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*Empowering families and children to effect lasting change... community by community.*



## UF Engineering Students Bring Bio-Gas to Cambodia

In July of this year, the University of Florida chapter of Engineers Without Borders sent two students, David Baden and Jon Alldridge, and their project mentor, Dr. Ann Wilkie, to Pursat, Cambodia. Here, the team worked with Sustainable Cambodia to assess the feasibility of implementing anaerobic digesters in rural villages. When organic waste is fed into these digesters, bacteria in the waste break down the material and form biogas, a mixture of mostly methane and carbon dioxide. This biogas is then used to cook villagers' meals and light their kitchen areas, and the leftover slurry is reduced of pathogens and is used as a fertilizer.

Anaerobic Digestion is a method of renewable energy that has been used in Asia for centuries, and digesters vary greatly in both design and cost. Shortly before arriving in Pursat, the team learned of the National Biodigester Programme (NBP), a government sponsored endeavor that handles the training, education, and construction of digesters in Cambodia. The team visited several families in different villages who have invested in digesters built by the NBP as long as 2 years ago and as recently as 2 months ago. These families only had positive reviews of their investment! The digesters, individual family units ranging from 4 to 15 cubic meters, are made of brick and concrete and are stored underground. With 20 kilograms of cow and pig manure per day, a family of 6 can successfully cook 3 meals and light their kitchens for 6 to 8 hours each day!



Throughout the journey, Sustainable Cambodia assisted the team in preparing transportation to the villages, accompanying them to all the homes visited, acted as translators in all conversations, set up meetings with village leaders and government employees, and much more! During a question and answer session with the students at the SC campus, the team was excited to notice the amount of interest generated by the younger generation. They said it was obvious the students were passionate about community development.

On the team's last day in Pursat, Sustainable Cambodia helped gather village leaders and committee members from each village, government officials from the NBP, and even students from the University of Battambang at a nearby villagers' house who had recently had a digester constructed. Here, the team joined members from the NBP, SC members trained in the



construction of these digesters, and the hosting family in educating village leaders, students, and visitors on the benefits and feasibility of biogas. The open house was a great success, and interest has spread significantly! The team is currently working with SC to bring approximately 66 of these digesters to villager homes. In just the past 2 weeks, 20 families have already signed

up!

Overall, the trip was a success, with interest generated in all villages working with Sustainable Cambodia on the prospects of implementing biogas in the home. Utilizing biogas not only provides sanitation and waste disposal to families, but also replaces firewood as a source of fuel, cutting down the deforestation rate and decreasing respiratory issues.



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Sustainable Cambodia is an internationally supported grass-roots not-for-profit organization, led by dedicated Cambodian staff with help from international volunteers, and with support from child sponsors and Rotary Clubs from all over the world. SC works with rural Cambodian villages to help them achieve sustainability and self-sufficiency. Sustainable Cambodia was co-founded by Rotarians, and active Rotarians make up a majority of Sustainable Cambodia's governing Board of Directors. SC aligns its values with those of Rotary International, including RI's ideals of empowerment, peace through understanding, world service and community service. We apply Rotary's effective "Four-Way Test" to ethical issues. Our model is unique in several ways:

- Only native Cambodians are employed as paid staff, and all international officers, directors and consultants are unpaid volunteers, ensuring that 100% of funding goes directly into the rural village programs.

- We are an empowerment organization rather than an "Aid" organization. We provide resources, assistance, training and education to the community, empowering families to revitalize their community and economy.

- Our approach is broad-based, including schooling for children, safe village drinking water, irrigation systems, alternative agriculture, vocational education, micro-business and healthcare.

- In return for the assistance, each family commits to helping surrounding villages: We not only "teach them how to fish," but teach them to teach others how to fish.

While we currently work in central Cambodia, our vision is for this empowerment model to spread across Cambodia, and ultimately to grow into other countries.

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