Clean Water in Cambodia

By Rich Cromwell

Getting Water Right. A Holistic Approach

Since 2010, I have ridden my bike across most of the countries in southeast Asia. A roadside encounter with a young orphan boy introduced me to the distressing fate of orphans in Cambodia. Since then, I have made eight trips back to Cambodia. Friends and neighbors have made donations to support to my efforts to improve the lives of the Cambodian kids. In 2013, the Bath Rotary Club and District 7780 funded water and sanitation work at the Bridges orphanage in Cambodia through a Community grant.

In 2014, the Bath Rotary club applied for a District Grant which funded a community assessment in five villages. They were visited to study water and sanitation problems (which have trapped the villagers in a cycle of poverty) and to seek possible solutions.





Picture on Left: Lieb, my translator and surveyor extraordinaire, conducting an interview
Picture on Right: Kids at typical dug well in Smach

In the remote Cambodian villages that our survey team visited, we found 105 uninstalled latrine kits. The cement rings, cover plates and porcelain squat toilets were strewn about villagers' yards. Not one had been installed. The villagers had paid an NGO 'roadshow' the equivalent of a month's earnings for the latrine components. They had received one community hygiene class and installation instructions months before, but 89% of the villagers were still defecating in the open. What had gone wrong? This NGO had not engaged the villagers and the villagers had not bought into the program.

Our door-to-door 'Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP) Survey' taught us:

- 99% of the 503 households in the five villages had no latrines.
- In the dry season, 86% of the villagers depend on polluted ponds and a polluted river for drinking water, and only 33% of the families treat that water. This bleak situation is exacerbated by poor hygiene practices and improper water storage techniques.
- There were shocking deficits in basic hygiene knowledge.

All the above lead to diarrhea, urinary tract infections and gastro-intestinal illness that cripple the villagers financially (due to expensive and distant medical clinics) and cause kids to miss school and adults to miss the little work available.

Rotarians familiar with WASH issues are aware that this is not a one-dimensional problem. Because of this, our Rotary has decided to use a holistic approach to address all aspects of the WASH problem unlike the well-meaning, but shortsighted NGO mentioned above.

To date we have:

- Dug 19 wells in 3 villages
- Curtailed open defecation by supplying latrine materials for 100 latrines and promoting self-help installation from the villagers
- Installed 268 water filters
- Educated through intense WASH health and hygiene promotion.
- Assisted villagers in the installation of the 105 abandoned NGO latrine kits

The program has achieved remarkable results. Our community mobilizer reports that all infrastructure is still serving the community one year after installation.

Our holistic approach will end the cycle of poverty in this forgotten corner of Cambodia!







Top Left: Rich inspecting sole water source in Kandal
Top Right: Villager in Char being interviewed in her hut
Left: Survey crew from "Water for Cambodia" compiling data in Romea