see box).

The SCR model also allows for training in skills not usually taught in formal training centres, such as soymilk production or construction of cement jars for collecting and storing rainwater. Trainees can also learn technical and practical business skills. For example, a stone cutting apprentice learns not only the craft itself but also where to buy or secure raw materials, how to market the finished items and success tips or "trade secrets".

**Implementing SCR initially.** In 2001, the ILO needed to make certain adjustments that would ensure the SCR model's success in Cambodia. Specifically, the model required new skills of the field staff and the cooperation of communities. The ILO launched one national and three provincial training workshops that focused on a systems approach as well as on the development of individual field workers' skills. The workshops increased field staff expertise and earned the support of national leaders. Also participating in the training were NGO and government field workers who could help identify successful local entrepreneurs. The three initial field workers were borrowed from the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation (MOSALVY).

The ILO continues to implement the SCR model under the APPT project. It is working to refine procedures, to develop management information and evaluation systems and to provide staff training to new field workers. In addition to MOSALVY, which provides office space and some workers in the provinces, the ILO collaborates with

an international NGO, the World Rehabilitation Fund (WRF), which has provided, among other things, two field workers to expand the project's capacity further. The combined staff entails one manager, one support person and six field workers. Current project sites are located in Pursat, Siem Reap and Phnom Penh.

## The SCR Model in Action

**Locating and evaluating success cases.** Field workers seek out successful microbusinesses, farmers or artisans. They learn about local successes by talking with prospective trainees, village leaders and colleagues and others. They interview duck farmers, hair cutters, producers of cement jars, producers of rattan mats and joss sticks, wood carvers, knitters, pig farmers and many others. Once the field workers identify successful businesses, they analyse the businesses to determine their viability and profitability. They ascertain the cost of raw materials, transport, labour, marketing and so forth and compare these costs to the income generated by a business to determine its profit. The assessment also benefits the targeted small entrepreneurs – many of whom have never conducted such an analysis but quickly learn how to do so.

If an activity looks profitable, field workers then assess the marketplace. Will the market sustain another similar business? One village might not be able to support more than one hair cutter, but basket weaving near tourist areas or in villages regularly visited by middlemen could sustain a group of producers. For example, in Siem Reap, home of Cambodia's famous Angkor Wat complex, tourism is on the rise, along with the demand for products for the tourist market. Basket weaving that uses natural products found in local fields provides the basis for both a village self-help group that caters to the tourist market and a company that exports baskets to the United States. Buyers go to the village to teach experienced weavers new designs. The weavers then share their know-how with others in the self-help group. The ability of the group to produce high-quality products in quantity appeals to buyers and benefits all the producers. As long as demand remains constant, an increase in the number of individuals engaging in income-generating activities does not seem to have an adverse impact on local markets.

Particularly in rural communities, assessing the market is not an exact science. Field workers must rely on their own knowledge of the local market and a community's needs and consider the possibility of gaining access to other than local markets.

**Assessing trainers and setting training fees.** With the assessment of profit and market completed, field workers find out if successful entrepreneurs are willing to train others. According to field workers, it is surprising how many people are willing to train others and are not afraid of competition. In some cases, such as basket weavers, new trainees can expand the trainer's market capacity and customer base. In addition, many people with disabilities agree to train other disabled persons after their own businesses are up and running.

## Knitting Success

Mobility-impaired and without a wheelchair, 16-year-old Van Tuch was unable to leave her home. An SCR field worker heard about Van Tuch and met with her to find out about her needs and interests. He then arranged for Van Tuch to get a wheelchair and for her neighbour Im Sopheap to teach her to knit and crochet. With a small grant to purchase knitting needles and wool and a training fee of 80,000 riel (US\$20) paid to Im Sopheap, Van Tuch learned a skill. She now earns 60,000 riel (US\$15) per month knitting garments for people in the village and small hats to sell in the local market. Even though Van Tuch's income is not enough to sustain her, it nonetheless represents a contribution to her family while her work adds a new dimension to her life.



Some entrepreneurs offer training at no cost while others request a fee or charge for training materials. If the trainee comes from another village, the trainer may provide food and board, if compensated. Generally, training fees are higher for more profitable businesses. For example, cement jar making, which is a more lucrative business than knitting and requires a longer training period, commands a higher training fee. In Cambodia, training varies from two weeks to six months, and training fees vary from no charge up to 800,000 riel (US\$200). Phnom Penh, the capital city, commands higher fees.

