

# Establishing and working with older people's associations in Cambodia

A practical guideline



**HelpAge**  
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**HelpAge International** is a global network of not-for-profit organisations with a mission to work with and for disadvantaged older people worldwide to achieve a lasting improvement in the quality of their lives.

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## Foreword

In many regions of the world, the number and proportion of people 60 years and older is growing faster than any other age group. By 2050, the old and young will represent equal proportions of the global population, with the proportion of those aged 60 or older expected to double from 10 per cent currently to 21 per cent. In Cambodia, the proportion of older people is expected to increase from 4.4 per cent in 2000 to 6.7 per cent in 2025 and then to 11.7 per cent in 2050.<sup>1</sup> With its rapidly growing population, the number of older people in Cambodia is expected to rise from 611,400 to 1,595,000 by 2025, or nearly 2.5 times within 25 years.

Older people are one of the most vulnerable groups in Cambodia.<sup>2</sup> Changing family structures, migration, years of civil conflict and the HIV and AIDS pandemic have weakened traditional support systems, leaving increasing numbers of older people particularly vulnerable as they cope with limited opportunities to earn income and access food, limited access to health services and increasing social isolation due to poor health and mobility. In many cases, older people, especially women, support themselves and children left in their care.

There is a general lack of awareness among government officials as well as aid officers of the issues older people face. As a result, older people are often omitted from development programmes and policies.

To address the need for support for older people in Cambodia, HelpAge International has established a network of older people's associations (OPAs) in the provinces of Battambang and Banteay Meanchey. These associations aim to promote mutual support among older people, reducing their isolation and vulnerability by creating a social support network that can facilitate community development activities. The OPA model utilises the skills and experiences of older people to enable them to help themselves and their communities.

HelpAge International began setting up OPAs in Cambodia in 1998, and since then has been using them to successfully deliver other projects. After the Government issued its Policy on the Elderly in 2003, another 139 older people's associations were established in 12 provinces and cities, with assistance from the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation.<sup>3</sup> The OPA model has proven to be sustainable and active in promoting the wellbeing and the participation of older people and can be a key tool for addressing the needs of increasing older populations.

Drawing on its experience in Cambodia, HelpAge International has produced this booklet as a resource guide, which can be used to form an OPA or work with older people in the community. The guideline outlines the benefits of older people's associations and provides practical guidelines for establishing and working with them. This guideline can be used by local authorities, NGOs, community leaders and older people, who have an interest in working with older people's associations.

This is a guideline only, to be developed and modified to local circumstances and to provide stimulus for other ideas on developing the older people's association model.

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December 2006

<sup>1</sup> Population Ageing in East and South East Asia: Current Situation and Emerging Challenges, Dr Ghazy Mujahid, UNFPA Country Technical Team for East and South East Asia, July 2006

<sup>2</sup> As identified in National Poverty Reduction Strategy (NPRS), December 20, 2002, p. 27, [www.imf.org/External/NP/prsp/2002/kmh/01/index.htm](http://www.imf.org/External/NP/prsp/2002/kmh/01/index.htm).

<sup>3</sup> National Strategic Development Plan, July 2006, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2006/cr06266.pdf>

‘Without the OPA, life will be more difficult for older people. The OPA has given them opportunities, which means a lot for poor older people.’

Nop Chuern, 59, Kor OPA

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Older people's associations (OPAs) are community-based organisations aimed at improving living conditions for older people. They provide a mechanism for providing social support in the community as well as for facilitating and delivering projects and services.

HelpAge International began establishing OPAs in Cambodia in 1998. The OPAs were initially established to fill the gap in social support for older people that was left following the years of civil war and political instability, that had severely weakened traditional institutions such as family, religion and community. The OPAs provided an opportunity for older people to come together, socialise and help the most vulnerable older people in the community.

The function of OPAs has since been expanded. OPAs still maintain their crucial social support functions, but in addition the experience of HelpAge International has proven that OPAs can play a key role in the wider development of the community. Many OPAs facilitate activities such as rice banks, cow banks and other livelihood and food security activities. The target of the OPAs has expanded, from focusing solely on older people to working together to help the broader community. By facilitating such activities older people work closely with local officials and a wide range of community members, enabling older people to make considerable contributions to the community. Through this older people have gained recognition and respect, and have been empowered to become active members of their communities.

The main functions of an older people's association (OPA) in the community entail:

- Providing social activities for older people;
- Providing social support, such as home visits for the sick and frail, religious ceremonies and funerals;
- Assisting the poorest and sickest older people;
- Creating social cohesion among older people in the community;
- Improving the social status of older people;
- Increasing the skills and abilities of older people;
- Improving the overall development of the village or community.

OPAs empower older people, particularly older women, who account for the majority of the OPA members. Because OPAs are part of the community, they are well placed to work with local government bodies (in Cambodia, this means the Village Development Committees and Commune Councils) and other community-based organisations. As a result of the increased knowledge and confidence the OPA members receive from the OPA activities, they can mentor others and transfer knowledge and skills that can assist younger people in such areas as agriculture, health, and water and sanitation. Older people's associations also play an important role in raising awareness of the rights of older people and improving their access to existing services.

Benefits of an OPA to older people include:

- Mutual support and friendship with other members
- Ceremonies, such as Buddhist observances, arranged locally, omitting the need for them to travel long distances to attend
- Social activities such as home visits and OPA gatherings
- Support when they are sick, experiencing financial hardship or during emergencies;
- Activities to improve livelihoods, income, health and food security
- The opportunity to comment on their own development and priorities for developing their village
- Representation to local authorities and service providers.



Working with an OPA also benefits the government, non-government organisations and other agencies that deliver programmes and projects; for example:

- Delivery of services is streamlined, by working through one organisation instead of individuals
- Greater understanding of a village's needs, the local context and how best to approach both is acquired, by drawing on the wisdom of OPA members' experiences
- Projects are community-led with local people invested in their success. If community members, including older people, are involved in all stages of planning and implementation, they will feel the projects reflect their priorities and thus be more protective of them, increasing their sustainability.

## Chapter 2: Forming an older people's association

This chapter outlines the purpose and objectives of an older people's association, the organisational structure, the steps required to form one, rules and regulations, and some methods to ensure sustainability.

