

worldrenew.net/asia

Tom Post
Team Leader
Asia Ministry Team
tpost@worldrenew.net
worldrenew.net/tompost
tompost.org

World Renew Canada
3475 Mainway
PO Box 5070 STN LCD 1
Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8
1-800-730-3490
Fax: 905 336-8344

World Renew US
1700 28th Street SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49508
1-800-552-7972
Fax: 616-224-8060

At the Heart of World Renew's Calling

What is really at the heart of World Renew's calling to show compassion to the poor? I think that *respect* and *striving to impact the root causes of poverty* are two of the keys. First, we try to *work respectfully* across cultures, races, and religious ways of life—because of the image of God in all humanity. One of the ways this respect becomes visible is when we work with partnering organizations around the world that share values and vision with us.

At the community level, two of the main ways that interpersonal respect manifests itself are in requiring self-reliance and in the amazing multiplication effect that self-reliance produces. This is Biblical: Elisha's question to the poor widow facing starvation was "What do you have in your house?" Jesus' question to his disciples facing a crowd of hungry people was "What do you have to give them?"

Here are a couple of recent examples from Asia that illustrate the ways that respect in relationships expresses itself in self-reliance that transforms people. The full stories can be found on the following pages.

First, in Cambodia where World Renew trained Socheat, who in turn became the community organizer at New Hope Church. Socheat overcame his fear of government officials and ended up helping them set up a youth program. Later, 12 girls and a boy from this youth program were accepted to university, but the boy had no money. The girls pooled their own money to help the boy pay his school fees, and he is now attending university!

Second, in Bangladesh World Renew works with a community organization named Prottasha ("Hope"). Prottasha works with a man named Nurul Islam, whose neighbors called him "Sholo Kamla" meaning "sixteen different jobs" Nurul had only a little land and worked many jobs to survive. His wife Momena joined a women's saving group with Protasha. Nurul applied for training in growing rice, composting, and cultivating vegetables, and then joined a men's saving group. Now Nurul is a full-time farmer, has enough food, and nobody calls him "Sholo Kamla" anymore!

As we build the respect into our systems that results in growing self-reliance among our program participants, we can also *address the underlying causes of poverty*, as demonstrated by the next few stories.

Our third story takes us to Laos, where World Renew works with some of the most remote communities in Asia. The lack of access to education, lack of roads, and language barriers have kept people both isolated and in poverty. When we work with communities to build water systems, roads, schools, and curricula in their languages, the transformation is wonderful! Locher, a young Rshi boy, is a math whiz because of an opportunity that has opened up to him through World Renew.

And three village leaders—Sanlong, Sianghung and Siangyan—appreciatively talk about what the new roads and a motorcycle trail mean for their villages. Now, the nurse can reach the sick, the sick can be transported to the hospital, more people can remain in the village because they can market their produce, and villagers can join together to build and maintain the roads! This is the fourth story.

Fifth and finally, in Patarkhama in northeast India, the Eight Sisters Farming Club is a group of 31 women from the Garo people group who have overcome one of the root causes of the poverty they endured in the past. Their mountainous land was worn out from repeated burning and erosion. They have restored their part of God's creation by planting erosion-control hedges, a concept that is part of the SALT techniques (Sloping Agricultural Lands Technology), taught to them by World Renew's partner, the Northeast India Commission on Relief and Development. The work was supported by financial help from Foods Resource Bank to World Renew. The Garo women learned the techniques of improving rice production, called System of Rice Intensification (SRI) on the small parcels of flat land that they farm. Between the sloping land and the flat land parcels, these women have now secured a full year's supply of food for their families!

#1. Youth at New Hope Church Support each other and their Community

A Story of Transformation from Cambodia

Socheat is a member of the congregation of New Hope Church (NEHC), which is located in a small village in Takeo, Cambodia. It is about 50 km (a 1-hour and 20-minute drive) from Phnom Penh. NEHC is a small, rural church with a congregation of 35 adults and 50 children.

In 2007, NEHC began to work with World Renew to transform the communities surrounding the church. Socheat was selected to be NEHC's community organizer. He was trained in community organizing and given a small monthly "love offering" to support him in his full-time work.

