

Ms. Chou Metta signed the farming contract with Amru Rice's CEO, Mr. Song Saran, on behalf of Sdau Agricultural Cooperative in 2019. Photo: DPA

BOLSTERING LEADERS, CHANGING LIVES IN RURAL CAMBODIA METTA'S STORY

The northern Cambodian province of Preah Vihear is endowed with sprawling plains and mountains and draws its name from an ancient Khmer temple dedicated to a Hindu deity symbolising fertility.

Chou Metta, 33, was born and raised in Sdau commune in Preah Vihear's Sangkum Thmey district. The predominant industry in the province is agriculture, with social practices remaining relatively primitive and rooted in tradition. Until recently, the farmers needed to wait for the rain to irrigate their crops and then haggle with merchants over the price of their harvest. With no organised local market, farmers often found themselves at the short end of the stick.

Metta didn't have the means

to stay in school past the ninth grade, but she worked hard and studied independently to become a school teacher in her local community. She has helped numerous youths enhance their abilities and knowledge through education over the years.

Together with local implementation partner Development and Partnership Action (DPA), Oxfam launched the Gender Transformative and Responsible Agribusiness Investments in South East Asia 2 (GRAISEA 2) project in Preah Vihear in 2017. By addressing the social norms that restricted women's leadership, inclusion and empowerment, the project helped give ordinary women farmers such as Metta the chance to transform their lives by becoming active market participants.

Metta's training through GRAISEA 2 allowed her to hone her leadership skills and provided the necessary guidance to achieve remarkable professional and personal growth. She is currently in her second term as the Chair of the Board of Sdau Development Agricultural Cooperative (AC), which is responsible for assisting local

farmers with market research. credit assistance and rice yield management.



"When I first became Chair of the Board, I was not very confident in holding this position. Once I became more aware and acquired more knowledge due to the trainings, I began to believe in myself and that I could lead the Agricultural Cooperative."

- CHOU METTA

Fellow board members attribute the success of their AC to Metta's abilities, commitment, and participatory leadership style, with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries also giving it recognition.

Metta noted that the training from DPA, such as understanding legal rights, enabled her to act in many areas of the agricultural industry. She ensured that the AC conducted its business with due diligence and maintained a good working relationship with the commune council.

"It is Metta's power of speech that engenders confidence in her leadership among the farmers," said Pheakdey Lina, the AC's Deputy Chair. "Under her stewardship, the AC has been able to solve many of the farmers' problems such as poor yields. AC members have received



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access to financial assistance and training on modern planting techniques. The AC has worked together to find more opportunities and markets for the farmers, expanding their choices for trade and allowing them to sell their produce at higher rates," added Lina.

Following Metta's footsteps, the women of Sdau commune have started to move away from traditional roles. Their courage and creativity in solving day-to-day problems have inspired the men to develop new habits themselves, such as helping with work at home. This kind of change at a fundamental level is demonstrative of the success and effectiveness of concerted training programmes that support women like Chou Metta to empower themselves.



"If I had not known or joined the training organised by DDA" organised by DPA, my life would not have taken this turn. Life is so much better now than in the past. I am very grateful for these opportunities, and I hope that this project can help more communities like it has helped mine."

- CHOU METTA