### 2.1 Purpose and objectives an older people's association

#### Purpose

OPAs aim to improve the dignity and quality of life of older people by encouraging support from governments, among their peers, families and younger people. The OPA encourages increased social interaction by providing a forum where older people can meet to discuss their problems, develop solutions and celebrate important holidays and events. The OPA promotes mutual help for vulnerable older people within and outside the association. The OPA also provides social support and activities to improve the livelihoods of older people and their families. Needless to say, all these have to be adapted to specific local circumstances.

#### Objectives

- Encourage mutual help through home visits, visiting sick members, assisting with funerals and providing emergency assistance
- Increase understanding among villagers of the contribution older people can make to the village life
- Promote cooperation between older people, other village members and local leaders;
- Assist in the development of the village
- Channel demands related to access to health care and other rights of older people.

#### Naoung Sinoun: In his view

At 56, Naoung Sinoun is still relatively young and healthy. He joined the older people's association in Takov village, though, because he wanted "to help the poorest and the loneliest" of those among the older population. He also believes there is strength in numbers and that there is a better chance for improving services if enough people ask together through the OPA. Naoung Sinoun has children, but he doesn't want to be dependent upon them when he gets old. Because he is still healthy, he helps the more vulnerable now so that when he becomes in need someday he will benefit from the same compassion among other OPA members.

'I am very happy to be a part of this OPA as it has improved my life. I feel more secure being around other older people who care about me.'

Pan Oun, 78, female  
member of Preah Sre  
OPA

### 2.2 Establishing an older people's association

There are three stages required to set up an OPA; each involves several steps. First, consult with village/community members to determine whether they want an older people's association. If the community is in favour, then next inform the relevant local authorities of the intention to establish a community-based organisation and include them in further activities. If the local authorities are included from the beginning, they will have a better understanding of the OPA's purpose, which may assist in planning any future activities.

The second stage is the development of the OPA rules, regulations and responsibilities. This stage should involve as many OPA members as possible to ensure everyone understands and agrees to the rules and regulations. Lastly, mechanisms should be put in place to ensure the sustainability of the OPA. This stage is ongoing throughout the life of the OPA.



### Stage 1: Meeting the community and local authorities

1. Meet with older members of the village to discuss the purpose, role, benefits and structure of an OPA and determine whether they are interested in forming one.
2. Meet with the village and commune leaders to inform them of the intention to form an OPA.
3. Find out who the well respected community members are. Visit them and explain of your interest in forming an OPA and explain the purpose and benefits of an OPA. These community members can help become a “champion” of the process and advocate for the establishment of the OPA to the rest of the community. Furthermore their support can add legitimacy to what you are saying in subsequent meetings.
4. Meet with all interested members of the village in small groups to describe the purpose and benefits of the OPA. Allow time for questions and sharing of ideas from village members. It is important to meet in small groups so everyone has an opportunity to contribute. Many older people are too shy to participate in larger groups.
5. Individual home visits to families with older people can be beneficial at this time. This provides an opportunity to explain in detail the purpose of the OPA and to answer any questions, which they may have been unwilling to ask in public.
6. Once people in the village seem to understand what an OPA is, schedule a bigger village meeting where people who want to join can sign up.
7. Schedule a meeting of OPA members to develop the purpose, objectives, structure and internal procedures. If possible, it may be a good idea to include the village chief and the local governing body members in this meeting.<sup>4</sup>

### Stage 2: Developing the OPA rules, regulations and responsibilities

1. When developing the rules and regulations, it is important to also develop the roles and responsibilities of the OPA leaders. Suggestions for these are provided later in this chapter. The purpose of the OPA will vary slightly from one to another, depending on the activities each one chooses to provide.
2. Once the rules and regulations have been developed, the OPA members then select three to four leaders to undertake the roles of president, vice-president, treasurer and, if necessary, secretary, which forms the ‘governing committee’. The governing committee is responsible for conducting meetings and managing activities. Good leaders are essential in ensuring that the OPA is managed effectively and efficiently.

<sup>4</sup> In Cambodia, this means the Village Development Committee members and Commune Council members.

It is important that at least one woman is on the governing committee to encourage other women to participate and to provide a voice for their opinions. The voting method is discretionary, although a secret ballot of some form is advised. Members may feel more comfortable voting for the person they really want as a leader if their vote is confidential.

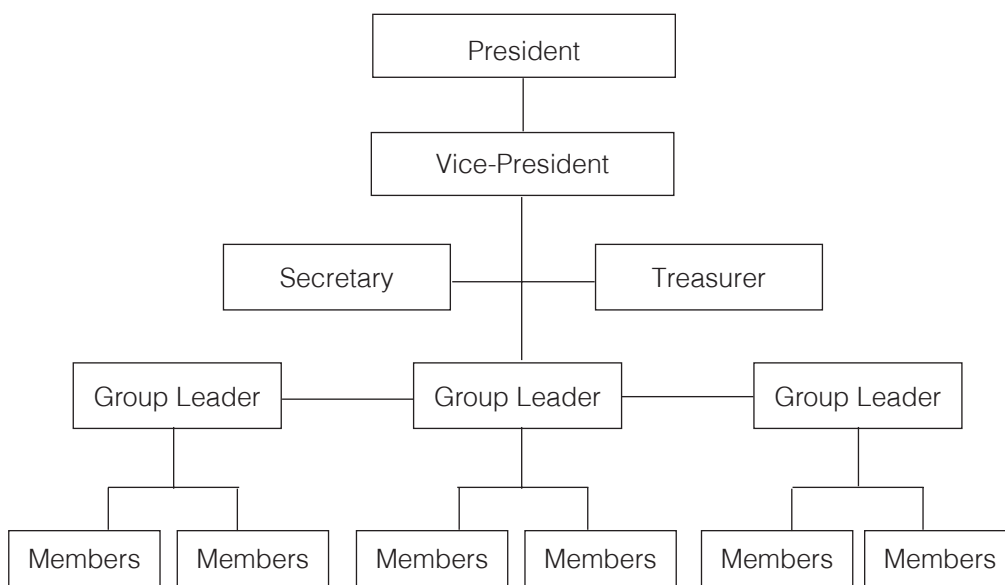
3. To facilitate the management of the OPA, particularly in larger OPAs, the members can be divided into groups of about 10 people and elect a 'group leader'. These leaders represent the group members, facilitate communication within the OPA and ensure that the interests of the group are promoted.
4. Depending on the OPA's activities the OPA can choose to elect subcommittees to manage specific activities, such as a rice bank or well and pond maintenance. They are selected from the OPA membership in a voting procedure. There are generally three members per committee, a leader, vice-leader and treasurer.
5. Once the OPA leaders have been selected and the procedures finalised, the association should be registered with the appropriate government ministry; in Cambodia, that would be the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation.