One of the many challenges that Socheat faced in his new role was building a relationship with the Commune Council. The Commune Council is the local government authority responsible for development in the commune. Historically the people of Cambodia, and especially people in rural communities, have distrusted government and even feared them. So it was not easy for Socheat to feel comfortable about building a positive relationship with the Commune Council.

However, Socheat and the Commune Council soon discovered that they had a common interest—they wanted to work with

the local youth. Because Socheat had experience in this area, he helped the council organize regular youth-group activities. Soon there were 18 members in group—17 girls and one boy. They met every month and built strong friendships.

As they were graduating from high school, the 12 girls in the youth group were accepted into university and made plans to move to Phnom Penh to start their college education. The one boy was also accepted into university, but he knew that he couldn't pay for his school fees. His parents were very poor and could barely afford to eat: no one in his family would think of attending university. When the girls learned that the boy was financially unable to afford university, they pooled their resources and agreed to pay his tuition. Now there are 13 youth from this commune who are attending university and supporting each other with their studies. They feel privileged to have this opportunity, and they are committed to give back to their community just as Socheat has.



#2. Proud to Be A Farmer

Improving Agriculture and Food Security in the Kishoreganj District A Story of Transformation from PROTTASHA in Bangladesh



In Ranikhamar village, he is known as "Sholo Kamla" meaning "laborer at sixteen different jobs." But Mo-

hammad Nurul Islam has always wanted to be a farmer. In Kishoreganj, Bangladesh, it is difficult for subsistence farmers like Nurul Islam to get a good yield from a small plot of land. So Nurul and many other Bangladesh men like him have no other way to earn a living besides working as a sholo kamla.

Momena Khatun, Nurul's wife, knew about her husband's passion for farming. She has been a member of the Joy Women's Group, organized by World Renew Bangladeshi partner, Prottasha, since 2005. One day, Momena learned at a group meeting that Prottasha was going to provide some agriculture training in Ranikhamar. This would be a dream come true for Momena and her husband. Nurul Islam signed up for each training that Prottasha offered, including off-season vegetable cultivation, growing

season vegetable cultivation, System of Rice Intensification (SRI), compost preparation, green manure techniques, vermicomposting, and more.

Since he started training in agriculture with Prottasha, Nurul has started to put what he has learned into practice and hasn't looked back. Among his new endeavors on a piece of shared land are plots where he has cultivated rice and seasonal vegetables such as squash, beans, tomatoes, cucumbers, okra, amaranth, spinach, chili peppers, radishes, papaya, and more. Nurul can also make his own compost and uses it on his fields. His land is more fertile than it was in the past and his production cost is much lower than before. Momena helps him save seeds for planting the following season, which also saves the couple money. Nurul and Momena can also cope with price fluctuations when selling their produce at local markets without having to go hungry for part of the year. They are

also saving some of their money for emergencies and future needs.

Earning income from his farm is not all that Nurul Islam has accomplished. As a good farmer he believes in values-based farming. He does not use harmful pesticides. He says, "My vegetables taste good, and they are free of poisonous chemicals." He also joined the Diganta Men's Group with Prottasha in 2013. Since then, he has saved 1050 Tk. and his wife has saved 8500 Tk. in their group savings fund. His family eats fresh vegetables on a regular basis, and they are in good health.

With an opportunity for training from World Renew and Prottasha, Nurul Islam has become a full-time farmer. His land produces crops year-round that provide for his family and produce income. No one calls Nurul Islam 'Sholo Kamla' anymore. He is proud to be a farmer.



Written by Goutam Bairagi, agriculture program coordinator for Prottasha (ABMS-Bangladesh)

#3. Towards Quality Education in the Uplands

A Story of Transformation from Laos

Children enter schools in the uplands

When World Renew started to work in the Muang Mai district in Phongsali province, the overall school attendance for school age children was 27% and girls' attendance was only 15%. In most of the Rshi villages where World Renew is working, girls did not attend school at all. From 2008 to 2013, World Renew worked together with these communities and local government to construct small, 2-room, semi-permanent schools in remote villages as well as bigger 5- and 6-room permanent schools in villages with more children. The district authorities appointed teachers to these schools and covered their salaries. Through these cooperative efforts, the children's attendance in these schools increased from 27% to 79% during the first phase of the project.



