



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

SUCCESS STORY

Keeping Drinking Water Safe from Floods

USAID well upgrades are protecting drinking water for 5,200 families that are susceptible to annual flooding in Cambodia.



Alison Lapp, USAID

A woman in Dong village, Kampong Thom Province, pumps water from a community well that was improved with USAID support.

Working with World Vision, USAID also distributed water purification tablets to nearly 3,400 vulnerable families, which many are storing to immediately treat drinking water during the next seasonal flood emergency.

As floods in Cambodia reached waist height in September and October 2011, inundating fields and destroying crops, the last thing one might have expected people to need was more water. However, Mr. Thouk Reth was one of many in the affected community who found himself surrounded by a world submerged yet wishing for water of a different kind—safe drinking water for himself, his wife, and their two children.

In total, floods in 18 of Cambodia's 24 provinces in the fall of 2011 killed 247 people, affected 1.5 million others, and destroyed nearly 10 percent of the nation's crops. In many areas, floodwaters also flowed into low-lying and uncovered community wells, contaminating families' only source of drinking water and increasing the risk of waterborne disease transmission. To prevent this problem from recurring during Cambodia's annual flood season, USAID upgraded community wells in the most affected provinces of Kandal and Kampong Thom through World Vision, raising wells as much as 10 meters above ground and equipping them with concrete covers and hand pumps to dispense the water protected within. The water supply for more than 5,200 households is now safer from flood contamination, thanks to the project.

Approximately 13 families draw water from the upgraded well in Reth's village in Prasath Ballang District of Kampong Thom Province, and none have experienced recent stomach sickness, he noted. "I know [USAID] could not give us each a well, but it's the same as if you had because there is enough clean water in this one for us all to share," he said.

As in other communities that received well rehabilitations, residents of Dong village, where Reth lives, pitched in to help elevate the well's base through USAID-sponsored temporary employment. Other such cash-for-work initiatives included cleaning schools and repairing flood-damaged roads, projects that provided needed income to families that lost crops to the floods. The work allowed affected communities to participate in upgrading their shared wells, making the improvements more than just a gift, but also a commitment to safeguarding drinking water in flood-prone areas shared among USAID, World Vision, and, most importantly, the families that use the wells.