

Protecting Cambodia's forests and rivers | Fruitful farms | Bees build resilience

A Common Place

Find
Christmas
gifts that
change lives
(see insert)



Cover photo: Kun Nora steers a boat as Sor Navy (front) looks for signs of illegal fishing on a patrol of Cambodia's Mekong River. (MCC/Fairpicture photo/Saobora Narin)

A Common Place

Volume 31 Number 3 Fall 2025

Patiently waiting

ANN GRABER HERSHBERGER
MCC U.S. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

(James 5:7-8 NIV)

Beauty and brokenness. I sit with the images and stories in this issue and am profoundly moved by the beauty of God working in the world toward good, of the human spirit and the fruitful earth.

The ache of this beauty is deeper because of brokenness also present where MCC serves. I hold those in Ukraine, Gaza, Haiti, South Sudan and many other places in my heart even as I rejoice with Nop Sokha, Koeut Chhunly, Puja Magar and Cander Chasombwa, pictured in these pages.

Advent is a time of longing for the coming of Jesus. Of reflecting on God with us, on the here and not yet complete Kingdom of God. Of reading about turning swords to plowshares, springs in the desert and being patient as we wait for God.

Amid beauty and brokenness, let us be encouraged by the joy of these stories even as we pray and work with those in places of violence and hunger. Let us be like the youth at Toledo Mennonite Church, serving others as we wait for the Lord's coming.

P.S. In this issue, you'll read about some of the thoughtfully chosen gifts youth at Toledo Mennonite gave through Christmas giving in 2024. This year, what gift would you choose and why?

Ann

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Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, shares God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. MCC envisions communities worldwide in right relationship with God, one another and creation. mcc.org

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ISSN 1083-818X

Printed in the U.S.

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A Common Place (USPS 013-937) is a publication of MCC and available free to anyone who wishes to receive it. To add, remove or change your address on our mailing list, contact:

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PO Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500.
Periodical postage paid at Akron, Pa., and additional mailing offices.

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A Common Place is printed on Anthem Satin, a paper that is FSC® certified.



What Christmas gift will Ann choose?

I am drawn to so many! Raising pigs put me through college. And I met pastors Rocio and Victor, featured in the gift of room at the inn, and saw the difference they're making.

But right now, I choose well-baby visits. As a nurse, especially in settings like Nicaragua during civil war, I saw vaccines and measurements of a baby's growth become building blocks. I remember the joy on hard-working parents' faces when their babies inched up on the growth charts and our own joy as our daughter Rachel, severely malnourished when she came into our home, grew. Simple interventions go a long way toward a healthy start.

Choose your gift at mcc.org/christmas or in the Christmas Giving Guide inserted in this issue.

Cover story

4 Peace like a river, on the river

In Cambodia, an MCC partner helps Indigenous communities peacefully confront illegal fishing and logging.

10 First person

Koeut Chhunly reflects on how her love of Cambodia's rivers and forests inspires her work with rural women.

Features

12 Puja's plentiful patch

Through an MCC-supported project, a young Nepali farmer has turned a single potted plant into a fruitful family business.

14 How beehives help communities thrive

In Zimbabwe, MCC partners help farmers adapt to changing weather through beekeeping.

Departments

3 MCC news

18 Making a difference

Christmas giving

19 Hello

(for children)

MCC news

Find more news at mcc.org



India

Enriching education

Within the walls of Sishu Siksha Kendra, a school in West Bengal, India, young minds grow and flourish. And in the schoolyard, fresh veggies do the same! In a community where many children once faced malnutrition, Parbati Mardi (pictured with daughter Anuradha Mardi) and other mothers learned how to grow greens, gourds and more through MCC partner Asansol Burdwan Seva Kendra. Then, on school grounds, they started an organic garden. The school purchases produce from the women and cooks it into the free meals served each day.