### Stage 3: Ensuring sustainability

1. In order for the OPA leaders to manage effectively in the long-term, they must receive training in good governance, record keeping and bookkeeping. Chapter 5 includes example formats for keeping appropriate records.
2. The OPA should meet regularly to allow leaders to inform members of the OPA activities and discuss any problems in the OPA and identify solutions. By sharing information with members and including them in decision making they will be better able to understand how the OPA works and what the OPA is doing.
3. The leaders should change frequently, every one or two years, for example. This ensures that the OPA is not dependent upon a few people to manage the activities. It is important that many people have the skills to manage the OPA and the knowledge to implement activities, in case a leader is no longer able to fulfil his or her duties.
4. The strength of the OPA is also dependent upon its ability to raise income to support its members. Some suggestions on how an OPA can raise funds are listed in chapter 4.

## 2.3 OPA organisational structure

The following provides a diagram of the suggested organisational structure of a large older people's association. Smaller OPAs would have a simpler structure, but a clear leadership is usually important.



## 2.4 Rules and regulations

Each OPA needs to establish its own set of rules and regulations that reflect the circumstances in the village. However, all rules and regulations should be based on the following common principles:

1. The OPA is a non-partisan organisation that is open to all older community members, regardless of status, ethnicity, political affiliation or religion.
2. The OPA will serve the interests of older people in the village, especially those who are most in need due to illness or hardship.
3. The OPA will conduct activities that benefit the village.
4. The OPA governing committee will be responsible for the overall management of the association and its finances.
5. The OPA will meet to discuss any planned activities with members before implementing them.
6. Decisions regarding the use of any OPA funds will be made using a majority voting method.

## 2.5 Suggested by-laws

1. OPA membership will be open to older people (older than 55)<sup>5</sup> in the community, regardless of religion, socio-economic status, political affiliation or ethnicity. The OPA will also be open to members younger than 55 at the discretion of the OPA members.
2. The OPA will serve the interests of older persons in the village, particularly those in need due to poor health, financial hardship or an emergency situation.
3. OPA members will visit fellow members at home or in hospital when they are ill and assist in organising traditional ceremonies and funerals.
4. OPA members will meet with the governing committee and other members before implementing any relief activity.
5. Someone from the OPA will meet with those who will receive assistance or for whom a ceremony is being organised, before implementing any activity. In the case of a funeral, the family will be consulted before any arrangements are made.
6. Upon completion of a ceremony, a statement of income, expenditure and materials used will be announced to all OPA members and participating village members. A material or cash donation will be handed over to the recipient(s).
7. The OPA will use any financial interest generated by its activities in a fair and transparent way. Interest will be used to assist the neediest people in the village or to establish or expand income-generating activities.
8. Before any funds or material support is distributed, the OPA governing committee will arrange a meeting of all members to select the beneficiaries.
9. The OPA will provide regular assistance to older people who do not have family or other support. [The list of recipients should be reviewed at least annually and the by-laws should state time periods for assistance.]
10. The OPA leaders will be elected for a one or two year term. At the end of each term a new leadership election will take place. [It is at each OPA's discretion whether leaders can fill a position for more than one term. The OPA's decision should be stated in the by-laws.]
11. An OPA leader can resign or be stood down before his or her term has expired, if he/she has a serious disease, relocates out of the community, dies, is considered to poorly serve the OPA, engages in corruption or is deemed to be acting only in the interests of certain individuals or groups.
12. Governing leaders, subcommittee members and advisors shall not receive any compensation. They serve in a voluntary capacity only.
13. These by-laws come into effect upon agreement in an OPA meeting with at least 51 per cent of members present and voting to accept them. All OPA members shall abide by the by-laws once they have been passed.

<sup>5</sup> The minimum age depends on the local context. In Cambodia a person is considered "old" after 55 years old.

Note: These by-laws should be displayed publicly for all OPA members to see.



## 2.6 Roles and responsibilities of leaders and members

### President

- Provides leadership to members and is responsible for managing the OPA
- Initiates activities and motivates members to contribute time, resources, physical and spiritual assistance to other members and to the community
- Conducts meetings to inform members of new activities and the progress or outcomes of existing activities
- Educates and instructs members, resolves problems and addresses any issues that may affect the OPA
- Oversees all income and expenditure and may audit the financial records kept by the treasurer at any time
- Is authorised to supervise and monitor all small projects and activities that generate income for the OPA
- Follows up and monitors all activities to ensure they have been consistent with their stated purpose and objectives
- Reports regularly to project donors (if any).

### Vice-President

- Acts on behalf of the president during his/her absence due to illness, travel, etc.
- Raises awareness of the purpose and objectives of the OPA to the members when there is a special event in the association or in the community
- Deals with tasks within and outside the OPA, on behalf of it
- If there is no secretary in the governing committee, the vice-president performs the duties of secretary, as explained below.

### Treasurer

- Supervises and controls the cash and materials of the OPA
- Maintains records of income, expenditure and assets owned by the OPA
- Provides a brief statement of income and expenditure to the OPA leaders and members at least quarterly, or when requested by the president
- Announces the income and expenditure generated by special traditional ceremonies, activities and other events.

### Secretary

- Takes minutes and keeps records of all OPA and small group meetings
- Supervises and records all correspondence and visits by non-OPA members
- Carefully verifies income and expenses with the treasurer
- Submits a summary report on meetings, activities and budget (income and expenses related to small project activities or special events) to local authorities or village development organisations, as requested.

Note: The secretary and the treasurer can be authorised to accept the responsibilities of the president or the vice-president in the absence of these two leaders.

