

# CAO Success Story

## How Hem Chetra 'Cooperates out of Poverty'



In the heart of Svay Rieng, in the small commune of Trapeang Sdau, a quiet revolution is taking place: one led by young family father Hem Chetra, a visionary pioneer and the head of the local producer group for synchronised cultivation in Trapeang Chneang village. His journey from farmer to leader has not only transformed his life but also uplifted his fellow villagers.

For generations, the villagers of Trapeang Chneang rely on traditional rice varieties such as Krasaing Teab for their subsistence. These varieties are known for their resistance to pests, minimal chemical requirements, and are usually grown over a period of 6 months in the wet season. In the dry season IR 504, OM 5451 and Saen Kro Ob 01 (SKO) varieties are produced within 3 months as cash crops. But prices fluctuate and in some years the income from the sales barely covers the investments.

This was the situation in the commune when CAO Sorn Sary took up office as a Commune Agricultural Officer (CAO) in Trapeang Sdau in April 2024. Recognizing the need for a better linkage to the rice markets, Sorn Sary joined forces with farmer Hem Chetra and formed a producer group for synchronised cultivation, a novel method in which the same variety of paddy is planted and harvested at the same time, bringing together the fields of many farmers. Hem Chetra's leadership and the CAOs technical inputs inspired others to join, and together, they achieved remarkable results:

One of the group's major breakthroughs came with the wet season harvest. On October 26, 2024, they successfully sold 20.5 tons of Krasaing Teab rice in one go to the Rainbow Company. By selling collectively, they managed to negotiate a better price—earning 1,015 Riel per kilogram instead of the usual 950 Riel. This seemingly small increase translated into an additional 333 USD for the farmers group, a significant boost to their livelihoods.

The success continued into the dry season. On November 10, 2024, the group sold 28 tons of IR ML202 rice at a price of 950 Riel per kilogram, up from the standard 900 Riel. This deal secured them an extra 350 USD in earnings. CAO Sorn Sary's initiative in combination with Hem Chetra's commitment maximized the farmer's profits and strengthened their bargaining power in the market.

Beyond financial gains, CAO Sorn Sary's efforts have fostered a spirit of unity and resilience among the farmers. Sary's journey is just at the beginning, but his achievements already illuminate a path toward a brighter future for his commune—one harvest at a time.

Just as Sorn Sary is serving his commune, many more local CAOs are doing the same across the nation. Soon, every Cambodian commune will be supported by this entirely new generation of young, well-educated CAOs—about 40% of whom are women. 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:

- Producer groups for synchronized cultivation
- Improving linkages to markets
- Increasing farmer's bargaining power
- Fostering trust and cooperation amongst the farmers
- Increasing incomes from the collective sale of produce.



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).

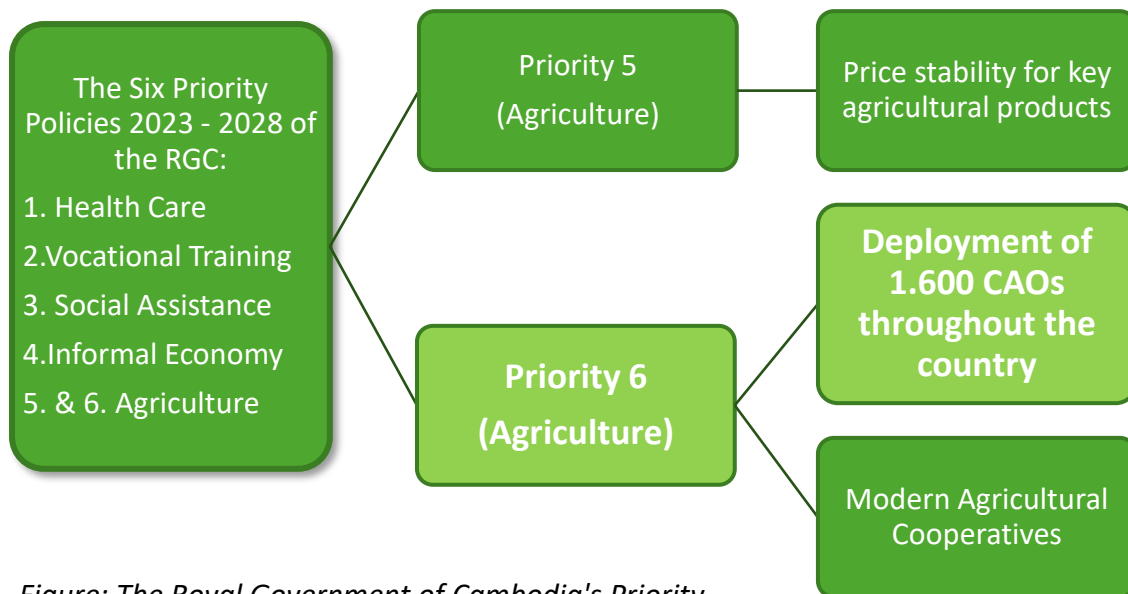


Figure: The Royal Government of Cambodia's Priority

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.

### Farmer Hem Chetra, the CAO, and the Producer Organisa-



CAO Sorn Sary

