

Human Capital Project

2010 September trip report¹

For 2010, the official HCP trip to Cambodia went for three weeks (Sunday 5 Sept to Monday 27 Sept), and only included John Humphreys. An invitation was sent to interested parties, but timing issues meant that some people had to pull out. The trip included stops in Bangkok, Battambang, Phnom Penh, Kampong Cham and Kratie.

Battambang (BB)

The most interesting piece of news from BB was that HCP now has its first graduate – Nhim Chamnan. After graduating a degree in banking, Chamnan has gone on to work as a data recorder for Vision Fund Cambodia, which is the micro-finance lending arm of World Vision. She earns \$150/month, which is a good graduate wage for BB, and works from 7:30am to 5pm (1.5 hours for lunch), Monday to Friday. Her manager is Ros Srey Touch (f).

According to her contract with HCP, Nhim was to pay 10% of her income for the next six years. However, she asked (and HCP agreed) to pay 20% for three years. Consequently, she is transferring \$30 to HCP every month, starting in early October. As of late November, Nhim had paid \$60 back into HCP. This is the start of HCP's internal revenue stream, and is a significant milestone for the organisation.

HCP work in BB was done between Wednesday 8th of September to Thursday 16th of September. This included a meeting with previous students (14/09), an information session (13/09), individual interviews (14/09), a contract signing ceremony (15/09), setting up a Cambodian bank account, and making payment arrangements for Nhim Chamnan.

The main UME-BB contacts were Raya (who works at the "American corner") and Sam An (who had just been promoted to Vice-President). Phann Sophon no longer works at UME, but he is still an occasional lecturer at the university and takes an active interest in HCP. Both Raya & Sam An were a huge help and HCP owes them a debt of gratitude.

While in BB I was asked to speak to several hundred new students who were coming for their first day. I explained the work of HCP, how we work closely with the University of Management & Economics (UME), and how I have found UME to be a professional and high-quality university.

I was also asked to record a radio advert for the university, explaining the work of HCP and promoting UME. Apparently, the TV advert that was recorded last year was never shown due to cost.

We had about ten students come to the information session, and six who came for interviews (a few were rejected before the interview because they received an "F" at school, and one applicant didn't show up). Of those, five were offered HCP financing.

The five new HCP students are He Davit (f, Management), Ly Chanritthy (m, IT), Soeun Sim (m, English), Sung Nann, (m, English), and Van Vibol (m, Management). Of these, He Davit was a difficult choice. Her school grades were low and she wasn't impressive in the interview, but she was chosen to maintain a balance between the sexes. Further details about the students are available in the appendix.

¹ written 10/12/10

The meeting of continuing students was attended by Chhporn, Vechhai, Chamroeun, Pisith, Sophy, Nybunthana, Puthearthy, Nga, Sidet, Saloeth, Saloun, and Sophon. Missing was Chan Thin, Sochea and Saroum, though on advice from UME all continued to receive HCP financing.

One important change was that Yourn Nga (3rd generation) was able to pay for one year himself, and so required one less year of HCP financing. All students seemed to be happy and doing well. Besides studying, some had jobs -- Sidet was teaching, Chhporn was working as school security, Sophon was working for the district government, Vecchai was going to start teaching soon, and Thana was working as a community volunteer.

Chim Saroum was able to come later for an individual meeting. Despite having been involved with HCP for the past three years, he still showed signs of not fully understanding how HCP financing worked. This has been a consistent theme with many people in Cambodia. Given the current state of education in Cambodia and the innovative nature of HCP financing, it is necessary to constantly repeat how the project works.

Saroum has just started his 4th (and final) year of his English degree, and also has started at a new job for Nokia (which is why he was unable to come to the earlier meeting). His job pays about \$120/month and he was consequently encouraged to use his wages to pay for half of the coming year, so as to reduce his future HCP burden.

HCP tuition fees at UME-BB covered two people from the 1st generation (\$500), three people from the 2nd generation (\$675), nine people from the 3rd generation (\$1800) and five people from the new 4th generation (\$1250). The total was US\$4225.

Kampong Cham (KC)

HCP work in KC was done between Monday 20th of September to Friday 24th of September. The main help was from Srun Sarak, though Muon Veasna continued to show an interest and help where he could. The HCP owes both of these men a debt of gratitude, and especially Sarak (and his staff) for coordinating all the necessary information.

While the class of 2008 continues to perform well, the class of 2009 has had some set-backs. Sung Vuch Leang (f) quit during the 1st semester (HCP received a ½ year credit for the cost of the 2nd semester). The reason given was that her parents live 1.5 hours away from KC and they could no longer afford to support her living in town. She had no job.

Also, Nith (m) decided to leave university and move to Sihanoukville to work for a health clinic owned by somebody in his extended family. His brother came in for a meeting to discuss the possibility of Nith coming back to university later, and how he might be able to start repaying his HCP obligations. It was agreed that Nith should start to meet his obligation of 2.5 years of HCP payment as soon as he has a regular income.