**Screening, selecting and matching trainees.** Village leaders, provincial MOSALVY workers and NGOs help field workers find disabled people in need of services. Trained in interview techniques, field workers take applicants' histories and explore their interests, abilities and skills to determine what services are needed. The field workers then match people with disabilities to trainers based on mutual interest, geographic proximity and other factors. Many trainees already know of successful entrepreneurs in their own or nearby villages with whom they may want to train, or they might have developed ideas about businesses they want to start.

In selecting trainees, field workers assess the trainee's capacity for developing the technical skills needed to start and manage a small business. Sometimes, the trainer may become directly involved by conducting a short assessment or offering a trial training period so that both trainer and trainee can determine if they are a good match. In assessing capacity for developing a microbusiness, field workers may also look to family or self-help group members who may wish to become partners with the trainee or support the trainee's business.

Field workers also need to assess for any special trainees' needs related to both disability and poverty. Training allowances are available and paid to trainers or trainees to cover costs related to transportation, training materials, accommodations and so forth.

**Establishing a practical hands-on training programme.** Trainers must agree to teach the business and technical aspects of the skill or business in question and to share "trade secrets". When trainer and trainee, along with the field worker agree to the length of training and the associated fee, the trainer and field worker develop a simple written agreement that spells out conditions and fees.

**Supervising and monitoring the training.** Field workers need to provide support to the trainer and the trainee during the training period, intervene if problems or special needs arise and determine if the trainee is acquiring the skills needed for a successful business start-up.

**Facilitating business start-ups.** Business development planning begins early, even before the completion of training. Field workers and trainees determine the costs related to business start-up and make profit projections. The project offers grants and loans to trainees unable to secure credit through other channels. Grants cover minimal funding needs while loans, offered for 12 months at 5 per cent interest, usually assist those who need 200,000 riel (US\$50) or more. A business plan is a prerequisite for the receipt of grants and loans, and field workers are trained to help trainees and their families develop the plan. Additional loans help former trainees expand their businesses.

Regular follow-up is critical; in fact, field workers generally monitor and provide support for one year after the launch of an income-generating activity. Many trainers make themselves available for continued support and assistance. For example, one woman takes her former trainee's knitted items to a local market to sell to vendors. A pig-farming company makes a specialist available by mobile telephone 24 hours a day for emergency assistance.

**Promoting multiplier effects.** The term "multiplier effects" refers to replicating successful businesses according to market forces. For example, the company engaged in pig farming trained a woman with a disability in Pursat province. In turn, she trained 12 others in the required techniques and skills. To date, many people with disabilities trained under the SCR model in Cambodia have become trainers.

**Project appraisal.** To determine whether a start-up activity is a worthwhile investment, each trainee's case undergoes evaluation to determine training costs and the expenses associated with initiating the business as weighed against the income generated by the activity. Similarly, project success is measured in terms of total project costs and staff salaries versus outcomes. Evaluation reports are posted on ILO's *AbilityAsia* Web site.

## Accomplishments

The first chance to field test the SCR methodology with people with disabilities lasted only from March to December 2001, at which time DRT project funding terminated. The Finnish Embassy, however, recognized the value of the approach and provided resources to continue and expand the SCR effort. Continuation of the work under the new APPT budget represented a major achievement. In terms of numbers of people served, the figures are as follows:

- Under the DRT project, 35 people were trained and 27 started businesses. Three field workers who also had other non SCR responsibilities achieved these results.
- Under the APPT project for the period March 2002 to June 2003, more than 160 people with disabilities were trained; of those individuals, 140 have started microbusinesses thus far. Many others have received other types of training, such as that offered by a mobile training unit in Pursat province. Trainees in Pursat also received assistance in setting up income-generating activities. Women comprise more than half of the Pursat trainees.
- Profits of former trainees in both project periods range from 60,000 riel to 480,000 riel (US\$15 to \$120) per month and higher, depending on the business. The profits compare favourably with a minimum wage rate of US\$45 per month in the garment sector.
- Under both the DRT and APPT projects, more than 130 NGO field workers and government staff and leaders received direct training in disability awareness and SCR. The training was both theoretical and experiential. Participants engaged in field work that involved interviewing and evaluating potential trainers. In a related accomplishment, field staff learned how to deliver effective training and as a result of the field staff's skill development, international consultants are no longer required as trainers.