### Subcommittees

Whether an OPA establishes subcommittees will depend on the OPA's activities. It is not necessary for all OPAs to have subcommittees. The OPA can decide to create a sub-committee to perform the following roles:

- Manage specific activities within the OPA, such as rice banks, cow banks or water and sanitation systems
- Work with OPA leaders and members to plan and implement projects and maintain any physical assets, such as a rice barn, a pond or shallow well

- Provide information to the general OPA members on the activity they are implementing and transfer skills and knowledge that they acquire through training to build the capacity of the OPA as a whole
- Motivate members to contribute time, labour, ideas and resources to the OPA activities to serve the interests of the association and the community as a whole
- Monitor activities regularly and report back to the OPA membership on any achievements or problems
- Provide members with the opportunity to contribute ideas and solve problems together
- Keep records (task of the subcommittee leader and/or treasurer) of all income, expenditure and assets and provide regular financial reports to the OPA governing committee
- Keep minutes of all meetings and report to the OPA membership regularly.

### Groups

The establishment of groups can be a useful tool within larger OPAs. Often, smaller OPAs can be managed without dividing into groups. If created, the elected group leaders perform the following roles:

- Motivate members to contribute time, labour, ideas and resources to the OPA activities to serve the interests of the association and the community as a whole
- Provide members with the opportunity to contribute ideas and solve problems together
- Monitor the wellbeing of the group
- Encourage the participation of the group in OPA activities
- Raise issues, concerns or ideas from the group in the OPA general meetings, if a particular member is unwilling or unable to do it on his or her own.

### General members

- Respect older persons, especially those who are poor, in the same way they respect themselves
- Provide social support and advice to each other and work to ensure the solidarity of the association
- Discuss with a fellow member who is sick or encounters a problem of another kind if he or she needs help from the OPA and then inform the governing committee of the situation
- Visit fellow members at home or in hospital when they are sick, are lacking enough food to eat or when there has been a death in the family. Other non-OPA members, such as poor older people without care and widows with dependent children, should also be visited in times of need
- Contribute resources, such as personal time, physical and spiritual assistance and ideas to serve the interests of the OPA and the community as a whole
- Actively participate in OPA meetings by expressing ideas and allow others time to speak. The OPA will become stronger if everyone feels comfortable participating
- Provide feedback on the success and problems with any activity so that it can be improved in the future
- Clearly understand the purpose, objectives and by-laws of the OPA and the roles and responsibilities of the governing committee, subcommittees, groups and general membership
- Help extend awareness of the OPA to other fellow villagers when possible.

## Chapter 3: Encouraging participation

For an older people's association to be truly effective in improving the lives of older people, it is important to involve older people in the planning and implementation of projects to ensure that all members, and the wider community, can benefit from them.

Frequently only a small group of people are included in the planning process for various community activities. This is generally due to the ease in consulting a small group rather than a large group. And often, the people who volunteer to assist with the planning of projects are the community leaders; people who are poor and who may even be selected as beneficiaries for activities, are seldom included. This can result in older people who are poor having no control over community activities that are meant to benefit them. Much documentation is available that underscores how including people in the planning of events/activities gives them a sense of ownership and leads to a higher success rate for projects.

To ensure that OPA members feel ownership of their association, and that the activities meet the needs of older people, the leaders must try and involve as many people as possible in the activities.

By following some simple methods and tools, the OPA leadership can increase participation of the members and wider community, which will only help to further strengthen the association. This chapter outlines some of the basic participatory learning and action (PLA) tools that can be used in a village or community.

### 3.1 The participatory process

When forming an OPA, it is often difficult to include older people from all segments of the community. The poorest older people are often under-represented in activities that are important for improving the quality of their lives, particularly in income-generating activities. The reasons for this are many and varied, such as limited literacy skills, inability to speak up in group situations, gender biases, feelings of inferiority due to caste, poverty or status, etc. The participatory approach is promoted in the OPA model to overcome some of these limitations to participation, based on the belief that everyone has a right to be heard and to contribute to their own development.

However, to run meetings and activities that are fully participatory can be difficult, and support may be required for the OPA. It is often useful to have one or two facilitators from outside the OPA to help. A facilitator could be a teacher, monk or community worker, for example. The facilitator can promote participation by all members of the community by:

- Asking questions and promoting discussion
- Being an effective listener
- Showing respect for all members
- Having knowledge of issues that affect older people.

### Creating an older people's association

It is important to ensure that an OPA reflects the diversity of the population and to make sure that people from all parts of the community contribute to the association. The following offers a few suggestions on how to promote participation from older people from all facets of the community:

- When setting up the OPA, ensure that it is clear that the association works for the benefit of all members and specifically aims to assist the most vulnerable people in the community.
- Do not exclude membership on the basis of class, race, religion, gender or status.

The participatory approach is promoted in the OPA model to overcome some of these limitations to participation, based on the belief that everyone has a right to be heard and to contribute to their own development.



- Older people often experience illness or physical incapacitates due to old age, such as failing eyesight, hearing difficulties, joint pain, etc. Thus, it is important to make allowances so they can participate equally. For example during meetings make sure that everyone speaks loudly and clearly, take regular breaks, and bring cushions for the more frail people to sit on.
- Schedule OPA meetings in a physical space that is inviting and does not have restricted access; for example, not too far from the village centre.
- Some older people may be working or caring for children; arrange meetings at a time that does not exclude people from participating.
- In some situations, village members may not have the literacy or numeracy skills required for record keeping. Seek assistance from someone outside the association who would be interested in this role, and if necessary, provide support; for example, a community worker might be willing to help record meeting minutes or a member of the community could be paid a small fee to do the job.
- Many OPAs have small membership fees. This can exclude many older people who are poor. If a membership fee is in place, then the poorest members of the community should be allowed to join free of charge.
- It is important that women are represented in the OPA leadership and on OPA subcommittees. Women are often not given the same opportunities to participate in village development activities as men, so it is essential that the OPA leads the way in including women in all decision making.
- The inclusion of officials, such as members of the Village Development Council (in Cambodia), in the OPA will help improve cooperation between the association and local government. But it is important that government representatives and other powerful people within the village do not dominate the OPA.

### Meetings

- During meetings, it is important that any discussion not be dominated by a few people but that everyone has a chance to contribute. The facilitator or OPA members should try to encourage everyone to speak.
- When voting on important decisions or selecting members of subcommittees, secret ballots may be best to ensure that everyone is comfortable to vote for the person or option that they prefer. It is important to develop a ballot system that is not based on literacy ability, as many older people, especially women, are automatically excluded from exercising their voting rights. Using pictures or diagrams as representations of what they are voting for or different coloured ballot boxes to represent the different nominations for OPA leadership helps increase participation.

