



Kids International
Development Society

NEWSLETTER

January 2, 2011

Hi Everyone,

We hope you all had a great holiday season. We have spent the last week connecting with our friends, contacts and children here in Siem Reap; getting projects started and checking up on ones that are ongoing. Last year we went out on to the Tonle Sap Lake in Cambodia, which supports many floating village communities over hundreds of square kilometers, the families are totally dependent on fishing. The level of poverty out on the lake is hard to imagine, although there is some relative prosperity, there are thousands of very poor families that barely eke out a living by the skin of their teeth. Compounding the issue of poverty is the struggle to stay afloat. Last year we assisted Moat Kla School which was in danger of sinking. As you may recall, when we delivered school supplies to them, the school was literally sinking under our feet as the children rushed forward to see what we had brought. We were able to refloat the school with bamboo floatation as a temporary solution. Maot Kla is a one room school very small and is struggling to educate 380 plus children who have to attend school in shifts to prevent the school from sinking, even with the added buoyancy.

When we left last year the idea of a new larger school with permanent and secure buoyancy was running around in our minds. During our time at home we were putting out feelers for designs, costs and builders for a new school. We were discouraged to discover that the costs were well above what funds were available to K.I.D.S. for this project. We went out on the lake last week to see if we could organize the villagers to build the school with material that we could purchase and have brought in. With the help The Lake Clinic (TLC) and their logistician Sakim, acting as interpreter, we organized a village meeting on a floating platform to brainstorm the construction of the school. When we announced our intention to try and replace the school we were met with enthusiastic applause and beaming smiles, as the school has been an issue for a long time. With the school district supervisor, principal and Sakim we organized a committee of locals to help determine the cost of construction and logistics of building of the school.

We started calculating the various components of the school, including: floatation, lumber, roofing bolts etc. Midway through the meeting there was a mild commotion from the villagers as their end of the platform started sinking. They quickly moved forward to higher ground to distribute the weight and the meeting continued with the floor just barely above the water. Unknown to us under the floor boards there were other creatures that were also moving towards higher ground as the water levels rose in their world beneath the floor. The first rat squeezed through a crack in the floor between the villagers and darted to safety while the second was swiftly dispatched by hand and tossed into a fish farm beside the platform.

creating a feeding frenzy. Next came the spiders, cockroaches and a myriad of insects heading for safety which is their case was...US. Through all this the villagers lively input into the school project hardly missed a beat, we could only follow their lead and calmly, brush, slap and squirm our way along through the rest of the five hour meeting.

The outcome of the meeting was that yet again the project was beyond our reach due to the high cost of transport and material on the lake. After the meeting we went to Moat Kla school to discuss alternative ideas and see if we could add on or somehow increase the size and capacity of the existing school but it always came down to the same thing the high cost of bamboo floatation and the relatively short life span of it. Looking out at the village feeling discouraged we watched a young mom and her three children in tattered clothing sitting in an empty barely afloat little shack when one of the children reached over to one of their few possessions... a book and began looking through it. Our hearts at that point were sinking in unison with what seemed like everything else around us. Our hopes of having a positive environment for the village children to learn and expand their minds seemed beyond reach.

On our way back to Siem Reap we stopped and talked to another builder of a school that was floated on a combination of old boat hulls and bamboo, finally in our price range but again we were not happy with the impermanence of the flotation and the risk of the investment in the school not being secure.

The next day covered in welts from spider and insect bites from the meeting we followed our last lead out to the port near Siem Reap. The conditions at the port would have to be described as grim at best. Aside from the school builder the whole port revolves around fishing. With most of the boats being wooden, the transportation of fish in open trucks and spillage combined with thirty plus degree heat, the resulting cocktail of bugs, bacteria and black water puddles adds up to and olfactory Armageddon... the site of our next meeting.

This time the stars lined up and we secured an agreement for a three room school on steel flotation with a long lifespan and fully furnished with teacher and student's desks and two toilets. In conjunction with the original school we refloated all the children will be able to attend school and receive an education.

We have now signed the contracts with the builder who is very experienced and we feel very comfortable with his ability and experience. He showed us a few schools he had previously built. Construction begins in a few days and we will monitor the progress and send you updates. The school should be complete in about ten weeks.

We will write about TLC and the work they do in the next email. Their help getting this project of the ground or rather floating has been invaluable.

Take Care Happy New Year
So Long For Now
Love,
Rick and Adrienne