Nigeria

Healthcare and hope

In Jos, Nigeria, MCC partner Faith Alive Foundation staff like Chika Emmanuel work with parents-to-be, providing critical care and encouraging fathers to take an active role in their families' health. Wayi and Datu Happiness Luther, who are living with HIV, are expecting their first child. Through Faith Alive, the couple began receiving the health care they needed and learned ways to help prevent the transmission of the virus to their child. "I was apprehensive about attending the health talk in my community, but today, I am grateful to God because he directed me to seek help," Wayi Luther says.



Lebanon

Building bright futures

In Lebanon, MCC partner Tahaddi is crafting pathways to success for young adults, helping them to overcome intergenerational poverty by specializing in high-demand trades like carpentry. At Tahaddi Community Center in Hay El Gharbeh, Beirut, youth have learned how to construct quality goods while safely handling saws and other heavy-duty equipment. And through trainings in skills like workplace communication and conflict resolution, they're learning to uplift not only their families, but whole communities, in all that they do.

Share relief kits, share joy

To families around the world, towels and toothbrushes can serve as tangible reminders of God's love. MCC relief kits provide cherished hygiene items to people living amid conflict and crisis, helping them to stay clean and healthy.

Contents (NEW items only)

- 4 large bars bath soap (leave in wrapper)
- Shampoo (1 or 2 bottles totaling more than 20 oz; place in a resealable plastic bag)
- 4 large bars laundry soap (such as Fels Naptha®, Sunlight® or Zote® brands)
- 4 adult-sized toothbrushes (in manufacturer's packaging)
- 4 new bath towels (medium weight, dark or bright colors preferred; approximately 28 in x 50 in)
- 2 wide-toothed combs (6-8 in)
- 1 nail clipper (good quality)
- Adhesive bandages (minimum 40)
- Sanitary pads (THIN; 1 or 2 packages; minimum 28 pads total)

Instructions: Place contents in a box or bag and deliver to an MCC drop-off location. The kit will be re-packed in a new 5-gallon plastic pail with a lid. MCC will provide toothpaste.

Go to mcc.org/kits/relief to learn more or find drop-off locations. Or contact your nearest MCC office (see p. 2).



Peace like a river, on the river

In Cambodia, an MCC partner helps Indigenous communities peacefully confront illegal fishing and logging.

STORY BY SIENNA MALIK
PHOTOS BY SAOBORA NARIN

Editor's note: In Cambodian tradition, a person's surname appears first, followed by the given name.

On a sunny afternoon, water gently laps against a collective of small boats beached on a river island in Cambodia's Kratié province. A group of women gathers under the shade of a flowering tree, its dainty white blooms perfuming the air. As the women enjoy fresh-cut watermelon and sweet sugarcane juice, they discuss the health of the river, the Mekong, and their plans to protect it.

The Mekong is Southeast Asia's longest river. An estimated 15% of freshwater fish caught worldwide comes from there, providing a vital source of income and food for many, including Sor Navy. She lives on the riverbank with her husband and three kids in nearby Vattanak village.

"When we need fish to eat, then we just use the net," she says. She and her husband can catch what they need, as people in the region have done for generations.

But, she says, in recent years a dip of the net has produced fewer fish, and the ones she's been able to catch have been smaller.

Families here have long used traditional fishing methods such as small, simple nets. Recently, however, fishers, including many from other regions, have come in with equipment meant to catch as many fish as possible, such as electrified tools that stun fish. Others use very large nets, which can harm Irrawaddy dolphins, an endangered species that is essential to local, family-run ecotourism operations.

While such methods are illegal, Navy says, poverty may

cause fishers to turn to them to boost their profits.

She fears what would happen if people here were no longer able to make a living from the river. She worries that scarcity could increase tensions within and between households, leading to violence, or prompt families to leave Vattanak, with their children dropping out of school at a young age. "That is very hard for me to accept."

Through an MCC partner, she's found a way to

“When we need fish to eat, then we just use the net.”

A patrolling boat travels down the Mekong River as women's group members look out for illegal fishing.

Sor Navy travels through the Prey Lang Forest, her motorbike packed with overnight necessities, as she looks out for signs of illegal logging.