### Identifying beneficiaries and conducting activities

It is important that the OPA members understand the processes that will be followed for choosing activities and identifying beneficiaries. With a clearly understood process and defined criteria, any decisions arising from the process can be justified.

## 3.2 Participatory tools

The following highlights a few of the most common and simple tools an OPA can use to help its decision-making process. These tools can be used to facilitate discussion from all OPA members and to ensure that beneficiaries have a say in decisions that may affect them.



## Group discussion

When planning any activity, it is important to both inform the community members of the activity and provide an opportunity for the community to discuss the activity, ask questions, share ideas and find solutions to any potential problems. A group discussion provides the ideal forum to do this.

In a group discussion, it is important that all views and ideas are listened to respectfully and that all members are encouraged to participate.

It can be useful to have a discussion for men and women separately, as they each often see a situation from a different perspective. The two groups can then provide feedback to each other and discuss together to reach a consensus.



## Wellbeing (wealth) ranking

A wellbeing (wealth) ranking is useful in determining the beneficiaries of an activity or for setting criteria for an activity. It identifies the relationship between advantaged or disadvantaged people and others in the village or community and can be used by older people to identify the most vulnerable persons among them.

For example, most OPAs have a social fund to help the very poorest in a village with food, material and health costs. Wealth ranking can help the OPA identify who should be eligible to use the social fund.

The following lists the basic steps in performing a wealth ranking:

1. Conduct small group discussions (these could be separated into women's and men's groups) to identify the criteria for ranking people/families. Four categories are commonly used, ranging from the poorest to the richest people in the village. The criteria for each of these categories will vary depending on the situation, as in some villages the richest group may still be quite poor. The criteria may include things such as how much land people have, the condition of their house, their occupation, their health status or what assets they own, such as a TV or radio.
2. Once criteria have been developed, the groups come back together to discuss the ideas put forward and agree on one standard set of criteria to be used for the ranking.
3. Then the small groups rank each of the families in the village/community according to their 'wealth'. One way to do this is to place each name along a piece of string or stick, with the wealthiest family at one end and the poorest at the other. Before ranking other families, it is a good idea to ask the participants to place themselves along the wealth-ranking line. All participants should discuss whether they think each participant has placed themselves in the correct place. If there are disagreements, it is important for the group to revisit the criteria and ensure that they all agree on how the assessment should be carried out.

3. Once all the families have been ranked, each of the smaller groups come back together to discuss their lists. If there are differences in the ranking of any families, the large group can discuss these and come to a mutual agreement on the final wealth ranking for the village.
4. This list can then be used to select activity beneficiaries from among the poorest in the village.

### Priority ranking

Ranking issues in order of priority is useful to understand how different people in the OPA perceive needs and preferences. Priority ranking can be used to determine which needs are the most urgent to respond to. For example, if the OPA has managed to raise some funds but members are not sure whether the funds should be used to build an OPA meeting hall, build a new well or add rice to the rice bank, then a priority ranking can be used to determine what members think is most important.

To conduct a priority ranking:

1. Explain the activities or items to be ranked, for example add rice to the rice bank or build a new well, etc.
2. Let participants determine the criteria for ranking, providing reasons for the selection of each criterion. For example, an activity/item that will benefit the most vulnerable older people in the community.
3. Ask participants to score each activity, using the criteria they have developed. For example, each participant could have one stone each, which is placed next to the activity that is prioritised. When everyone has completed placing the stones, count which one got the most stones.
4. Get the participants to discuss their choice, making sure everyone has a chance to contribute. Allow time for discussion about any areas of disagreement.
5. When the group has reached a consensus on their priorities, record the final list along with the reasons behind the decision.

### Village mapping

Village mapping is used to provide a visual representation of the village. It can simply be a representation of the resources of the village or it can be used to select locations for new infrastructure, such as a pond or a well or to highlight areas of the village prone to flooding or drought. The village map should contain the location of all major infrastructure, such as schools, health centres, roads and water sources, as well as the location of houses. Other locations of significance in the village should also be mapped.

Key steps for constructing the village map:

1. Select people from different parts of the village to participate to ensure the village is mapped accurately. Explain the purpose of the map.
2. Choose a suitable location and materials to construct the map. The map should be sufficiently large enough so that all the houses and other small landmarks can be shown. It is best to complete the map in a way that ensures changes can be made as the exercise progresses. The map can be constructed on paper or drawn with chalk on the ground or illustrated with materials, such as leaves to represent home gardens and stones to represent houses. This often works well, as the material bits can be moved easily as corrections are made to the map.
3. Ensure that everyone in the group participates; check that all areas of the village are represented correctly and no important landmarks have been missed.
4. Once the final map is agreed upon, a permanent copy can be made for future use.

This chapter has briefly provided some examples of tools and methods that could be useful for community-based activities, OPA activities and working with older people in particular. For more information, please refer to the resource guide at the end of the booklet.

## Chapter 4: OPA activities

There is a wide range of activities that the OPA can organise and facilitate. The activities chosen will obviously be dependent upon the specific circumstances of the community, its priorities and the funds it can mobilise.

Some activities are simple and need relatively few resources for implementing. These include the social activities of the OPA, providing home care to the frail elderly and providing health education. The importance of the social support of the OPA should not be underestimated. In various surveys conducted by HelpAge International in Cambodia, the majority of OPA members consistently stated that they highly value the social network provided by the association.

OPAs also can become involved in improving livelihoods of older people, particularly vulnerable older people, and their families. Many OPAs are also starting to become involved in the development of the whole village by assisting other vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, widows, female-headed households and those affected by HIV or AIDS.

OPAs can mobilise resources for these activities through their own fundraising, approaching NGOs working in their village, working through the commune councils or directly asking district departments to provide education and training in such areas as rice production or water and sanitation. An important step in mobilising resources for activities is to justify the activity by clearly identifying needs and priorities. The participatory learning and action tools discussed in chapter 3 can be used to do this.

The following are examples of activities that various OPAs have organised and facilitated in Cambodia; these activities can be copied or used to stimulate other ideas. HelpAge International Cambodia can provide further technical advice on any of these activities.

