



# Newsletter 3 : Phnom Penh

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[www.experians.net](http://www.experians.net)

**Experians** is a French non-profit organization created by two young graduates from Paris Ecole Polytechnique. Its objective is to study the solutions developed for sanitation problems in urban poor settlements within developing countries. Based on the experiences of six cities – New Delhi, Hanoi, Phnom Penh, Santiago de Chile, Buenos Aires and Antananarivo – the organization wants to bring a new view on these problems and a transverse analysis.

## Interview of Phil with Seng, slum dweller on the shores of the Bassac River, Phnom Penh:

**Phil:** Good morning. Have you been living here for a long time?

**Seng:** No. I have been living here for the past six months. Before, I was living in a wooden house with my family on a rooftop in the city centre. Unfortunately, a fire of “unknown origin” destroyed all temporary houses on this rooftop two years ago. We have thus been moved to a relocation site thirty kilometres away from Phnom Penh. I was lucky to get a piece of land there because many people did not have access to property, most of these pieces of land being sold illegally. The problem is that this land was in the middle of paddy fields so I could not work (I am a moto-taxi driver). We thus stayed there as long as we could and I finally sold my piece of land to a rich businessman from Phnom Penh who bought most of the relocation site afterwards. We came back to town in order to find a job. The only house we could find was here, on the shores of the Bassac River.

**Phil:** You are thus the owner of your new house ...

**Seng:** Not at all! I do not have enough savings in order to pay the 50 US \$ of “building licence” to the local police, for an illegal land. Thus I rent a room for my whole family in this house.

**Phil:** For the toilets, how do you proceed?

**Seng:** Recently, emergency public toilets have been built by the NGO Urban Resources Centre (URC): These are just basic pit latrines but it helps... Temporary solutions for temporary people...

**Phil:** And for your waste?

**Seng:** We throw our garbage away under the house. The river takes everything away

when it floods every year and anyway, there is no garbage collection here, except the waste pickers’.

**Phil:** Are they numerous?

**Seng:** In town, yes: many children collect recyclable waste. My cousin is a waste picker but he works in a waste picker organization that was set up by the NGO CSARO. He is luckier than most waste pickers: he earns a salary now and has daily access to toilets and showers. His condition is much better than those at the dumpsite... It is terrible there.

**Phil:** Yes... I have been there too... Talking back about your current situation, what is the evolution compared to before the fire?

**Seng:** It has deteriorated. Before, I owned my place and we had gathered into a community with saving groups when we lived on the rooftop. Thus we had been able to set up a drainage-upgrading project that had been partly funded by an NGO. Our garbage was collected if we disposed it in the street. The fire destroyed everything and since then, NGOs have only work with secure land communities.

**Phil:** How do you feel in your new community?

**Seng:** I do not believe in the community anymore: on the rooftop, our community leader was given ten pieces of land by the authorities in order to convince us to leave and go to the relocation site, and he has gone away with our savings. In the relocation site, nothing was planned for us to work or even live decently... Here, on the shore of the Bassac River, I have nothing left of my own, except for my motorbike. As a tenant, I am not entitled to anything. I do not trust the government’s promises anymore. Rumours say they are going to legalize our slum but you know... They can make us move anytime with a new fire, like they did in 2002! Look, can you see the building site there? They told the people that they would make a public park in this precise place... They are now building a new casino and a luxury hotel...

**Corruption is everywhere, from the community leader to the administration.**



**Interview with Mr Kor (Cambodian employee of an international NGO) and with Mrs Bing (independent consultant for the Cambodian authorities):**

**Phil:** Good morning. I am surprised to see the systematic use of the community concept for poor neighbourhood sanitation. Is it a miraculous solution?

**Mr Kor:** It is not a traditional concept in Cambodia but nowadays, every large international NGO come to Cambodia with the formula: "Build a community, we will provide you funds". People have quickly understood their interest in building a community even if it is neither natural nor stable.

**Mrs Bing:** If you have another solution, I am interested... The success of the community-based approach in many developing countries has urged NGOs to implement it in Cambodia even if the society here is much more individualist. No adapted solution has yet been developed.

**Phil:** Concerning squatters, what is their future according to you?

**Mr Kor:** We are pessimistic. These days, fires of "unknown origin" tend to disappear and the municipality has given up the idea of relocating people several kilometres away from town. But several powerful NGOs, as for example UN-Habitat, have just resigned. Local NGOs are now supposed to negotiate directly with the government; this is completely unbalanced... Concerning the future of squatters, "land sharing" is the new solution. The land occupied by squatters will be built by a private company and half of the new buildings will be given back to squatters while the other half will be owned by the company. This solution presents advantages for both parties.

**Mrs Bing:** It is true that, if well implemented, "land sharing" would be a beneficial solution for everybody. However the

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government does not always keep its promises: the land next to the Bassac River from which squatters have been evicted was supposed to become a public park and it is now a building site for a hotel. Corruption is everywhere.

**Phil:** Concerning sanitation, Phnom Penh is

a town that often gets flooded. Is any action initiated?

**Mr Kor:** Our work with communities often lead to the building of secondary drains connected to the city's primary network. These drains are partly funded by the community and partly by an NGO or a partner. Nevertheless, this concerns communities that own their places and are willing to invest.

**Mrs Bing:** Many of these secondary drains have indeed been built but the primary network is undersized and in very poor condition. It is often overflowed.

**Phil:** What about waste water?

**Mr Kor:** There are lakes and canals...

**Mrs Bing:** Nothing is done in this domain of course, master plans deal with this but nothing is put into practice.

**Phil:** Consequences on people health must be tragic!

**Mr Kor:** Very few people are aware of health problems

**Mrs Bing:** Actions urge to be taken: in Phnom Penh, in 2000, according to a survey, one child out of four had diarrhoea in the two weeks before the survey!

**Phil:** What about solid waste?

**Mr Kor:** This is a big issue.

The firm "Cintri" is in charge of solid waste management for the next 48 years but it loses a lot of money because people refuse to pay for their waste collection in spite of the low price of this service. In poor neighbourhoods Cintri tries to implement new pre-collection project but we are just at the beginning.

**Mrs Bing:** People are not satisfied with this service. Garbage is not always collected daily so it tends to overflow the sidewalks The Japanese cooperation is about to present its new solid waste master plan: changes are expected... To be continued ...

**Phil:** Thank you both for all these information.



Electronic resources:

URC (Urban Resource Centre):

<http://urc.freehomepage.com/URCBG.htm>

CSARO (Community Sanitation and Recycling Organization): [www.bigpond.com.kh/users/csaro](http://www.bigpond.com.kh/users/csaro)

Phnom Penh Municipality: [www.phnompenh.gov.kh](http://www.phnompenh.gov.kh)

JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency):

[www.jica.org.kh](http://www.jica.org.kh)

WSP (Water and Sanitation Program): [www.wsp.org](http://www.wsp.org)

Handicap International: [www.handicap-international.org](http://www.handicap-international.org)

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