A third 2009 student, Lihor (f), will continue at UME-KC but is now able to support herself. There was some discussion about whether she should "buy out" her obligations, or wait until she graduates and pay her obligations then. She decided not to "buy out" her obligations.

The information session was very well attended, with over 30 people (including parents). After explaining the project, sixteen people came in for interviews. In the end, HCP added seven students from KC – Son Kunthea, Sea Sok Kong, Srun Sok Cheat, Sorn Sirey Sambo, Hoeun Kim Haing, Chhuong Malin, and Oeun Chan Thoeun. Three other offers were made, but those students withdrew – two got alternative financing, and one (Boramy) was unable to come because her mother was scared to have her living so far from home. That was a very sad story. See the appendix for details about all the interviews.

There was some confusion about the correct tuition fees for HCP students. After some discussions with Muon Veasna and other UME-KC staff it was agreed that HCP would pay \$225/year for each year, which is slightly different to the normal tuition schedule. Based on this agreed tuition fee, it was determined that the 2009 payment for 3rd generation students was too high by \$25/student, and this money was subsequently credited to HCP.

HCP is also coordinating the delivery of dozens of economic textbooks, collected by the staff at the economics department at the University of Queensland. Some books were taken over during the trip, and the rest of the books are being shipped to UME-KC. HCP tuition fees at UME-KC came to \$2465.

HCP tuition fees at UME-KC covered four people from the 2nd generation (\$900), two people from the 3rd generation (\$450), and seven people from the new 4th generation (\$1575). The total was US\$2925. However, HCP also received \$125 credit for previous over-payment (5 * \$25) as well as one semester credit for Sung Vuch Leang (\$110), so the payment was \$2690.

Travel costs & other activities

At the time of travel, there were no return flights directly from Brisbane to Cambodia, so it was necessary to go via Singapore, Malaysia or Thailand. For 2010 the trip was done via Thailand. Return flights from Brisbane to Bangkok were A\$1100. Travel to Cambodia, and travel within Cambodia, was done via cheap traveller bus (US\$5 – US\$20 per trip). Accommodation was in cheap hotels or traveller guesthouses (US\$5- US\$10 per night).

Total cost of the trip would have been more than \$2000, none of which was financed from HCP donors. All donations go directly to the cost of tuition.

The two notable non-HCP stories were visiting the town of Kratie, which is famous for the fresh Irrawaddy dolphins that swim nearby in the Mekong River, and playing half a game of soccer for a Cambodian team that plays in the national 3rd division (managed by UME-KC part-owner Muon Veasna).

Appendix: Students interviewed

UME-KC

Keng Makora (m) – C96. Accounting. 19. Very poor impression at the interview and couldn't understand the project. Finished school in 2010 and his alternative plan is to apply for scholarships elsewhere and help his family. His parents are rice farmers, living 2 hours from KC, though he has relatives in town. Wants to work in a bank (\$180/month). REJECTED.

Malin (f) – D76. English. 18. Spoke some English already. Finished school in 2010 and alternative plan would be to stay home. Parents are rice farmers about 1 hour from KC, and she would be the first in her family to go to university. Heard about HCP from her neighbour. Has an uncle in KC to live with. ACCEPTED.

Sambo (m) – E53. HRM. 19. 30 minutes late to the interview, and no 2nd page on the application. Father has retired and three siblings work on rubber tree plantation (\$70/month, very hard work). Finished school in 2010. Heard about HCP from a leaflet about the university. ACCEPTED. (Initially rejected, but accepted after other students pulled out.)

Kim Haing (m) – D87. Economics/Banking. 22. Father is dead and mum is poor farmer (with 2 pigs). Live 30 minutes from KC, would come to university by share moto with friends. Finished school in 2009 and spent 2010 working in a security job (\$75/month). Alternative plan is to get another job, maybe in a factory. Wants to work in a bank (\$300/month). Heard about HCP from Sambo's dad. Seems to understand the project. ACCEPTED.

Sokkong (f) – D89. Finance/Banking. 22. Father dead, five siblings. Works as a tailor (\$4/shirt, \$5/pants). Finished school in 2010. Wants to work in a bank because she's good with cash (\$120/month). Live in KC. ACCEPTED.

Khat Kosal (m) – D70. Management/Accounting. 22. Father dead, four siblings, mum is old and a rice farmer. Lives 30 minutes from KC on bicycle. Finished school in 2010 and alternative plan is to work on farm and/or be a school teacher. WITHDREW.

Khat Sopheaktra (m) – E42. Management/Accounting. 19. Family farms water vegetables. Lives 30 minutes from KC by bicycle. Finished school in 2010 and alternative plan is to be a farmer and/or school teacher. Wants to study accounting (\$150/month). Heard about it from his older brother Khat Kosal (see above). REJECTED.