Above, Theum Chan Thou, right, leads a women's group patrol of the river as Daung Soklim drives the boat. On page 7, at top, Nop Sokha of Peace Bridges Organization stands in the shade of a tree in the forest. Below, patrollers catch fish for dinner.

“Part of my faith is to take care of all of this creation that God has entrusted to us.”

take action, helping to keep the river healthy and her community intact.

Along with Theum Chan Thou, a cashew farmer and mother of two, Navy leads a team of local women on several multiday patrols a year. They look out for, and address, fishers using illegal techniques.

The women do so as members of the Prey Lang Community Network, comprised of residents from four Cambodian provinces who protect the river and nearby Prey Lang Forest. Through trainings offered by MCC partner Peace Bridges Organization (PBO), residents have learned how to confront illegal fishing and other forms of environmental degradation peacefully.

After their snack, Navy and Chan Thou lead the women back to the boats. The group sets sail, two or three to a boat. Should the women spot people fishing illegally, they will all pull their boats over and approach. The safety of being in a large group, and the conflict resolution trainings they've taken, make them feel confident doing so.

Navy says that when she speaks with fishers, she calmly explains to them that local communities depend upon the health of the river, and that unsanctioned fishing hurts their way of life. She reassures them that families can sustain

themselves with traditional methods. After all, it's what she and her husband do.

The women also use these approaches in the Prey Lang Forest. During forest patrols, they join with the network's men's groups, boarding motorbikes and looking to stop illegal logging.

The trees in the forest, some of which are nearly 1,000 years old, are at the center of all aspects of life here. The forest holds great spiritual significance for the many people from Indigenous Kuy communities, and its bounty has sus-



tained nearby residents for generations. Families forage for fruits and wild mushrooms. Oil from neem trees can be used as medicine or a natural pesticide. Residents know which wild vines hold reserves of potable mineral water, and they can dry and slice the vines to make rope. Tree resin, used to patch boats, is an important source of income.

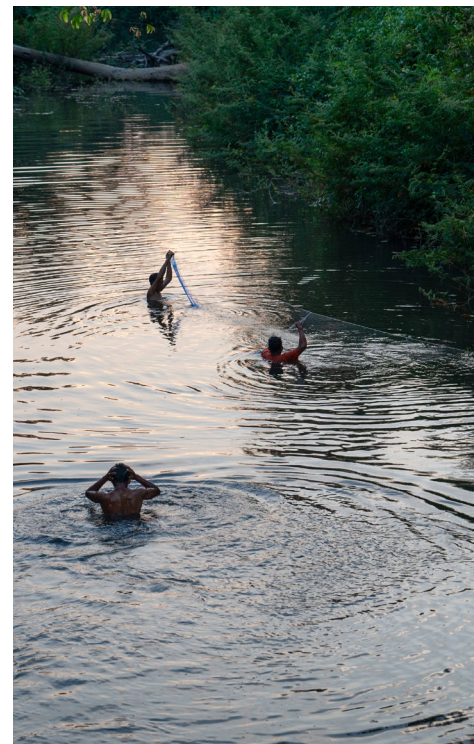
It is the immense importance of the river and forest that inspires residents to commit to taking part in the patrols. These patrols often take multiple hours, and sometimes multiple days, out along severely sunny stretches of the river or down rocky, uneven roads. Participants check in with each other regularly and are quick to pull over if anyone has a problem with their boat or motorbike. At night, they set up camp, fish from the Mekong and enjoy a fish dinner, before resting and continuing on their journey. The first patrolling groups formed through the Prey Lang Community Network consisted solely of men. In those early days of the patrols, the participants often used harsh words toward fishers and loggers. Such confrontations left patrollers and their families and communities vulnerable to violent retaliation.

Trainings offered by PBO have helped them to learn and practice more peaceful approaches.

When PBO was founded in the early 2000s, staff first



At left, Svay Song of Prey Lang Community Network fills a bottle with potable water from a vine in the forest. Below, men's and women's group members patrol the forest on motorbikes.



Above: On an overnight patrol, group members prepare and eat fish (left) caught by male members while wading in the water (right). Left: Theum Chan Thou gathers edible water spinach from the river.



