



Developing ripples of sustainability through community water projects

Fall 2016 Newsletter

News on Trailblazer Foundation's Activities During the Past Quarter

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(Cover Photo of TF's recently completed secondary school in Sret Village, Cambodia)

Checking In Where The Action Is....

A Note From Trailblazer's Executive Director

Hello All,

I recently returned from a three-week visit to Cambodia, where I spent time checking in with Trailblazer's staff there on the ground. I went to help facilitate three significant additions to our operations in Siem Reap province: a new Program Manager, a new work truck, and the expansion of our newest program.

With respect to Trailblazer Foundation's new Program Manager, we recently hired Caitlin Plunkett, who's bio can be found lower down in this newsletter. Caitlin is in Siem Reap to take on the responsibilities I had when I lived there, managing the day-to-day operations of Trailblazer Foundation - including coordinating with our local affiliate Trailblazer Angkor. The main purpose of my trip was to introduce Caitlin to Trailblazer Angkor's staff and Trailblazer Foundation's business partners in Siem Reap, letting them know she is the new face of Trailblazer Foundation in Cambodia.



We also have a new truck, thanks to the support of Friendly Planet Travel and the fifty other donors who contributed a combined \$10,000 toward the purchase of a new work truck for our well drilling team. As my trip coincided with this purchase, I was pleased to be able to be part of that process.

Finally, Caitlin and I, along with Trailblazer Angkor's manager, Ratanak Sor, made good progress on designing the two new flagship projects for our Economic Development program (both of which we hope to fully launch in 2017):

- 1) providing a regional women's vocational center with the technical expertise and initial funding it needs to address its infrastructure, so the center can become sustainable and profitable;
- 2) launching a farmers cooperative, through which rural farmers would grow crops for the tourist market in Siem Reap City, selling those crops to cooperating restaurants and hotels in town.



Chris Coats with the staff of Trailblazer Angkor, our Cambodian affiliate organization, during her recent trip to Siem Reap.

As always, it was great to visit with our local staff, give them hugs and thanks for their great work, congratulate some of them on their recent marriages and children's births, and renew the connection Trailblazer has between our operations in Cambodia and the United States.

In this newsletter, you will read more about Caitlin, our new truck, and our new program activities, as well as other news about our work in Cambodia.

Trailblazer has experienced some significant and important growth in the last year, since the Board and I committed to leading the organization to its next level of capacity and impact. It was great to help usher in some of these changes during my trip to Cambodia.

Better yet, it was inspiring to see how these institutional and operational advancements are enhancing our work, and our results, on the ground - in the rural villages of Siem Reap province.

All the best,

Chris Coats

Food Security Program

Women, The Green Thumbs of the Family

At the core of Trailblazer's Food Security program is our agricultural trainings, through which our Cambodian staff, along with a specialist from the Ministry of Agriculture, instruct and mentor villagers on growing more diverse and greater amount of crops. And at the core of the villagers' homestead gardens are the women of the household.

Historically, in Cambodia, women have done most of the gardening at home, as men are typically out working for an income and/or collecting firewood. Women are primarily at home to care for the children, so it makes sense that they would also work the home garden.



Cambodian women at a recent Trailblazer-sponsored agricultural training on soil management.

The predominance of Cambodian women as home gardeners is reflected in the fact that women have made up ninety-two percent of the 100+ people who have attended our agricultural trainings thus far in 2016. These women have learned about soil management, horticulture, organic pesticides and fertilizers, and composting.

Equally indicative of this trend, all of the attendees of a recent workshop we held regarding our desire to launch a farmers' cooperative next year were women. This cooperative, which we expect to initiate in 2017, would provide these women (and their families) the opportunity to get a higher return on their agricultural pursuits, by selling crops desired by tourists to local restaurants and hotels (see story on Economic Development Program below).

For more information about our Food Security program, please visit our website.



Education Program

Construction of New Secondary School Completed, Inauguration by Year's End

As you may recall from reading our recent newsletters, last fall Trailblazer Foundation's Board of Directors re-doubled the organization's engagement in our Education Program, by committing to building a new school each year in Siem Reap province. We are pleased to announce that we just finished construction of this year's school, a secondary school for nearly 500 students, located in the village of Sret.

Our new school is replacing an existing structure, built in 1965, that had only three classrooms. The new building has six classrooms, which we have equipped with desks, chairs, and chalkboards. Sret Village showed its commitment to this \$80,000 project by raising the first \$3,000, a significant sum for a village of that size and economic capacity.



The new secondary school Trailblazer built this year.



The inauguration of this new school is scheduled for early November, with classes beginning to be held there in the new year.

When our school construction projects are completed, and as part of the inauguration ceremony, Trailblazer signs the school deed over to the appropriate government agency. The Cambodian government is then responsible for providing the teaching staff and Cambodian curriculum. Additionally, because each school becomes a public school, it qualifies for food support through the United Nations World Food Program. We expect to hold the inauguration ceremony on November 4th, with classes starting in the new school for the next school session.

