

RTTC Women's Dorm Water & Sanitation Project

— Mission Accomplished

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U.S. Peace Corps

Battambang Regional Teacher Training Center Women's Dorm Water and Sanitation Project - Cambodia

Special points of interest:

- * **RTTC Enrollment for 2009-2010 School Year:** 738 teacher trainees
- * Year II: 375 trainees across 8 major subjects (211 females)
- * Year I: 363 trainees across 8 major subjects (198 female)
- * **RTTC Enrollment for 2010-2011 School Year:** 711 teacher trainees
- * Year II: 362 trainees across 8 major subjects (198 female)
- * Year I: 349 trainees across 8 major subjects (178 female)
- * Dropped only 1 trainee from last year's entering class to this year's Year II class—a male English major who took the entrance exam to the prestigious NIE upper secondary teacher training program in Phnom Penh
- * 38 teaching staff (12 female)
- * 5 English teacher trainers (1 female)
- * 20 non-teaching staff



Front and rear view of the project dorm. Residents pictured hanging laundry near dorm water/sewage pipes .

. On Sunday, May 08, 2011, 7:20 a.m. (Cambodia time), I forwarded an email request for donations from colleagues, friends and family to [Appropriateprojects.com](http://appropriateprojects.com) for my Battambang Regional Teacher Training Center Water and Sanitation Project [<http://appropriateprojects.com/book/export/html/577>]. I included photos of female teacher trainees crammed into a small bathroom space to wash clothes, take “bucket showers,” and use the one or two working in-ground toilets. Further, I shared the story of a female trainee who died last year, under circumstances that I continue to hypothesize were possibly somehow related to limited access to clean water and sanitation facilities. In sharing that story, I emphasized that I am not a medical doctor, nor am I privy to all of the details of that student's death. Nor is/was it my intent to assign blame, but rather that I work to find solutions to what I deem a related problem frequently encountered in Cambodia -- lack of access to potable water and related unsanitary living and toilet conditions. It *was* my hope, that by securing the funds to repair the water and sanitation situation at the women's dormitory at the RTTC - Battambang, we (donors and myself) could possible mitigate future health problems among the female trainees.

On Sunday, May 08, 2011, 8:55 a.m. (Cambodia being 12 hours ahead of my friends in Texas (U.S.A.)) **the first donation was made!** Our thanks to each donor for making a difference!

Thanks to Averill Strasser [mail@watercharity.org] and the rest of the group of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) in the U.S.A., at "Water Charity," for a structure to fund legitimate and critical water projects proposed by currently serving PCVs.

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A peek into one of the crowded dorm rooms



Cistern water used for laundry, bathing, brushing teeth, and flushing toilets...

**THE CONTEXT OF MY PEACE
CORPS SERVICE AT A
TEACHER TRAINING Ctr.**

In the 1970s the Vietnam War spilled into Cambodia. Chaos ensued. After years of civil war on April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge, a hardcore-Maoist group of Cambodians, led by Pol Pot (Brother #1), seized Phnom Penh and took control of the country, turning back the calendar to Year Zero in an effort to create a primitive-agrarian utopia free from the influence of foreigners or foreign governments, books, money, modern medicine, modern appliances, modern knowledge.

In April 1975, I was completing 9th grade, looking forward to high school. In 1978 the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia—I was completing 12th grade and began 4 years of undergraduate study. In 1980, the Cambodian Education system was restarted from zero. It is estimated that 80% of the teachers in Cambodia were killed during the genocide. In 1980, there were no factories to make paper, pencils, books, desks, chalkboards or chalk, etc. Students used wooden boards and the tips of burned sticks to write their lessons. My Cambodian Teacher Counterpart, Ms. Chea Phanet started 1st grade in 1980, at age 7. She registered herself, accompanied by a neighbor because her parents were busy working. The RTTC Battambang opened in 1980. The first cohort of Battambang RTTC TESL teacher trainers was not taught until 1999. Guerrilla warfare continued even after a 1991 peace agreement is signed in Paris, UN supervised free elections held in 1993. I completed a Masters in Social Work in 1984, and work as a psychiatric social worker, and enter a doctoral program in Fall 1990, graduating in Dec. 1993 and joining the faculty at the Univ. of Texas-Austin, Jan. 1994. In February 2009, Former Khmer Rouge leader Duch goes on trial in Phnom Penh on charges of presiding over the murder and torture of thousands of people as head of the notorious Tuol Sleng prison camp. In July 2009 I leave the U.S. for Peace Corps Volunteer service in Cambodia.