“Women in the community hear about it and are asking about it.”



An aerial view of woodlands and clearings along roadways in the Prey Lang Forest.

sought to foster peace between the 3% of Cambodians who identify as Christian. But leaders like Som Chanmony, executive director, soon saw that their peacebuilding and conflict resolution trainings could be useful for all in the Buddhist-majority country.

Many community members in this area follow a mix of Buddhist and animist practices. Their deeply spiritual desire to protect the forest and river made them a natural fit for a partnership with PBO, whose staff as Christians also feel called to work for the well-being of the environment. “Part of my faith is to take care of all of this creation that God has entrusted to us,” shares Chanmony.

In 2021, the first group of female patrollers was established. Chan Thou recalls that at first, there were only about seven members. Men were apprehensive about their wives and daughters joining, knowing that patrolling involved overnight trips and tense interactions with fishers and loggers. At times, Chanmony has sat down with the husbands of new participants to explain how PBO’s trainings help to keep everyone safe. He has often been successful in convincing the husbands.

The successes that the women have seen also change minds. Chan Thou says that when she joined the group, she had the

full support of her husband, who knew how much she loved the river and forest. Her parents, however, were more hesitant.

But over the past few years, illegal logging has visibly decreased, and fish populations are starting to bounce back. Chan Thou’s parents saw this recovery — and saw how central their daughter’s leadership was to it. “From that time onward, my parents started to support me 100%,” says Chan Thou. “I feel so happy when they support me and they understand about my work.”

As support for the women’s group has grown, so has membership. There are now about 30 women involved. “Women in the community hear about it and are asking about it,” says Navy. With the group in Kratié well established, the Prey Lang Community Network now plans to establish women’s groups in the other three provinces where it works.

Navy is hopeful that this investment in protecting Cambodia’s eco-systems will continue.

“You know the river is belonging to all of us.” ■

Sienna Malik is managing editor of A Common Place magazine. Saobora Narin, a freelance photographer in Cambodia, supplied photographs through Fairpicture.



First person

During a break from patrolling, Koeut Chhunly speaks to women's group members on the shore of the Mekong River.

Koeut Chhunly

An MCC partner reflects on how love of Cambodia's rivers and forests inspires her work with rural women.

AS TOLD TO SIENNA MALIK



I really love nature. As a Christian, I believe that God really wants us to take care of all of creation.

I grew up in Cambodia's Battambang province, close to the shores of the Tonlé Sap Lake, or Great Lake. Through the Tonlé Sap River, the lake is connected to the larger Mekong River. In the area, there is also a forest, which the people in my town would visit during national holidays. We always wanted to spend time inside the forest, where we could connect with the fresh air, rather than in the noisy town. In the forest, we could find a quiet peacefulness, which is so important to mental wellness.

Today, I live in the city of Phnom Penh, but Cambodia's natural resources remain important to me. In the city, we depend upon water from the Mekong. I want to keep the water clean, for the sake of our health. Fish from the river are important sources of protein here, and they are so much more flavorful than farmed fish.

But fish populations have been going down, and with that the cost of river fish is rising. Our forests — including Battambang's woodlands and the vast Prey Lang Forest — are losing their oldest and largest trees. In some parts, only small trees are left.

Cambodia is now seeing air pollution problems that we've never had before, and weather patterns are changing from when I was a child. In the past few decades, more companies have been able to get permits for things like factories, house construction and commercial logging. But also, financial difficulties have led more people to

take part in illegal fishing and logging.

The people who live in rural communities, in the forest and on the river, depend on Cambodia's natural resources in all aspects of their lives. So, they are the first to feel all these changes.

I have worked with Peace Bridges Organization (PBO) for 17 years and currently work with women from these communities, empowering them to take an active role in river and forest protection.

I lead conflict resolution and leadership trainings so that they can join patrols of the Mekong River and Prey Lang Forest, in boats or on motorbikes. The women travel as a group, some-

times with local men's groups, sometimes on their own. They look out for people fishing or logging illegally, and they talk to them. In trainings, the women learn about the laws surrounding fishing and logging. They take the time to explain to fishers and loggers how breaking these laws affects their communities.