A very big thanks goes out to The British Schools Foundation and Four Girls for Families for providing most of the funding for the construction of this new school. If you wish to help launch the new school (supplies, ceremonies, etc.), you can make a timely contribution on our website.

For more information about our Education program, please visit our website.



Economic Development Program

College Students Visit Siem Reap to Help Design Farmers' Cooperative Project

In our summer newsletter, we introduced two college interns from Indiana University, who were in Cambodia working on developing the framework for a Farmers' Cooperative that Trailblazer Foundation plans to launch in 2017. In late July, those interns passed their feasibility study onto another intern who was in Cambodia - Nicolette Ulrich, from the University of Oregon. Nicky is pursuing a dual master's degree in Nonprofit Management and International Studies (the latter with a focus on Global Food Security). This is a fitting combination of studies for someone helping Trailblazer develop the business plan for a new project regarding agriculture and economic development in Cambodia.



Intern Nicky Ulrich, at Trailblazer's office and work site in Cambodia.

The Farmers' Cooperative will enhance both the number of economic opportunities available to our partner villagers, as well as the return on investment participating farmers receive for their agricultural pursuits. Rural farmers will grow crops for the tourist restaurant market in Siem Reap City, and sell those higher value crops to cooperating restaurants. It is designed to leverage Trailblazer's Food Security trainings, yet be a new project within our Economic Development program.

Nicky has been interviewing interested restaurants about their need for lettuce, herbs, and certain vegetables, as well as interviewing interested farmers about their capacity to grow these crops. Also, she has been introducing our Cambodian staff and interested farmers to the best management practices for running such a cooperative.



Nicky watching a well being installed by our well-drilling team in Cambodia.

With the significant help of these interns, Trailblazer will have a plan in place that addresses the major challenges for such a cooperative: namely, enlisting enough farmers to provide a steady stream of product, growing crops faster, keeping the produce fresh for delivery, and establishing a transportation system to get the produce to the restaurants in a timely fashion.

We expect to launch a pilot project next year to test our best options for addressing these challenges, a process that will further inform our strategic/business plan for an eventual full implementation of the Farmers' Cooperative concept. Interestingly, at present, the farmers from our partner villages who have voiced the strongest interest in being part of this pilot project are all women (see Food Security Program article above).

For more information about our Economic Development program, please visit our website.

Staff/Board Profile

Meet Caitlin Plunkett, Our New Program Manager in Cambodia

In her introduction above, Chris Coats, Trailblazer's co-founder and executive director, discussed her recent trip to Cambodia. Chris' primary purpose for this trip was to welcome Trailblazer's new Program Manager, Caitlin Plunkett, to Siem Reap and her new position.

Caitlin brings to Trailblazer Foundation three years of work experience in Siem Reap, as a project coordinator for two international development projects. Most recently, she served as Program Manager for an education organization in Ethiopia. Specific to her time in Siem Reap, Caitlin helped establish a non-profit social enterprise for The Bridge of Life School, as well as managed all projects and staff in the South East Asia region for Travellers Worldwide (a volunteer recruitment and placement program).



Earlier in her career, Caitlin taught English to underprivileged children in Cambodia's capital city, Phnom Penh, and then assisted with building a school on the outskirts of the city (where she developed a curriculum, recruited and managed the volunteers, and led fundraising efforts for the new school).

Caitlin received her Bachelor of Science in Psychology in 2008, from Swansea University in the United Kingdom. From her years living in Cambodia, she has a working knowledge of the native language, Khmer - which, no doubt, will come in handy in her new position with Trailblazer.

You can learn more about the rest of our staff on our website.



Funding and Other News

Trailblazer Is On The Road Again

For the second time this year, we have successfully raised the \$10,000 needed to purchase a new work truck for our team in Cambodia. The first truck, which we bought last spring, replaced a nine-year old wreck used by our water filter team. The second truck, which we just purchased in September, replaced a seven-year old vehicle used by our well-drilling team.

Trailblazer would not have been able to buy either of these trucks without the generous support of many individuals, and one notable business – Friendly Planet Travel. Friendly Planet not only contributed \$6,630 total toward both new trucks, the international travel company also promoted our crowdfunding campaign to its clientele. As a result of Friendly Planet's outreach, we had forty-four new donors contribute to our truck campaign (a 25% increase in our overall donor base).

With these two new trucks, Trailblazer is back on the road again, driving hard toward our 2016 commitment to construct and deliver 400 water filters, drill 160 wells, and build 60 latrines, thereby providing improved health and sanitation for at least 2,500 Cambodians.



Trailblazer's new well-drilling truck, which will soon have our logo on it.

A Final Word....

As part of our recent crowdfunding campaign to raise funds for our new well-drilling truck, Trailblazer offered donors a suite of different incentives as thank you's. One of those incentives was the digital distribution and use of two-dozen photos (for screen saver images and the like), photos from throughout the Angkor Wat complex. These photos were taken by our own Tom Skeele, during his work visit to Siem Reap last January. Here are three of our favorites from that batch of Tom's best.

