



# SUCCESS STORY

## Going from strength to strength

Mrs. Ou Sipa happily sits down to talk to us about her membership of the *Strey Smakchet (Women's Voluntary) Saving Group* while waiting for a load of fish to be delivered. She explains that the group operates differently to most other groups as, although the members contribute weekly, the entire group only meets on a monthly basis. The 30 members (22 women and 8 men) from Sipa's community are required to each save a minimum of 7,000 riel (\$1.75) weekly, which is pooled and used to provide low-interest loans to members. Sipa has saved 137,000 riel (\$35) in the four months since she joined the group, and the group has already accumulated four million riel (\$1,000). She comments that she is "very happy to see the members saving and paying back their loans regularly."

Working in collaboration with Pact and with financial support from Chevron Overseas Petroleum (Cambodia) Limited (COPCL), the Khmer Women's Cooperation for Development assisted the members to start the *Strey Smakchet Saving Group* in February 2013. The "Women's Empowerment and Health Promotion" project supports village saving and loan opportunities with a focus on women's empowerment and leadership. The project also promotes education on health issues and provides training on relevant business skills.

A quietly confident and experienced businesswoman, Sipa has her own fishing boat and also buys fish from local fishermen. She steams the fish in baskets, and the baskets are then transported by taxi to be sold to customers in other provinces. In the past, she could only afford to buy the wood, salt and baskets that she needed for a day or two. Recently, she received a loan from her saving group, which allowed her to buy good dry wood in bulk, order the baskets in advance and also buy large quantities of salt. Since obtaining the loan, her business runs much more efficiently, earns higher profit margins and her income has increased as a result. With the extra income, Sipa's family now has enough food and they can "buy a sack of rice instead of buying rice each day," also saving money. Her 17-year-old son and 13-year-old daughter can attend a better school, and she is glad that they are getting a better education.



*Mrs. Ou Sipa, 50 years old, pictured with the baskets used in her fish-steaming business. She is a member of a women's empowerment group, one of many created by Pact in collaboration with the Khmer Women's Cooperation for Development. With financial support from Chevron Overseas Petroleum (Cambodia) Limited (COPCL), the "Women's Empowerment and Health Promotion" project promotes saving and loan opportunities with a focus on women's empowerment, health and literacy.*

*Story reported by Kate McKinna,  
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