Math champion from Phialokao village



A young boy named Locher, who just finished 5th grade in primary school in Phialokao village, is one of the children who has benefitted of a new school. His teacher noticed his talent in math and sent him to a competition in Muang Mai. Locher won the competition and was later sent to the provincial math competition, which he won as well. Finally, with support for his travel costs from World Renew, he joined the national math competition in

Vientiane and came home with the second prize. His success was rewarded with generous money prizes and a government scholarship to continue his studies in the city of Udomxay.

Locher's parents said that he carried his school books everywhere and showed interest in learning early on. His parents gave him a chance to go to school full time even though it

meant that they and Locher's siblings had to work harder in the fields because of his absence.

Only the brightest students succeed

While we were all excited about Locher's success, we were also reminded that simply having access to school does not guarantee equal opportunities for all children. Currently, only the very brightest ethnic-minority children such as Locher are able to perform well in school because they arrive speaking their indigenous language and must learn the national language, Lao, in which school is taught.



Locher's father told us that when he was a child, he went to the school in the same district. He spent seven years repeating the first two grades, and he still could not qualify to enter third grade based on his Lao language ability. Non-formal language education is given in the evening, in addition to the children's school day. Locher's sister dropped out of school during second grade because she was not able to keep up with the evening language classes.

Towards quality education

Besides improving people's access to education in remote areas of Laos, World Renew is committed to improve the quality of education so that more ethnic minority children will have an opportunity to succeed and enjoy their studies. An ethnic community school readiness pilot project is starting this year in Locher's village. The children's indigenous tongue will be used for their education and Lao will be taught as second language. This will help the children adapt to school and set a good foundation for them to be better equipped to succeed academically when they begin grade 1.

Story and pictures by Ari Vitikainen

#4. New Road, New Opportunities

A Story of Transformation from Laos

Until early 2014, the Khmu villagers in the Pong Yang region of Laos had to walk along narrow forest tracks skirting the mountainsides in order to visit each other. They rarely went to the center of their own district, Muang Mai, even though it is only a few kilometers away as the crow flies. The people in Hadja village, in the far south of the district, could walk about twenty minutes to a small farmer's market on the Ou River and get to another district center from there by boat. And although Sida village is closer to Muang Mai and people could get there by motorbike track, it was difficult to reach the other villages and the Ou River to the south from Sida. The most remote village of all was Tamo, in the middle, with no easy access in either direction. If the Ta-

mo villagers wanted to go anywhere, there was no choice but to walk around the mountains. This made things like getting medical treatment or buying and selling goods very difficult.

The isolation of the Khmu villagers in Pong Yang began to change when World Renew started working there in February 2014. The staff discussed with local leaders and villagers the potential impacts, both positive and negative, of getting road access. Everyone decided that the benefits would outweigh the risks. The villagers were enthusiastic about the prospect of having a road and agreed to do the work themselves on a cash-for-work basis, with support and technical guidance from World Renew. The project included providing the participants with



tools for digging, and each village organized itself into work groups and got started.

The difference was remarkable. The first time project staff went by motorbike to visit Hadja the road was under construction, and it was an extremely rough ride through a bamboo forest. When they

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finally arrived at their destination, part of the village fence had to be pulled down so that the bikes could be brought inside. The people said that a motorbike had



never come to their village before!

Now, the motorbike track network between the three vil-

lages is complete. There is a new entrance to Hadja, and eight families have already purchased their own motorbikes. The village leaders, Sanlong, Sianghung and Siangyan, reflected on the changes the road has brought to them. "Carrying things on our backs was difficult, as was

travel to other villages nearby. Now, there are people travelling between the villages every day. When someone got sick in the past, someone else from the village had to go and help the nurse carry their bag, otherwise the nurse wouldn't come. Now, we call, and they come!"