Working with the women's groups is not always easy. There is a mindset here that women cannot do anything but care for their households. Patrolling the river and forest are talked about as a man's job, not a woman's. This is partly because the patrols are overnight trips, and it is not common for women to leave home for so long.

Sometimes, the women's husbands are worried about their safety, and

others in the community may criticize them for being away from home. The women worry about getting all their housework done before they leave for trips, and sometimes they get called home early to care for their families.

PBO and the women's group leaders take the time to sit with people in the community, building trust. The husbands have become supportive. Many even have started to take care of the housework while their wives are away, which is not a common thing.

The women's mindsets have changed, too. They no longer view patrolling as men's work. Being in a group together provides them a space to talk about not only the chal-

lenges of protecting the river and forest, but also about personal challenges. They feel less isolated. I see them organizing community events and even speaking to the public at those events. I am excited to see them doing this kind of work.

When I travel to the forest with the women, my mind feels fresh and peaceful. I feel that connection to creation that I have felt since childhood. The human being needs nature; I always keep this in mind. ■

Koeut Chhunly is a senior program coordinator with Peace Bridges Organization.

“When I travel to the forest with the women, my mind feels fresh and peaceful. I feel that connection to creation that I have felt since childhood.”

Feature story

Puja's plentiful patch

A young Nepali farmer has turned a single potted plant into a fruitful family business.

STORY BY SIENNA MALIK
PHOTOS BY MCC/FAIRPICTURE/UMA BISTA

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In Nepal's foothills, changing weather patterns pose great challenges for farmers. Many young adults have made the hard choice to leave home to find work.

But through the Youth Empowerment and Eco-Entrepreneurship Project, run by MCC partner Hilly Rural Development Organization of Northern Morang, young farmers are bearing new fruit right at home.

Puja Magar, 21, of Kerabari Rural Municipality, joined this three-year project in 2022, receiving training and seed funding.



“People didn’t used to do this, but it has shown others in the community that they can raise cows and grow strawberries.”

As Puja Magar’s field has flourished, so has her confidence in sharing farming knowledge. Longtime friend Ishwor Man Magar used his funding to buy a cow. He now sells milk at a local dairy and uses manure on his farm. Puja Magar saw her friend’s success and decided to raise a cow of her own. In turn, she has helped her friend seize the ripe opportunity to grow berries on his own land.



“I first brought one strawberry plant and planted it in a pot and I was able to get good fruit. My family and I decided to do the whole field after that.”



“I used to be very shy, I feel that I’ve learned a lot and I have got this confidence that I can speak, I can show everyone I’ve been doing this.”



As the business has borne fruit, Puja’s mother, Purna Kumari Magar, plus her father, brother and uncles, have joined her in raising strawberries. The family currently sells to distributors, but they hope that, together, they can produce large enough yields to sell directly to customers.



Video: Nepal’s berry devoted farmers

Sienna Malik is managing editor of A Common Place magazine. Uma Bista, a freelance photographer in Nepal, supplied photographs through Fairpicture.

LEFT: Puja Magar used what she learned about climate adaptation and leadership, and the funding she received, to experiment with growing strawberries. When her first plant thrived, she explored ways to grow berries on a larger scale in a field behind her family’s home. Plastic covers help plants retain moisture, even when rain is unpredictable.

How beehives help communities thrive

In rural Zimbabwe, an MCC-supported project helps farmers adapt to changing weather patterns with buzzing businesses.

STORY BY SIENNA MALIK

PHOTOS AND REPORTING BY ANNALEE GIESBRECHT



Molly Moyo stands with one of her beehives (p. 14) and holds a fruit tree seedling (at right, top), which will be planted to attract bees to her land. At right, bottom, Kulima Mbobumi Training Center staff travel to a remote community via dry, off-road terrain.



After decades as a beekeeper, Molly Moyo is still fascinated at the sight of the intricate honeycombs that form in her hives. She remains amazed at the way that a helping of honey can squelch a cough. And she's grateful that, by selling honey to others in southern Zimbabwe's Gwanda district, she could put her children through school.

