

CAO Success Story: Healthy Soils for Healthy Plants



In the heart of Anlong Veng Commune, Commune Agricultural Officer (CAO) Chhoeun Chhailin has made it her mission to empower local farmers, improve soil health, and foster sustainable agricultural practices.

Agriculture in Anlong Veng is challenging. Main cash-crops is cassava for the Thai export market, but after years of continuous use more and more fields are facing soil depletion which is leading to sharp drops in yields. Fortunately, the Royal Government of Cambodia recruited a local woman with deep knowledge of the commune and the local agriculture and an even deeper passion for sustainable farming techniques.

Chhailin, leveraging the knowledge she gained during her studies in Thailand, has introduced a game-changing approach—mixing organic fertilizer with chemical fertilizer to revitalize exhausted soils. Mrs. Niv Kim (see picture above), a cassava farmer in Thanol Rak village, has witnessed the benefits firsthand: While her relatively young cassava fields already produced a healthy 30 tons per hectare, the introduction of bio-fertilizer increased her yield to an impressive 40 tons per hectare.

During her lunch breaks or after work Chhailin often supports Ta Yom, a visionary local entrepreneur producing high-quality seed starting soil. Recognizing the potential of his mix of rice husk biochar, cow dung, and compost, she stepped in to support him in marketing, accounting, and transitioning from a small family-run business to a legally recognized enterprise, benefiting numerous farmers in the region. One of them, Mr. Heng Sengly, produces sweet melons and shares: “Before Ta Yom started his production, we had to buy imported seed starting soil from Thailand. Now, the soil is much cheaper, it is natural, and it gives very good results”.

Chhailin’s efforts extend beyond immediate agricultural improvements; she is fostering a long-term vision of sustainability. Her engagement for organic and locally sourced inputs is strengthening the agricultural community and local economic circuits, reducing dependency on imports, and promoting environmental stewardship. Her work exemplifies the power of grassroots leadership and the profound impact of a dedicated individual.

And just as Chhailin is serving her native commune many more local CAOs are doing the same across the country. 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 Development Partners and their programs.

The CAO’s continuous presence at grass roots level helps in supporting:

- Revitalization of depleted soils
- Increasing cassava yields
- Improved production of sweet melons
- Local production of organic soils.
- Strengthening locally sourced inputs and advancing local economic circuits



CAOs – An Opportunity for Development Partners for Cooperation

**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).

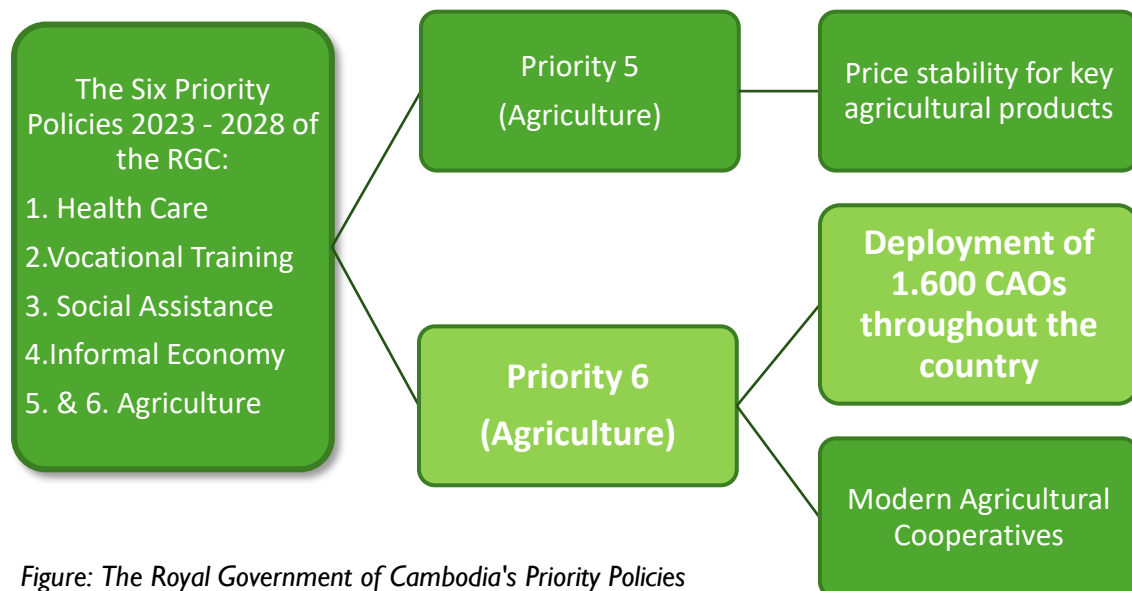


Figure: The Royal Government of Cambodia's Priority Policies

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.



CAO Chhoeun
Chhailin



Ta Yom and
his wife