## Lessons Learned

One of the major lessons learned in the Cambodia project is that challenges can be met through simple yet creative low-cost solutions. Some of the more specific lessons learned include:

**Change must be managed and training provided.** When first introduced, the SCR model did not take hold despite the interest of national leaders and the DRT project staff. Although the method is relatively simple to implement, it nonetheless requires staff training, especially with respect to some aspects of business management, such as how to evaluate whether a business is making a profit. Further, staff needed to set forth goals and required encouragement to try the new approach and thus build their confidence.

**Field workers who know the community and like to talk to people are particularly effective.** A dynamic and outgoing field worker who is not reluctant to ask money or business questions is an important asset. He or she must know the appropriate fees for informal apprenticeships and understand local markets.

**Developing government and NGO commitment facilitates sustainability.** The support of government (both national and provincial) and NGOs is essential to the success of project implementation and to securing funding to carry out project activities.

**The SCR model is particularly applicable to people with disabilities in rural areas.** The SCR village-based approach is particularly appropriate for rural disabled persons whose barriers to formal training take the form of low literacy skills, limited mobility and transportation options and a general lack of resources. Learning by doing is an approach that suits people with certain types of disabilities. The “multiplier effect” (trainee becomes a trainer) empowers disabled entrepreneurs and encourages them to train other people with disabilities or, in some cases, nondisabled persons, often for fees that add to their overall profit.

**The market demands constant assessment.** If too many people start to produce the same products or offer the same services, the market could become “flooded”. That is the demand and low cost for the goods or services may decrease as a result of increased availability. Even rural markets can undergo rapid change and, therefore, require constant assessment.

**Resources are needed for training fees, training allowances, grants and loans.** While project costs are low in a country such as Cambodia, resources must be available for training fees, materials and credit. Given that resources for these purposes may be difficult to locate in rural communities, the project found it necessary to provide them.

**Field workers must be mobile.** To travel to rural communities and places most in need and to provide adequate follow-up, field workers must have reliable transportation. In this case, the project provides each field worker with a motorbike and the resources to use and maintain it.

**A picture tells a thousand words.** Photographs and simple examples of successful cases are invaluable for explaining the project, promoting the project to donors and conducting training.

### A Trainee Becomes a Trainer

It took only two weeks for 19-year-old visually impaired Chea Saveun to learn how to make milk from grinding soybeans. She learned the skill from a neighbour and has established her own successful business by making, bottling and selling the milk. Her shop is located outside her home. With her first earnings, Chea Saveun bought an icebox and bottles. Her overhead costs include the soybeans, which she buys from the market, and a small monthly payment to her aunt who provides the electricity needed to operate the bean-grinding machine. Her income varies depending on demand – for example, she makes 8,000 riel (US\$2) a day but sells more milk at festival times. Overall, she is doing so well that she was able to secure a small loan of 400,000 riel to open a second “shop” at a nearby school. Her mother now operates the home-based shop while Chea Saveun works at the school. She also became a trainer, teaching another visually impaired woman to make soymilk. The other woman locates her stand at another school so that the two women do not compete with each other.



### Looking Forward

The APPT project is continuing to assess the SCR model as it applies to people with disabilities in rural areas. It is developing improved monitoring and evaluation procedures. Through its Phnom Penh location, it is studying the application of the SCR approach to urban areas. After almost two years of field testing, the model seems well suited to rural people with physical impairments, many as a result of landmine accidents. While victims of landmine accidents have been the primary beneficiaries to date, the APPT project is increasingly seeking out people with other disabilities, especially those with hearing, visual and intellectual impairments.

Working with its partners, the ILO hopes to attract additional funds to expand the APPT project to other provinces. It is refining its procedures and starting to draft a manual that can be used for training purposes as well as for replicating the model. It also plans the development of additional training materials, a video and related promotional materials to facilitate project replication and expansion.

## Replication

The SCR approach requires, first, the participation of successful entrepreneurs who are willing to train others and, second, the existence of markets that can support new businesses. Of course, funds are essential, especially for training fees, allowances, loans and grants. The SCR model can be incorporated into an existing programme, as was the case with the DRT project, or it can become a project focusing exclusively on the SCR approach, as was the case with the APPT project. Further, existing classroom-based training programmes can incorporate the approach into their curricula. The methodology also lends itself to families or groups that wish to learn and start a business together.

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