### 4.1 Social support and ceremonies

The OPAs provide a social support network for older people in their village. OPA meetings provide the opportunity for older people in the village to meet each other and form friendships. Many OPA members now regularly visit each other outside of the OPA meetings. Many members simply meet for a chat but they also visit each other when they are sick or have other problems in their family.

An important function of the OPA is assistance with funerals. Many older people and their families do not have the money or resources to conduct a proper funeral when someone dies. The OPA can establish a social fund to provide monetary assistance to these families. Many older people who live alone worry that they will not receive a proper funeral when they die. In these instances, the OPA can assist by making the arrangements for the funeral.

Most OPAs conduct ceremonies to celebrate the main religious days. Many villages are located a long way from the nearest pagoda or other place of worship, making it difficult for older people to attend the existing religious ceremonies. The OPA collects donations at these ceremonies to contribute to the social fund, which is used to assist the most vulnerable older people with the costs of health care, food, house repairs or funerals.

‘It is a good feeling to have the support of others [OPA members] and to participate in community ceremonies; I consider them [OPA members] my family.’

Pheuk Hach, 63, female  
member of Roahalsuong OPA

‘The home visits are important. It changes attitudes and the caring makes a big difference.’

Naoung Sinoun, 56, male  
member of Takov OPA

## 4.2 Home care

A volunteer home care scheme is a useful means of providing support to the oldest and/or most vulnerable older people. Volunteers within the village visit sick or less mobile older people and assist them with basic household tasks, such as cleaning, shopping and cooking. The volunteers also provide social support by just spending time talking to the older people, most of whom live alone or with young grandchildren.

Home care has the following outcomes for older people:

- Reduced isolation
- Increased hope for their future
- Improved quality of life
- Increased knowledge and skills of self-care
- Reduced expenditure for family on health care
- Improved intergenerational relationships in the village.

The steps involved for implementing the home care project are as follows:

1. Form an OPA sub committee to run the project and select volunteers, from within and outside the OPA.
2. Select the older-person beneficiaries. Suggested criteria could be: Beneficiaries must be older than 55, have a low income, have a poor living condition, poor health and live alone.
3. Identify care needs and develop care plans. This involves determining what activities the older person can complete on his/her own, what activities he/she needs assistance with and how often he/she requires a visit from a home helper.
4. Train volunteers on their role and responsibilities, the needs of older people and how to provide basic care.

The home care sub-committee should regularly monitor the home care activities by regularly visiting the home care beneficiaries to determine the level of care they are receiving and their level of satisfaction with the assistance provided, and by holding regular meetings with the volunteers to ensure they have the support they need.

Further information on the training available can be provided on request.

### Gum Lunh: In her view

Gum Lunh is 74 and lives alone. She collects snails and crabs and gathers morning glory to sell in the market. She is happy in her village because she receives encouragement from fellow OPA members. She also especially enjoys the group teaching of the Dhamma and the interaction from the home visits that are part of the OPA's activities. She regards OPA members as her family and sees the group as providing her with a "new identity".

## 4.3 Health education

Many public health education schemes target young people and women in particular. However, for older people to age healthily and to protect themselves from disease, they need access to health education as well.

OPAs can organise training on health issues related specifically to older people. Training by NGO, health centre or the Provincial Health Department staff on healthy ageing, conditions associated with ageing, such as diabetes, and care of the elderly can be provided.





Health education should not be limited to those issues that only have an impact on older people. Many older people look after their grandchildren and thus require information relating to child health. In addition, the majority of people affected by HIV or AIDS will at the later stage of their disease be cared for by their older parents, who thus need education on HIV and AIDS, on how to protect themselves and how to care for the sick child.

Many OPAs find it useful to establish links with their local health centre staff to know what services are available and what they are entitled to. Some OPAs monitor the services they get from the health centres and provide this feedback to their Commune Council (local government) and health centres in order to improve the services.

#### 4.4 Water and sanitation

The majority of older people do not have easy access to safe, clean, reliable drinking water and often use water from ponds and streams. Most people have never received any education on easy ways to make the water safe to drink. Access to clean drinking water is essential for improving health outcomes and ensuring that people can work productively. It is especially important for older people who may be more susceptible to illness.

Basic education on how to improve water to make it safe to drink and improve hygiene and sanitation is relatively easy for an OPA to organise through contact with NGOs or the health department. Water and sanitation education and awareness campaigns can be organised in each village to provide knowledge on water-related diseases and illnesses and how to prevent them. With some training and assistance, and provision of basic materials, it is also possible for OPAs to construct shallow wells, ponds and latrines.

#### 4.5 Rice banks

Rice banks are an important tool in improving food security, as many families experience rice shortages for at least a few months each year. They can also help prevent families getting into debt with commercial lenders. Rice banks are also relatively straightforward for the OPA to manage and to establish with little outside assistance. The interest earned by the rice bank can be used by the OPA to assist the most vulnerable who cannot grow their own rice, by providing donations of rice that does not need to be repaid.

#### 4.6 Income-generating activities

OPAs provide a vehicle for the formation of small self-help groups to access credit through micro finance schemes. These self-help groups allow older people to access monetary loans at a reasonable interest rate without any physical collateral requirement. The groups can also encourage regular savings. The savings schemes also give older people peace of mind as for many it is the first time they have had any savings at all. With no savings, they are at risk of needing to sell their assets if faced with unexpected expenditure, such as health care costs, or loss of income earned if they become too frail to continue working.

#### 4.7 Fundraising activities

For an OPA to be sustainable in the long-term, especially to support its social fund from which it is able to provide monetary assistance to older people, it must conduct fundraising activities. Each OPA will have different strengths and different income-generating opportunities, depending on the local circumstances and the existing skills of OPA members. The following offers some basic suggestions for fundraising activities:

- **Membership fees** – A small membership fee can be collected from members who can afford it. The poorest members of the village should receive free membership to the OPA.
- **Ceremonies** – Many OPAs conduct ceremonies for important religious days. A proportion of the donations made during these ceremonies can be kept by the OPA for use in activities that assist the poorest older people in the village.
- **Donations** – Many OPAs receive donations from people who are not OPA members. Donations are often received from younger, wealthier members of the village as well as from relatives who are living abroad.
- **Equipment rental** – The OPA can purchase basic equipment, such as a microphone and speakers, water pumps and push carts, that can be rented to people in the village for a fee.
- **Income-generating activities** – Small income-generating activities, such as a small shop or cake stall, can be established and run by OPA members, with the profit going to the OPA.
- **Collective land ownership** – The OPA may receive a donation of land, such as rice fields. This land can be rented to people in the village for a small fee. The OPA can rent land to poorer, landless people in the village at a rate significantly lower than standard rental fees. Alternatively, the OPA members can farm the land themselves.

