

CAO Success Story: Healthy Soils for Healthy Rice



In the heart of Prey Touch Commune, a young agricultural officer, Proeurng Sela, is working to change the way farmers cultivate their rice fields. With a degree in horticulture from Battambang, two years of NGO experience, and a solid training from the Ministry of Agriculture she has the knowledge, but earning the trust of experienced farmers is another challenge entirely.

“In our commune, people are frustrated with declining yields,” Sela explains. “They experiment with different fertilisers, but without success. I learned about soil texture, soil health and organic fertilisers at university and in the training for CAOs, so I had some ideas for healthier soils. But farmers don’t always listen to me. They say, ‘I’ve been growing rice longer than you’ve been alive!’”

Growing Trust: How Organic Fertiliser Transformed a Cambodian Rice Field

Rather than argue, Sela knew the key was to show, not tell. She worked with a local farmer, Phuy Hing, who was desperate about his declining yields, and a friend of her family. Sela observed that the rice roots in his fields were not fully developed and still too small to absorb nutrients. His neighbours already mocked him, saying he had forgotten to fertilise. But just within a few days after following Sela’s advice and applying organic fertiliser, the rice leaves turned greener, and the roots became visibly stronger.

Word spread quickly. Farmers who once laughed at Hing were now asking, “How did you do that?” Seeing the transformation, first his mother, brother, and father-in-law adopted the innovative technique.

Sela is optimistic. “If we want farmers to believe us, we need to demonstrate success. After that, they spread the news themselves. That makes my job easy.”

Today, farmers in Prey Touch are turning to organic solutions, and a young agricultural officer is proving that change starts with trust—and a little patience

And just as Sela is serving her native commune many more local CAOs are doing the same across the country. Each and every Cambodian commune will be supported by this entirely new generation of young and well educated CAOs — of which about 40 % are women. And they are out in the field, close to the farmers and ready to collaborate with Development Partners and their programs.

CAOs – An Opportunity for Development Partners for Cooperation

The CAO’s continuous presence at grass roots level helps in supporting healthy soils and strong crops.

The rice roots before CAO Sela’s intervention:



and after:



**Ministry of Agriculture,
Forestry and Fisheries**

Healthy Soils for Healthy Plants

Background: The 6th Priority Policy of the Royal Government of Cambodia:

In the current 7th legislative term, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) embarks on the ambitious endeavour to create a stable and sovereign framework for future agricultural growth. With the 5th and the 6th Priority Policy the Government promotes production, marketability and price stability for agricultural products, establishes a nationwide network for agricultural extension by deploying Commune Agricultural Officers (CAOs) all over the country, and develops Modern Agricultural Cooperatives (MAC).

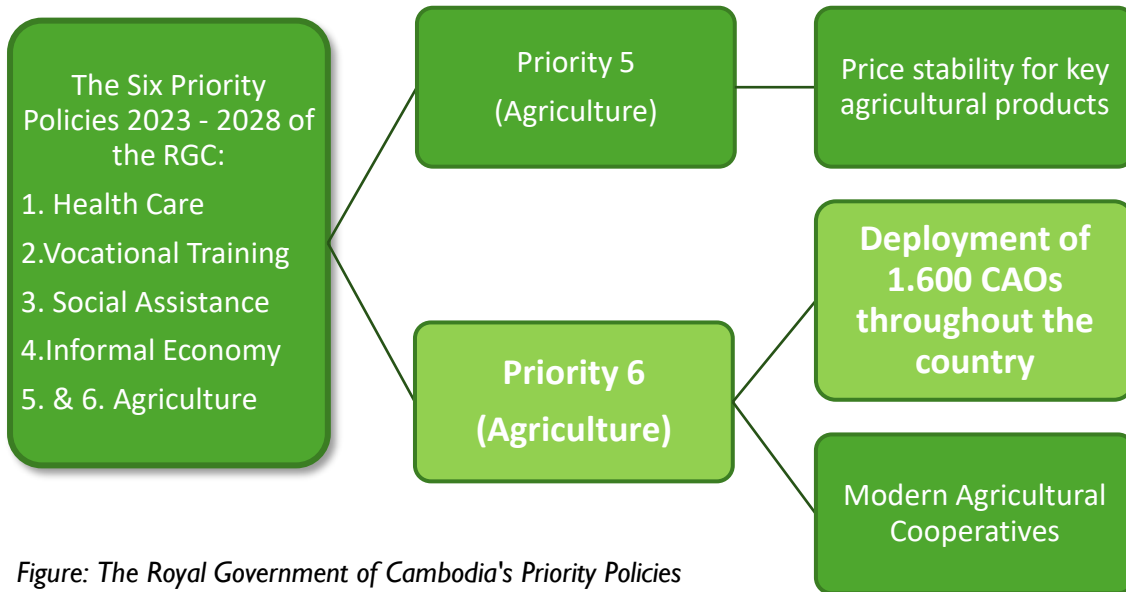


Figure: The Royal Government of Cambodia's Priority Policies

Within the 6th Priority Policy, a nationwide agricultural extension structure aiming for a total of 1.600 Commune Agricultural Officers (CAOs) covering all agricultural communes in the country is envisaged. And the structure is rapidly taking shape: For the time being (April 2025) a total of 1.250 CAOs have taken up duty, the first group started serving their communes more than a year ago. By late 2025 the final group of 350 CAO will complete the picture.

**Chhoeut Chean,
Phuy Hing,
and CAO Proeurng Sela
(from right to left)**



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