The villagers say that the new road has made life better than it was before because people can travel faster and easier. People feel more secure about staying in the village instead of moving away like some families had in the past. Farmers can also go to their upland fields by motorbike, which makes farming easier. There is better market access and villagers are also starting to think about making permanent gardens and growing cash crops as their main livelihood.

The people in Sida and Tamo have also improved their livelihood opportunities. They can use the road to get to Hadja and then walk a short distance down to

the farmer's market on the Ou River where they sell forest products and livestock. The prices at this market are better than they could get elsewhere, so, people from all of the villages in the area now trade at the farmer's market on the Ou River. Sanlong, the headman in Hadja, says, "After we made the big road to the village, the villagers were very happy. We then mobilized the people to build a motorbike track to get to the stream where we get water. In the future, we also plan to make a road to the Vang Kong Market, so that people can get to there more easily."

"For many years, I didn't think that there would ever be a road in our area, but we were finally able to help each other, and we made one by ourselves," said Mr. Sianghong, an elder in Hadja.

*Compiled by Sarah Whittaker
Information from Mr. Donsi,
Construction Team Leader*

#5. A Guiding Star

A Story of Transformation from Patharkmah Food Security Project in Bangladesh

The Eight Sisters' Farmer Club in Nongladew village, Meghalaya, Bangladesh, was formed in 2009 and has 31 members. The



members of the club are Garo people, a minority ethnic tribe. There are 145 households living in the project village.

In Nongladew, the residents work at farming, raising livestock, and fishery management. Generally, the farmers in this area have traditionally practiced slash-and-burn farming. The farmers in the Nongladew project have worked for nearly five years on to improve their crop yields using Sloping Agricultural Land Technology (SALT), System of Rice Intensification (SRI), kitchen gardening, composting, rain-water harvesting, and livestock rearing. In that time, the farmers have made good progress in improving their yields, and they are now getting good results from their farms. They have even become a model for other farmers nearby. Last year, the Eight Sisters Farmer Club joined the Iasnokhtilang Federation, and they are now active members in that larger arena as well.

When World Renew started working in Nongladew, farmers practiced "shifting cultivation" or "slash-and-burn" methods

to clear their land. The following year, the farmer would slash and burn another plot, leaving the previous year's land lying fallow. And in the past, this system worked because one rotation period lasted around nine or ten years, giving the land plenty of time to renew itself using this method of land clearing. However, the rotation period has become shorter recently due to an increase in population and corresponding reduction in the availability of land. Now, the rotation cycle is three to four years—too short for the land to sufficiently rejuvenate between cycles—and the soil is less productive as a result.

To adapt to the increasing pressure on the land in the area, World Renew's partners introduced the upland farmers in Nongladew to SALT as a sustainable alternative to shifting cultivation. The new technology can provide the residents with more food security throughout the year than the traditional method of paddy cultivation which provided families with only six or seven months of food each year.

In addition to SALT, the Nongadew project introduced local farmers to SRI. As the name indicates, it is specifically used for rice paddy cultivation. Since the introduction of SRI, 21 members of the



Eight Sisters have begun using the techniques, and a second method of cultivation is now being introduced to the farmers to help them further. Through these new practices, the farmers could secure a full year's supply of year food for their family.

Besides SALT and SRI, the farmers have also started growing kitchen gardens and livestock rearing. This has helped to supplement family nutrition and is also a source of income for the family.

*Written by: Cosmos Khonglah,
Edited by: Kohima Daring*

The Garos are the second largest indigenous ethnic group in Bangladesh and are spread across three districts in Assam and northwest Bangladesh.

The Garos are a matrilineal society, meaning that the youngest daughter inherits the property from her mother. Sons leave the parental home at puberty and after marriage, they live in their wives' parental home. Garos are more patriarchal in the way they operate. While the property of a Garo family is owned and passed on by the women, the men-folk govern the society and manage the family property.

The Garos are mainly Christians. The rest follow traditional animist religions. Being matrilineal, individuals retain the clan name of their mother as their 'title' (the local term for surname). First names are commonly Garo names but many are given "Christian" names instead.