

CAO Success Story:

Ensuring Healthy Meals for Cambodia's Schoolchildren

In the quiet, sun-drenched fields of Kouk Mon Commune, Oddar Meanchey Province, the local Commune Agricultural Officer (CAO) Loeung Toren walks between rows of lush green vegetables, carefully inspecting the leaves for any signs of pests or chemical residues. His role is crucial in supporting the World Food Programme's (WFP) Home-Grown School Feeding Program. Every morning, children across the region receive nutritious breakfasts at school, and Toren's work ensures that Kouk Mon's pupils get meals which are both healthy and safe.

WFP recently adapted the school feeding program to source home-grown vegetables locally whilst ensuring quality control and supporting local farmers. However, small-scale farmers in the region often used chemical pesticides and herbicides to protect their crops. Toren and many colleagues in the region were trained by WFP and now play a key role in this transition. They educate farmers on sustainable farming techniques, conduct routine checks, and ensure that the vegetables supplied to local schools are safe and healthy.

At Kouk Mon Primary School, Principal Thout Poeuy has seen a remarkable improvement in his 300 students' well-being. With daily nutritious meals, their concentration has increased, and school attendance has improved. "Before, we could not always be sure where our vegetables came from or how they were grown," Poeuy says. "Now, thanks to Toren's efforts, I have peace of mind knowing that our students are eating safe food."

Toren's work extends beyond farm inspections: By fostering trust between schools and local farmers, he has helped create local economic circuits with a small but regular income for the participating farmers. One such farmer, Pouch Poeurch, regularly provides tomatoes, morning glory, pumpkin and other vegetables to local schools and he recalls how this practice changed his economic situation "Now, I can sell my vegetables to the school program on a daily basis, and I earn a small but stable and regular income while keeping school children safe. Thanks to the CAO!"

And just as Toren is serving his commune, CAO Miei Moeurt is doing likewise in neighbouring Ampil Commune, as are many more local CAOs doing across the region. Soon each and every Cambodian commune is 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 more 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:

- Safe & healthy diets at schools
- Trainings in sustainable farming techniques
- New and regular income sources for farmers
- Advancing local economic circuits
- Direct & local marketing



**Ministry of Agriculture,
Forestry and Fisheries**

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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).

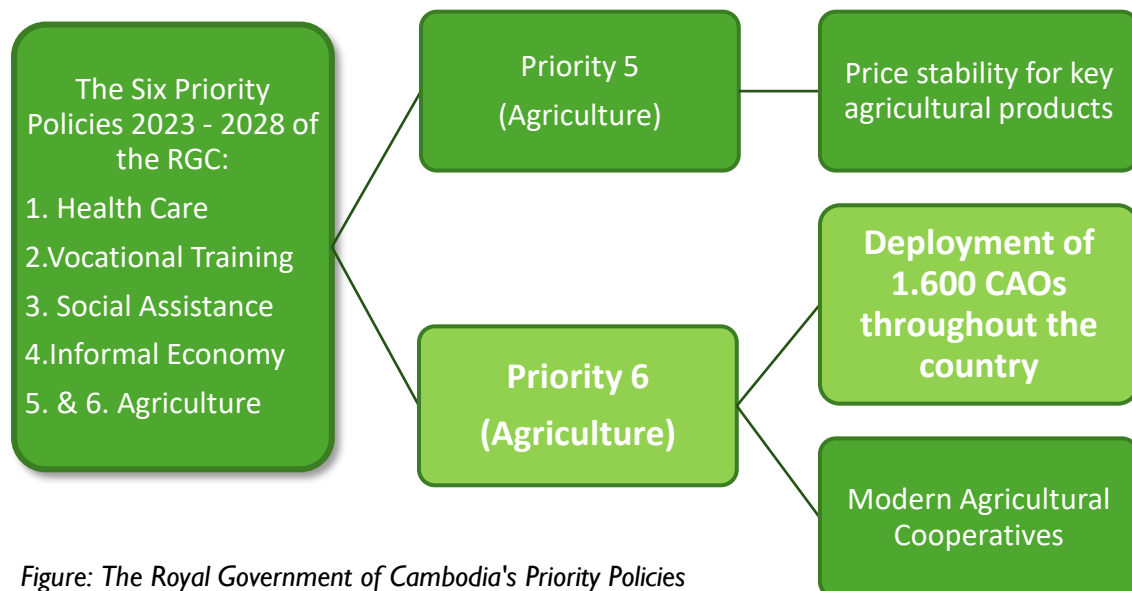


Figure: The Royal Government of Cambodia's Priority Policies

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.



CAO Loeung Toren



CAO Miei Moeurt



Kouk Mon Primary School



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