(Unedited) Letter from a Female Trainee and Dorm Resident



Unusable, this toilet space has become a storage area...



"Teacher Darlene, I think a face-bowl would go nicely right here. What do you think?"



Pre-repair. No water, but a good hot room for drying freshly washed clothes.

Dated: July 2011.

Dear: Darlene Grant; It has been a pleasure to work with U.S. Peace Corps. My best wishes to you for successful teaching in Texas state, happiness in family, good health, more clever, intelligence in your life, and the best one have a good journey. I would like to say thank you so much for your kindness that you work hard in pedagogy of Battambang province and my class (M2 + N2). All my generation thank you so much, love you so much, and I'll remember you for whole life. I expect that you will come back in Cambodia again to help us.

Sincerely

Say KimLeang (N2)

Trainee in Pedagogy of BB

I had worked closely with the M2 and N2 Teacher Trainees majoring in English teaching, for their two years at the RTTC. During the month leading up to my departure I was often asked "Teacher Darlene, why do you love Cambodia so much?" Having practice in honing my own teaching skills during my service at the RTTC, I've learned to elicit more information rather than immediately answer questions posed, because, my answer isn't going to address the real issue on the questioners mind—invariably, the real question or underlying comment is yet to be revealed. Certainly, I understand this as a social worker, but I have a new sense of clarity given this two-year cultural emersion. I haven't said "I love Cambodia," directly, so, I tend to respond to the question with "What do you see me doing or saying that makes you think I love Cambodia?" I would paraphrase the answers I usually get from trainees as follows: "You work hard to teach us to be good teachers. You help us with the English Club and with the English Debate Club. You bring us candy. You smile and laugh a lot. You make us happy to learn. We are not bored when you teach us. You like the food in Cambodia, especially ginger chicken. You help us to repair the toilets in the dormitory. You take photos with us and give us photos for free. You do a lot for Cambodia. You live with a Khmer family and love them. You love Cambodia."

The Short Story and Rationale for the Battambang Regional Teacher Training Center Water and Sanitation



I strongly believe community involvement is necessary to developing sustainable projects. I began talking to my Khmer teacher counterparts, colleagues and teacher trainees back in June 2010 about the challenges related to the loss of a trainee, and inquired about possible ways to help the RTTC community grieve and recover. During many conversations, my Khmer teacher counterparts and colleagues focused on the need to remediate the unsanitary conditions of both the women's and men's dorm facilities. One administrator focused broadly on his concern for the plight of the very poor students living in our dorm facilities without fans, in many instances without electricity, and with poor sanitation and water facilities. Of particular concern was the state of the bathrooms in the two dorm buildings on our small campus that house about 250+ young Cambodian women teacher trainees.



Of the two bathrooms serving the dorm in which the deceased trainee lived, the downstairs bathroom was the only one with a working, 2,000 liter, above-ground water cistern in the building. Further, of the four in-ground squatty toilets on the ground floor, almost one year later (2011), only two were in working condition. None of the toilets in the upstairs bathroom worked. *Meaning, in this dorm there was water from only one source available to approx. 114 young women to wash their faces, bathe, brush their teeth, hand-wash their clothes, and to use for flushing the two working in-ground toilets using a little bowl for dipping and pouring.* Further, this cistern water source is not safe drinkable water until boiled and/or otherwise sterilized/decontaminated. Once a week, dorm residents often pool their meager money to purchase 20 liter bottles of water for cooking and drinking.

Pictured above with my English Teacher Trainer Counter-Parts. Without their help and support, my primary and secondary projects at the RTTC would not have been successful.

