

17th October, 2020

Dear Friends,

On Saturday 10th October I moved to my new assignment in Sisophon. This was the headlines in the “Khmer Times” on 14th October: “Two tropical storms to hit an already devastated Cambodia, threatening more floods and destruction.” Let me show you how it has affected us here in Sisophon and other areas of the Province of Banteay Meanchey.

On 13th October I had gone with our staff of KBO to the village of “Being KaNgaok” which is about a 45 minute drive from Sisophon. In my life I had never seen such large stretches of flooded fields. The photos below will give you some indication about the situation.



The first photo shows the ground floor of the Team Leader’s house. The other 2 photos show the entrance to her house. The third photo shows where we had to park our car to walk into her home.



From her home we had to go by Koyun to one of the members of their SRI group.

It amazed me to experience the skill of the Koyun driver. I had often felt that the Koyun would topple over but he made it. Often some of our staff had to get down into the muck and push the Koyun out when it got stuck.



In the first photo our team members are pushing the Koyun. In the second photo the lady on the left is the team leader. In the third photo is the lady farmer who is a member of the team and whom we visited.

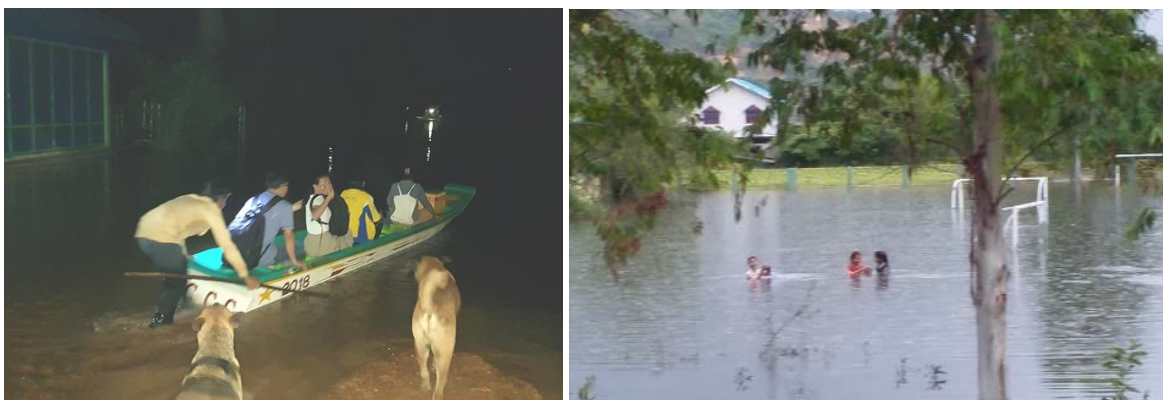
After visiting this lady farmer we started our journey back. On the way we stopped by the school of the village. It has 78 children from Class 1 to Class 6. They have only 3 classrooms built with the support of one of the monks. Class 1 to 3 come in the mornings and the others in the afternoon. These are shown in the photos below. Repairs to the wooden walls are needed. It is important that the children on this village have this school as the next school where they could go to is far away. The children of this school have participated in KBO's "School Children's Program for Agriculture + Ecology".



We then returned to Xavier Jesuit School where I am now based. That morning, before I left for my visit to the village described above, the state of the road leading to our school is shown in the first photo below. Fr. Quyen had ordered for some gravel so that the school children and staff could cross easily. In the second photo we see the situation of this place a day later.



One day later the staff had a get-together in the school, since it was national holiday. They had to be towed to the school and back by boat, which was kindly loaned to the school by an official. This we see in the photo below. The football field of the school is still flooded but it does not keep away our girls and boys of our hostel and some neighbors going in to catch fish.



Because of this situation it was decided to close the school for the students from Wednesday 14th October but the teachers had come to the school.

In the photo below we see a field of the school, just next to the Jesuit Residence that is in the final stages of construction. In that field we plan to plant rice, the SRI way, with the help of our senior students. Some of the girls in the hostel are in this photo. This field has been flooded for nearly a week now.



This flooded situation had affected the house of our part-time guard (in which 3 families stay) and that of a neighbor. Their homes had water up to their waste. When we heard about their situation it was decided to give them temporary shelter in the Jesuit residence which is still under construction. In the first photo is one of the families. In the other photo the children, who had not had any breakfast and lunch that day, enjoying a meal prepared for them. They could then go to sleep in peace.



In the first photo above are some of the families whom we have accommodated. In the other 2 photos are some officials whom Fr. Quyen had taken to meet these families whom we are supporting with the meals that they need. The officials have seen that we are caring for the local communities as well.

These 4 families will continue to stay with us until it is safe to return to their homes.

Today is 18th October. I went with Br. Tamh to see the house of the families who are at present being cared for in the Jesuit residence. The first photo shows their house and the second shows the home of the old man who is the grandfather of some of the children being cared for by us. The old man then took us back to the school in a boat of one of the neighbors.



We then went to the Church in Sisophon for the farewell Mass for Fr. Quyen. At the end of the Mass the students, of the Hostel attached to the Church, sang a few songs conducted by Sch. Yoonho. After that some of the students thanked Fr. Quyen for all that he had done in Cambodia. Fr. Quyen then thanked them all and the community in Cambodia.



Khmer Times in its report had also stated this: “More heavy rain would come across Cambodia this week due to the effects of two tropical storms – Nangka and Saudel, said the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology (MOWRAM) in an announcement on Tuesday”.

We hope and pray for the best and we ask you to please keep the affected farmers and their families in your prayers. Many will lose their harvest and will have to see how they can get through till the next season.

With regard to the Covid-19 situation in Cambodia, the number of cases has remained static at 283 for the past week. Our hope and prayer for all Cambodians is that the Lord protect them from any locally affected person.



I close my report with this photograph. The flooded area was near the entrance and was supposed to be the parking area for vehicles and motorcycles. In the photograph we see this lady and children of our school and the neighboring village catching fish.

The floods, which we see as something that has really affected the farmers, have brought joy to these people. May this joy be with them always.

With greetings from all of us at the Xavier Jesuit School, the Karuna Battambang Organization and from the local community, I am,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Noel', written over a light blue rectangular background.

(Br. Noel Oliver, SJ)