## 4.8 Other activities

The previously mentioned activities are all suitable for the OPA to establish and run on its own. Although some outside training may be required, there is little material assistance needed. Where it is required, such as the rice bank, the community should contribute sufficient resources.

In HelpAge International's experience, if there are outside resources available, the OPA is a suitable model for implementing other development activities such as a cow bank, organising agriculture training (integrated pest management and integrated farming systems) or building ponds, wells and latrines. The OPA can be a useful resource for implementing development activities for the community.

Other suggested OPA activities include:

- Literacy training for illiterate OPA members by organising for a teacher to provide literacy classes
- In areas prone to flooding, the OPA can link with the Cambodian Red Cross to promote awareness of the local disaster preparedness plans
- OPAs can also arrange for a local Human Rights NGO to provide education to members on land tenure issues and their legal rights regarding land ownership.

Each OPA will need to identify its priorities and design activities accordingly.

### Chum Leap: In his view

Chum Leap is 64 years old and a member of the Roahalsuong OPA. A widower, he lives with his son and daughter-in-law. Before the OPA was formed in his village, Chum Leap endured a contentious relationship with his son, who was unemployed and disrespectful toward his father. By joining the OPA Chum Leap could borrow money from the association to buy seed to grow corn and sugar cane. When he began planting, his son willingly helped him in the fields. This project brought more income to the family, provided Chum Leap's son with work and triggered an improvement in their relationship. His son now seeks him out for advice, and they remain working together in their fields.

## Chapter 5: OPA record keeping

It is essential that the OPA keeps records of its activities. These are crucial for internal management and to build legitimacy in the community. If the OPA has received funds from outside sources, the donors may request to see the record keeping for monitoring purposes. The OPA needs to keep meeting minutes, financial records, records of beneficiaries and records of its subcommittee activities.

For some OPA committee members, training will be required in setting up a proper record-keeping system. The following provides some basic guidance:

### 5.1 Minute taking

It is important to maintain good records of all decisions the OPA makes. Minutes should be kept of all meetings of the group, its leaders and its committees. The minutes do not need to be long but should note all important decisions and actions arising, such as activities or tasks that need to be completed.

The following provides an example of the basic minutes structure:

OPA name:
Meeting (subject and date):
Attendees:
Agenda items:  1. .... 2. .... 3. ....
Key points discussed:  1. .... 2. .... 3. ....
Action arising (this should list of all the things that people have agreed to do and who will do them):  1. .... 2. .... 3. .... 4. .... 5. ....



## 5.2 Record keeping

### Membership list

A list of all members of the OPA should be created. The membership list will need to be updated regularly, as new members join or leave.

### Beneficiary data

Each OPA should have completed a list of all families in the village. This list should be used to record which families are beneficiaries of each activity; for example, members of the rice and cow banks, as well as the people who have received training. The lists of beneficiaries should be displayed publicly, usually in the place where the OPA meets, to maintain the openness and transparency of each project.

### Subcommittee and activity records

Each subcommittee should maintain its own records, separate to those of the main OPA group. For example, the rice bank committee should have up-to-date records of how much rice is in stock, how much has been loaned and how much is owed, including interest. There should also be accurate records for each rice bank member individually.

### Monthly report

Each OPA should complete a monthly report on its activities, outcomes, finances, difficulties faced, key meetings and any other important issues. Any OPA member should be able to access this report. The monthly report is useful for the OPA to have a record of its activities, list achievements and how issues were overcome and as a historical record for resolving any future disputes. The reports are a useful tool to demonstrate the OPA management capacity to outside donors.

The following is an example of an OPA reporting format; this can be modified, depending on the activities of each OPA.

'I am willing to work to help my community. I have been able to improve my skills, which I use to help more people. I want to help the OPA for a long time, as I feel it is a way for villagers to reach a good standard of living.'

Chuan Chheout, 53, male member of the Preaek Chhor OPA who also participates in Commune Council meetings

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## OPA Monthly Report

Village	Month		
General overview:			
<b>1. Rice bank</b>			
How much rice in the rice bank (kg)			
How much rice loaned this month (kg)		Male	Female
	Older people		
	Other members		
How much rice repaid this month (kg)			
How much rice still to be repaid (including interest) (kg)			
Decisions/outcomes of any rice bank committee meeting			
New members' names			
Condition of rice barn (if not in good condition, why?), stock or other issues			
<b>2. Training activities</b>			
What training activities took place?			
How many participants		Male	Female
	Older people		
	Younger people		
<b>3. Key meetings</b>			
	Details		
With other OPAs			
With Commune Council			
With district departments			
With NGOs			
Other			

**4. Planned activities for next month**


**5. Finances**

Amount of money in the OPA	
Amount outgoing this month	
Details of expenditure	
Amount incoming this month	
Source or incoming money	
Amount owed to the OPA	

**6. Other**

Did the OPA meet? Specify whether it was a subcommittee or general meeting	
What were the outcomes of the meeting	
Any other OPA activities, such as ceremonies	
Have there been any problems this month? If so, explain	
What issues/activities need to be followed up in the next month	
What things have worked well this month	
What lessons have been learned, how can things be improved next month	

### 5.3 Book keeping

It is important that the OPA maintains an accurate and transparent book keeping system. The accounting system can be very simple, with the treasurer recording income and expenditure and the secretary verifying it each month. Receipts, where possible, should be kept. At the monthly meeting, the treasurer should inform the OPA members of the group's financial status.

