

## **HOPE VILLAGES BUILDING LIVES**

Sdock Chrey Village at Kampong Speu grew out of a forest clearing. When the team from Hope Villages and Hemisphere Fund first visited it in 2011, the 1000 hectare site had some settlers living in makeshift mud huts with straw roofs and plastic coverings for walls. It was a pathetic sight.

Following the conclusion of an MOU with the Cambodian authorities, Hope Villages embarked upon a funds raising exercise to give hope to the villagers – proper homes, education for the children, clean drinking water, and sustainable activities for living.

Today, three years later, there are 116 families on the site, each allocated with a 1 hectare farmland and a residential site. The village, called Hope Villages Zero Carbon Resettlement Village also has a community centre where young children learn English language. 2015 will see the completion of a village mosque.

The Hope Villages team visited ten of the homes during the December 2014 Goodwill Visit. One third of the concrete homes have been built. More are in the process of construction, but additional funds (\$290,000) are required to complete about 70 more homes. One villager said to us during our visit to her home – “I would like to stay here for the rest of my life.”

Before they settled at the site, these villagers were homeless and landless, many living off the city streets. The new homes have offered hope to them and inspired visions to create a better life for them and their children. A man in his 30's operates a small provision shop in front of his home together with his wife. His plan is to have a mobile grocery store using a converted truck to ply his wares to factory workers in the nearby town. His 5-year old daughter attends the Hope Nursery. When asked what he would like his daughter to do – he proudly declared that his wish for her to become a doctor. Our efforts in giving him a sustainable life has dared him to have a big dream for his daughter.

Another villager grew moringa plants. He is on a programme initiated by MKT (Mrom Khmer Thormacheat) where moringa seeds are given to the villager and in exchange when the plants grow in about 3 months, the leaves (a superfood widely demanded by health food makers) are sold to MKT. More villagers will be participating in this lucrative programme.

The new settlers are keenly waiting for their first crop of rice to be harvested – again through a programme worked jointly with CEDAC, a local NGO involved in agricultural training.

As one villager puts it – “life is peaceful here, with so much greenery and away from the stresses of living on the streets.”