Sideth (m) – C97. Law & Economics. 18. Family sells groceries so can't afford university. Potential scholarship, but can only accept if the scholarship is for the right university, because can't afford to live away from parents. Brother works in security and goes to university, sister is a tailor. Finished school in 2010 and alternative plan is a technical job such as car mechanic (\$80/month). Wants to study economic development (\$150/month). He got his scholarship. WITHDREW.

Sokcheat (m) – E51. HRM. 20. Mum has no job and dad is a mechanic (\$200/month). Eight people in the family, the rest all still at school. Lives in KC. Heard about HCP from Sideth. Finished school in 2010 and alternative plan is to work as a waiter (\$50/month). Wants to study HRM (\$200/month). Nice guy. ACCEPTED.

Chan Thoeun (m) – D81. HRM. 21. Family have a farm near KC. Used to work in real estate, but now no business. Family is in debt because of the costs of building their house. Finished school in 2009, then worked as a security guard (\$65/month, used to help family). Wants to upgrade to HRM to earn over \$100/month. Heard about HCP through the radio & other students. ACCEPTED.

Kunthea (f) – D84. Accounting. 18. 2nd round of interviews. Parents are peasant farmers, 1.5 hours from KC (would rent at uni). Finished school in 2010 and alternative plan is to work in a factory (\$50/month) making shoes. Wants to study accounting (\$200/month). Friend of Sinoun, Thavy & Boramy. ACCEPTED.

Sinoun (f) – E40. Accounting. 20. 2nd round of interviews. Parents are peasant farmers, 1.5 hours from KC. Finished school in 2010 and alternative plan is to work in a factory. REJECTED.

Thavy (f) – E43. Accounting. 21. 2nd round of interviews. Dad is a moto-dop and mum sells food. Live 1.5 hours from KC. Finished school in 2010 and alternative plan is to get a job, but not in a factory. REJECTED.

Boramy (f) – D76. Accounting. 18. 2nd round of interviews. Father dead & mum sick. Peasant farmers, 1.5 hours from KC. Older brother works in a casino (\$120/month) to support his mum. The family also looks after an orphan. Finished school in 2010 and alternative plan is to work in a factory. Parents were going to sell land for uni, but had to sell the land to pay for mum's health costs. Couldn't afford to live in KC so HCP & UME arranged to provide her with a minimal stipend (in exchange for "volunteer work" at uni), but her mum was still scared of sending her daughter off to KC alone. WITHDREW. ☹

Phy Run (m) – E23. HRM. 19. 2nd round of interviews. Dad is a policeman, living in KC. Finished school in 2010 and alternative plan is to work in a factory (\$60/month). REJECTED.

Sopheap (f) – E41. Accounting. 21. 2nd round of interviews. Family are peasant farmers, 1.5 hours from KC. Would live with brother. Finished school in 2010 and alternative plan is to stay home with family. She didn't understand the project so was encouraged to apply next year after she understood how HCP worked. REJECTED.

UME-BB

Vann Vibol (m) – E53. Marketing. 23. Finished school in 2010. Father is disabled & 75 years old. Live 20km from BB as rice & fruit farmers. Was the first in his family to finish school and would be 1st to go to university. His alternative plan would be to take whatever job he could find. Heard about HCP from a friend at the UME library. ACCEPTED.

Sung Nann (m) – D59. English. 19. From the same commune as Vibol, but different village: 36km from BB. Finished school in 2010. Family are rice farmers, brothers work on a big farm (\$2.50/day; \$40/month). Alternative plan is to study with the monks. Wants to teach English (\$100-\$150/month). Would be first in family to go to university. ACCEPTED.

Soeun Sim (m) – E (337/500 = 67.4). English. Parents are farmers from Pursat. Wants to be an English teacher (\$100-\$150/month). Heard about HCP from the radio & Sam An. Finished high school in 2009 and has been studying Buddhist philosophy at the Buddhist university. ACCEPTED.

Soun Sout (m) – E23. IT. 22. Parents are rice farmers living 50km from BB. Sout lives at the pagoda in BB. Finished school in 2010 while studying & living in the pagoda. Alternative plan is to continue at the pagoda. Heard about HCP from UME staff. REJECTED.

Ly Chanritthy (m) – D80. IT. 24. Family were peasant farmers, father is dead, live 56km from BB. Lives in a pagoda. Ritthy stopped school early and went to be a monk and study Buddhist philosophy. He went back to school as a mature student and graduated in 2010. He estimates a future IT income of >\$250/month. His alternative plan is to become a public school teacher (\$50/month). He heard about HCP from Kan Bunthol (UME vice-director, admin) who also lives in the pagoda. He would be the first member of his family to attend university. ACCEPTED.

He Davit (f) – E29. Management. 22. Didn't come to information session, but heard about interviews so showed up. Large family (7 children) living on a rice farm >50km from BB (2 hours). If studying, would live with friends in BB. Finished school in 2010 while also doing plantation work (\$1/day). Alternative plan will be to continue doing plantation work and living with family. Wants to study management to work in business (\$300/month). Heard about HCP from other students from her village. ACCEPTED (with reservations).