

The project aims to set up a community-based organic vegetable garden at Ta Ngao Khmer temple to supply clean and safe vegetables, consequently enhance the public health in An Phu commune, Tinh Bien district, An Giang province. The project team conducted a workshop at Ta Ngao temple in July 18, 2019. The workshop has taken place successfully since local staff, monks and residents including 21 females and 9 males encouraged to join in and share about garden designs, community-based organic farming techniques and management.

It is interesting that local armies are encouraged to participate in clearing weeds, preparing the seedbed, and making compost for the garden. Then, the garden is mulched to reduce weeds' development.

SETTING UP COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIC VEGETABLE GARDEN FOR KHMER COMMUNITIES IN AN PHU COMMUNE, TINH BIEN DISTRICT, AN GIANG PROVINCE

An Giang, August 26th 2019



Figure 2. The workshop conducted at Ta Ngao temple



Figure 4: Local armies helped to make a garden (left) and covering seeds with mulch is implemented by the local community (right)

The next stage is to set up the irrigation system and sow the seeds. The project team and local residents co-conducted an automatic sprinkler system that partly helps the community in watering the vegetables. The water is available all the year round since the irrigation system has built nearby the natural pond.

Workshop details:

- Introducing project objectives and community benefits;
- Sharing Australian community-based organic gardens from the project team members.
- Sharing organic-based farming practices and integrated pest management methods from members of Ech Op Farm and Mekong Organics.
- Exchanging the hands-on knowledge from the local farmers and residents.

The seedbed:

- Making compost.
- Tilling the soil.
- Sowing the seeds.
- Covering seeds with mulch.

Irrigation system:

- Water pumping machine.
- Automatic sprinkler system.



Figure 5: The local community planted the vegetable (left) and the vegetable garden is about 2 weeks after sowing stages (right).



Figure 1: Research site (the red location pin) at An Phu commune, Tinh Bien district, An Giang province (Source: Google Map)

Next, project team members, local staff, monks and residents co-designed vegetable gardens at Ta Ngao temple, in which all participants and neighbors can have access to the garden. We have decided to make a garden nearby the primary school, and this enables schoolteachers and young students to have outside courses on agroecology and organic farming practices. It is revealed that the project not only benefits the community in terms of supplying chemical-free vegetables, but also provides educational opportunities to local schools nearby the project sites.

Via talking with the monks, it is found that the community-based organic vegetable garden is very useful to the temple and the surrounding communities because the chemical fertilizers and pesticides are not allowed to utilize. Therefore, that will enhance the public health if the vegetables from such a garden are consumed in the daily meals. In the next stage, the project team and local community will carry on co-monitoring/evaluating the garden from now to the harvesting time. It is expected that local capacities, including community participation, decision making and self-managing the garden from sowing to harvesting, will be strengthened when the project is completed.

Project partners:

- Mr. Truong Thanh Dat (Manager of Ech Op Farm)
- Mr. Pham Tan Dat (A member of Mekong Organics)
- Mr. Nguyen Minh Dang (A member of Ech Op farm, Mekong Organics, collaborator of Research Center for Rural Development, An Giang University)
- Mr. Nguyen Hoang Khang (A member of Mekong Organics)

Beneficiaries:

- The Ta Ngao temple and local residents
- “B” An Phu Primary School

Making up 6.49 % of the Mekong delta population, Khmer people concentrate mainly in Soc Trang (31.5%), Tra Vinh (25.2%), and Kien Giang province (16.7%) (The United Nations Population Fund 2011, Thuy 2012). In An Giang, due to the proximity to Cambodia, Khmer is the largest ethnic group, making up 6% of the provincial population. It is found that the poverty rate of this group is much higher than other groups including Kinh, Cham, and Chinese (Thuy 2012, Tung 2018). Compared to Kinh partners who build their backyard garden to serve household demand and sell to the market, Khmer people tend to reply on off-farm works such as livestock husbandry and seasonal agricultural jobs (Thuy 2012).

A community garden is a shared space where people in a particular area join in, share the gardening work, harvest fruits, vegetables, flowers, and even livestock, and maintain the space. This garden model has been carrying out to provide fresh produce, support nature contact, and enhance the wellbeing of the participants, especially in western countries (Twiss *et al.* 2003). Then, this model has spread out globally for other purposes including producing food, improving the income, creating jobs, and bettering the local environments (Irvine, Johnson, & Peter, 1999). To reconcile the interrelationship between people, land, and sustainability, organic farming is employed to grow food because chemicals, preservatives, irradiation, and GMOs are prohibited in the process of growing (Ferris *et al.* 2001, Macias 2008).

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Figure 3: The garden is selected by the project team, local staff, monks and residents

Project team:

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- Mr. Nguyen Van Thai-coordinator (Research Center for Rural Development, An Giang University);

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