

Sustainable agriculture and participation of smallholder families in policy-making

Context

Cambodia is one of Asia's poorest countries. The current political situation is especially tense as a result of the forced disbanding of the opposition party. Eighty per cent of the population live in rural areas. Failed harvests and low prices for agricultural produce, precarious supplementary earnings outside the agriculture sector and excessive debt are some of the factors underlying the lack of food security of many households. Climate change is further compounding the situation. Recent years have seen a surge in land expropriations owing to the absence of the rule of law and of a land register. If Cambodian smallholders are to boost their output and sell their products profitably, they will need improved access to land, to various supporting services and to markets. HEKS/EPER projects assist peasant farmers in securing land access, sustainably enhancing their bargaining position on the market and expanding their knowledge so as to be better protected against climate change and able to increase their output and earnings.

Objectives, priorities, activities

The HEKS/EPER Country Programme aims to guarantee the right to food for peasant families in villages covered by projects. Accordingly, HEKS/EPER fosters climate-adapted, sustainable and resilient agriculture with higher yields and secure access to local natural resources such as land and water. Young journalists are being trained in the villages to publicize unjust land grabs by telling their stories and providing information on land rights via social media or radio. To secure land access for indigenous peoples, their villages are being assisted in acquiring communal land rights.

To enhance knowledge of sustainable and climate-resistant cultivation methods as well as access to key services and outlets, HEKS/EPER works, on the one hand, with enterprises and state institutions in reaching more farms, developing adap-





ted products, services and marketing channels and in imparting knowledge to the farmers. On the other hand, “incubation programmes” are also conducted: support is given to the business concepts of start-ups and small businesses that offer solutions to the problems of smallholders. Under an initial programme, for example, funding was provided to enterprises that had developed smartphone-controlled drip irrigation systems. In order to promote peaceful coexistence, HEKS/EPER undertakes continuing education and training in conflict management and peacebuilding for representatives of civil society, authorities and for members of traditional arbitration bodies, strengthens local state arbitration bodies and supports mediation in major conflicts.

Target groups

HEKS/EPER projects in Cambodia benefit families and communities who live from agriculture. Individual activities specifically address the needs of the indigenous population.

Partnerships, networks, alliances, memberships

HEKS/EPER Cambodia is a member of the NGO Forum on Cambodia for local and international organisations dealing with land and livelihood programmes, the Disaster Risk Reduction Forum and of ACT Alliance. HEKS/EPER also works with local networks to encourage organic farming.

HEKS/EPER on the ground

HEKS/EPER operates a Coordination Office in Cambodia with eight staff members and which provides professional support for partners and projects.

Topics and working approach

HEKS/EPER takes a human rights-based approach to its work of assisting communities in claiming their rights to land and food. Government agencies are encouraged at the same time to fulfil their obligations. HEKS/EPER also follows a market development approach to its collaboration with private and public sector stakeholders so as to adapt their methods, products and services for target groups.

Country:

Cambodia

HEKS/EPER No.: 365.200

Responsibility:

Michael Blaser, Desk Officer for Cambodia

Contact:

Swiss Church Aid (HEKS/EPER)
Communication
Seminarstrasse 28
8042 Zurich
Switzerland
Phone: +41 44 360 88 10
E-mail: projektdienst@heks.ch
www.heks.ch/english