Along with my Khmer teacher counter-part, Ms. Chea Phanet, I met with the Director of the RTTC and the contractor to develop a time table and plan to repair the water lines and the 2,000 gallon upstairs cistern and toilets, and the downstairs toilets. We also discussed plans to include one hand washing station upstairs, and one downstairs that would possibly be external to the often crowded bathroom facilities. The idea for these stations was driven by a desire to vary the options available to these young women to wash their hands and brush their teeth, hopefully lessening the incidental and unintentional spread of germs.

RTTC Beginning of the Year Parent Orientation



Oct. 11, 2010. At the beginning of each school year I join the parent orientation programs. Seated at the table of honor facing hundred of parents, I smile a lot as parents from remote villages stare and point, exclaiming in loud whispers about "the black" at the table. I hear "She's dressed like Khmer. Why?" I smile. I listen to speeches by the director, assistant directors, and often a high official from the Provincial Office of Education or the larger national level Ministry of Education. A monk, who happens to have a sibling as a member of the teacher trainee student body, is always present to make a long speech. Did I mention all ceremonies and faculty/staff meetings are conducted totally in Khmer?? Yup. Everyone's always amazed at how much I understand what takes place. Thank goodness I pay attention to body language, context, and the increasingly large list of Khmer words I understand. What struck me most were the short speeches by parent representatives from each of the 7 provinces student trainees hale from. After learning about the donation accessed each family for the "free" education at the RTTC, the father in the top photo here says in Khmer "Do not confuse me with a rich man . I am just a poor porridge seller. I cannot contribute "buan mund (40,000 Cambodian Riel)" (that's about \$9.76 U.S.) to help decorate the school." It seems he continued "...and poor parents like most of us in this room hope not being able to "donate" will not make it hard on our children to attend school here. We appreciate that this education is free. That is important to us."



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Project Results



Daily 6:45 a.m. flag raising ceremony.

To Project Donors: Barbara White, Sarah Weddington, Deana Williams, Kathryn Meikle, John & Rae Dollard, Namkee Choi, Ellen Spiro, Terry Newman, Diana & Mary DiNitto, Barbara Arnold, Lynn Wallisch, Mary Mulvaney, Susan Heinzelman, Paul Woodruff, Susan Bradshaw, Scott Seidel, Pamela Schott, Liz Nowicki, Joni Jones, and Juanita Chinn.

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Project Results (see photos next story):

I wish that all the water and sanitation related challenges that I witnessed or experienced while serving as a volunteer in Cambodia could be resolved as easily and expeditiously as the one described in this newsletter report to donors, family, friends and colleagues back home. In less than 2-weeks of the commitment of the funds, there was running water in the upstairs cistern, and all the in-ground toilets in the dorm were working. Without drama, without fanfare....fixed...working...and happily being used by the teacher trainee dorm residents.



The older of the two women's dorms on the RTTC campus. Begs the question, what's next?

Closing Comments and Good News:



My close of service date was July 12, 2011. Heading directly home to the U.S., I flew out of Phnom Penh that night. My primary priority for my last few months of service was to spend every possible moment preparing the Year II English teacher trainees for the national final teaching exam. I co-taught teaching methodology, led English Club, and developed a Parliamentary Debate Club for years. And I watched three cohorts TESL teacher trainees grow from shy to bolder in their English skills. I watched them grow from unsure in front of the classroom, to surer; from students into teachers. What a gift to be a part of their growth. For most, I was the only foreigner native English speaker they had ever met and interacted with, and for a few, who will graduate and be posted at distant village schools, maybe the only foreigner native speaker they ever will interact with. Amazing! Isn't it?



My secondary priority was to complete all school and community based projects and to say goodbye to all the friends I had made during my two years serving in Cambodia. Running water and working in-ground toilets. Check! But, I plumb ran out of time to follow-through with the plan to oversee building/installation of "hand washing stations" at the dorm, prior to my departure. I am happy to report, however, that the project didn't fall apart with my departure. Each of the two bathrooms now has a 3-sink hand washing station, installed less than a month after I had returned to the U.S. And, using my project as leverage, the director of the RTTC reports she has a commitment from the World Bank to build 16 new toilet stalls within the next year, that would provide safer more sanitary facilities to the other women's dorm on campus as well. I am beside myself with appreciation!!!

