



PROFILE

Leng Chumnap: A Brave Woman

Leng Chumnap is the only woman in a committee of nine persons in Tumpung Cheung's Community Fishery organization in Cambodia

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Going by her easy, beaming smile, no one would guess that Leng Chumnap is a very busy woman. A fish seller by profession, she is also in charge of extension work in the village of Tumpung Cheung, located in the Battambang province of Cambodia, close to the Thai border. Mother of three children, Leng Chumnap is the only woman in a committee of nine persons in Tumpung Cheung's Community Fishery organization.

The Community Fishery organization has helped Leng Chumnap to reach out to her fellow villagers in many important ways and bring about positive changes in their lives. In turn, the organization has significantly changed her life as well. Chumnap's husband was once an illegal fisher but as a result of her involvement in the

resources could be used to great advantage to enhance employment and incomes throughout the year. They would not have to fish in fear anymore.

Visitors to Tumpung Cheung can surely expect to be taken enthusiastically around the village by Chumnap and shown the many positive changes that are taking place there, especially in the waters of Tonle Sap, which teem with fish during the fishing season.

At the ICSF Siem Reap meeting in 2007, Chumnap spoke with conviction about these changes. That meeting helped her learn a lot, particularly because, knowing Thai, she was also able to listen in to the Thai translations and have heartfelt discussions with the Thai participants.

In the four years since the Siem Reap meeting, further significant and heartening changes have taken place in Tumpung Cheung village. The flooded forest—the nursery for fish—has increased significantly. The amount of fish caught over the last four or five years has been more than adequate for the consumption needs of all. On many days, families have even had a surplus to be taken to the market. The Community Fishery area is now demarcated with signposts—the result of a collaborative effort with the government in marking out the boundary of the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve, which adjoins the village. All but a handful of members have stopped using illegal electric fishing operations.

The Chairperson of the Community Fishery organization graciously acknowledges the important role that Chumnap has played in making the organization truly participatory. Recognizing her abilities, the Commune Council, which is the lowest level of administrative governance in Cambodia, has employed her as an extension worker of the whole commune. In this new role, Chumnap is popularizing social welfare programmes throughout the commune's many villages. Unfortunately, this means that she spends less time in the Community Fishery organization. ❏

newly created Community Fishery organization, he went through a process of reform and now uses only legal small-scale fishing gear.

The fishery resources of the great Tonle Sap Lake in Cambodia were once completely controlled by a lobby of rich and influential fishing lot owners. However, in the year 2000, a new sub-decree announced by the Cambodian Prime Minister seized most of the fishing-lots and transferred them to river based communities. However, not all the village households were convinced about the genuineness of that action. Also, working together as a community was not the norm. Yet Leng Chumnap welcomed this bold and unprecedented initiative and was confident that it would contribute to improving the lives of the village community by giving them access to fishery resources. In the days that followed, in her role as extension worker, she went from house to house, explaining to the villagers how the community's new access to Tonle Sap's fishery