The following is an example of a simple bookkeeping system:

Date	Voucher #	Description	In	Out	Balance
		Opening balance			0
1 Apr 06	1	Received funds from ceremony	50,000		50,000
1 Apr 06	2	Rental fee for water pump	15,000		65,000
5 Apr 06	3	Pay for transport for 2 poor older persons to go to health centre		4,000	61,000
7 Apr 06	4	Transport for OPA leader to go to Commune Council meeting		2,000	59,000
9 Apr 06	5	Help repair older person's house		40,000	
9 Apr 06	6	Books and pens for accountant		8,000	51,000
10 Apr 06	7	Monthly membership fee	25,000		76,000
Total			90,000	54,000	36,000

Date	Voucher #	Description	In	Out	Balance
		Opening balance			36,000
1 May 06	1	Monthly membership fee	25,000		61,000
5 May 06	2	Contribution for members funeral		40,000	21,000
5 May 06	3	Rental fee for water pump	20,000		41,000
7 May 06	4	Donation by relative	25,000	2,000	64,000
8 May 06	5	Repair rice barn door		50,000	14,000
9 May 06	6	Medicine for sick older people		6,000	8,000
Total			70,000	98,000	8,000

## Chapter 6: Networking

An OPA will be stronger and far more effective if it builds relationships and networks with outside parties. These relationships provide the OPA with opportunities for learning and information sharing, as well as increasing the capacity of the OPA to advocate for the needs of its members.

The following suggestions highlight ways to develop relationships outside the OPA:

### 6.1 Other OPAs

It is useful for an OPA to establish links with other OPAs. Exchange visits can be organised for members to learn about activities in other OPAs. Committee members from different OPAs can meet regularly, every two to three months for example, to discuss OPA successes and difficulties they may be facing. These meetings provide continuous peer-to-peer training.

Working closely with other OPAs increases each one's ability to advocate successfully on common issues, such as improving local health centre services.

### 6.2 Commune Councils (local government body)

In Cambodia, the Commune Council is a key partner for an OPA, as they are responsible for the development plans of the commune. Keeping the Commune Council informed of OPA activities keeps it better informed when planning commune activities. The OPA leaders can also raise awareness on issues confronting older people to ensure that they are considered in the Commune Council's plans, as well as raise issues that the community as a whole faces. Regular feedback from the OPAs to the Commune Council is encouraged. This can be more effective if OPAs within the same commune work together and approach their Commune Council collectively.

### 6.3 Health centres

The majority of older people in Cambodia do not go to a health centre when they are sick. Instead, treatment is usually sought from Kru Khmers, or pharmacies. This approach works in some cases. But it can be expensive and often the treatment prescribed is not suitable. The reasons why older people do not seek out the health centre are numerous, such as difficulties in accessing it due to the expense of transport and/or distance, poor service delivery and lack of awareness of services provided. Sometimes, older people believe that their illness is a part of getting old and thus there is no point in being treated.

An OPA that fosters strong links with health centres can overcome some (but not all) of these issues. During outreach visits to the community, health centre staff can provide information on available services, basic training in self-care, nutrition and exercise, and training for people caring for immobile or sick elderly people.

'The work of the older persons in the older people associations has improved community life. Older persons are involved in religious events and the development of the community.'

Sin Visal, Prekloung  
Commune Leader



Linking with the OPA also increases the health centre staff's awareness of the health issues confronting older people, who are usually a low priority for health centres. By providing feedback on the standard of services provided by the health centre the OPA can often help improve those services. This feedback is directed, in Cambodia, via the Village Health Support Group or via the Commune Council.

The OPA social fund can be used to cover transport and medical costs for the most vulnerable people in need in the community.

#### Kliang Phon: In her view

Kliang Phon, her husband and their only daughter are HIV-positive. Her mother is 73 years old and an OPA member of the Dopkrasaing village, east of Battambang. Their family earns some money by selling lottery tickets. Her mother received a loan from the OPA, which enabled them to buy chickens to raise and sell and rice to eat. Kliang Phon wants to improve on this work with her mother by selling groceries, vegetables and desserts. She is especially thankful to the OPA, as they provide her family with money to travel to the district hospital for treatment.

### 6.4 District departments

Staff within the district departments, such as Agriculture, Rural Development or Health, can be approached to provide training to the community. If they are unable to provide training, the provincial departments often can. However, the OPA will need to raise funds to support costs of the training.

### 6.5 NGOs

NGOs working in the OPA community are a key source of material, training and funding. Most NGOs do not specifically target older people and thus, by default, exclude older people from their activities. By fostering a relationship between an OPA and NGO staff, often assisted by a village development committee or village leader, OPA members and NGO staff can work together to include older people in the NGO activities. This can also increase coordination of different NGO activities in the same community.

## Resources

### Situation of older people in Cambodia

*Growing Old in the Former Khmer Rouge Stronghold of Pailin*, ADI Project, Cooperation Committee of Cambodia (CCC), 2006.

*The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Older People in Cambodia*, HelpAge International, 2003.

*The Situation of Older People in Cambodia*, HelpAge International, May 1998.

Knodel, J, *The Impact of AIDS on Older Age Parents in Cambodia*, Population Studies Center, University Of Michigan, published by National Committee of Population and Development.

Zimmer, Z, *2004 Survey of the Elderly in Cambodia*, Population Studies Center, University Of Michigan.

### Working with older people

*Advocacy with older people: Some practical suggestions*, HelpAge International, 2000.

*Older People – Why organise? Community organising, older people and advocacy*, HelpAge International, 2000.

*Participatory research with older people: A sourcebook*, HelpAge International, March 2002.

### Participatory learning and action tools

International HIV/AIDS Alliance document, *Tools together now!* Participatory tools to facilitate mobilising communities for HIV/AIDS

[http://www.synergyaids.com/documents/IHAA\\_MobilisingCommunity\\_pre-pub\\_version.pdf](http://www.synergyaids.com/documents/IHAA_MobilisingCommunity_pre-pub_version.pdf)

*A Trainer's guide for participatory learning and action*, JN Pretty, 1995.

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Visit our website at [www.helpage.org](http://www.helpage.org). There you will find information on ageing and development, recent HelpAge International projects and HelpAge International publications, including the two regular HelpAge International newsletters:

*Ageways 67: Older citizens monitoring*

Promotes citizen monitoring as a development approach, drawing on the older citizens monitoring project in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Jamaica, Kenya and Tanzania and a similar project in Ethiopia. It explains why older people need access to services and why they often miss out.

<http://www.helpage.org/Resources/Regularpublications/Ageways>

*Ageing and Development*

<http://www.helpage.org/Resources/Regularpublications/AgeingandDevelopment>

## Establishing and working with older people's associations in Cambodia

A practical guideline

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Community Chest of Korea