But over time, rainfall destroyed the hives that she had kept since the 1990s. The shifts in rain patterns — leading to prolonged droughts and flash floods — were gradual at first.

In the past five years, however, the changes have gotten more drastic. "Present is not the same as before," she says. "Previously, flowers would be blooming. ... But now it's dry because of the change in climate."

When severe droughts came to the largely rural area in 2023 and 2024, farming families already reeling from unpredictable weather faced challenges with food security as crops and livestock died due to water shortages. Intensive mining in the region, while economically important, is worsening the severe water shortage and has, over time, taken nutrients out of the soil.

Everyone, including seasoned farmers like Moyo, felt the strain, but young adults perhaps felt the impact more than anyone.

As crops failed and livestock populations collapsed, young men began to leave the area to find work in other parts of Zimbabwe or in other countries altogether, fragmenting families.

Young women, meanwhile, stayed close to home, caring for loved ones and trying everything to keep family farms going. Scarcity wors-

ened already severe challenges faced by many rural families, raising tensions within households and between neighbors.

Today, though, the buzzing of bees sings out as a sign of hope in rural communities where MCC partners work, not only on Moyo's land but also on farms run by young adults in Gwanda and beyond.

In 2023, MCC and partner organizations in Zimbabwe launched Locally-Led Indigenous Nature-based Solutions for Climate Change Adaptation in Zimbabwe (or LINCZ), which is a multiyear MCC project, with funding from Global Affairs Canada.

Through this project, MCC partners like Brethren in Christ Compassionate and Development Services (BIC-CDS) are collaborating with local leaders to help households adapt to an ever-changing climate by conserving water, improving soil health and diversifying their income.

Moyo was among the local leaders invited to take part. BIC-CDS replaced her beehives and arranged for her to train local farmers — mostly young women — to start abundant

“Previously, flowers would be blooming. ... But now it's dry because of the change in climate.”



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bees](https://mcc.org/bees)

Beekeeper Candrer Chasombwa inspects one of her beehives in Zimbabwe's Samende village.

apiaries of their own.

To ensure that the bees would have plenty of nectar and pollen, BIC-CDS worked with farmers to plant fruit trees. Citrus trees, like oranges and naartjies (a type of mandarin), proved to be sensitive to extreme weather, so participants' attention turned to native options like gum trees. In turn, bees can cross-pollinate the trees and farm plots that BIC-CDS is helping residents establish, contributing to crop productivity and the health of the local eco-system.

At first, many in Moyo's community were hesitant to get involved.

"There's this phobia of bees. People are just scared," she says. But as she explains to the young farmers what a rewarding vocation it can be, they begin warming up to the idea. As an experienced bee handler, she's also offered to help the brand-new beekeepers lure swarms to their new hives.

Beehives are also bringing new opportunities to young people in Samende village, Binga district, in the northern reaches of the country.

There, young people's prospects had also been rattled by the droughts and ensuing economic downturn. As with Moyo's community, many young men have left Samende to find work elsewhere.

"It's a big problem," says Candrer Chasombwa, a young

"We're no longer afraid because we are trained."

woman from Samende.

But she is part of a group of young adults – 12 women and three men, ages 18-35 – who have embraced the opportunity to diversify their incomes amid these challenges.

They initially met because they all grew vegetables in the same part of town, near a dam that provided irrigation. Over time, they began working together through activities like basket-weaving and harvesting and selling tamarinds and fragrant mangos in the market.

In 2024, when MCC partner Kulima Mbobumi Training

Young adults from Samende are making beeswax products like lip balm (near right) to diversify their income. Middle right, Mercy Munsaka applies beeswax lip balm. Far right, a demonstration of shoe polish made from the wax.



"Someone who has a beekeeping project can harvest better than someone who is depending on the crops."

Center (KMTC) and local leaders began recruiting participants for a September beekeeping training, the group decided to attend.

Several members of the group came from beekeeping families and had relatives who had crafted hives from gourds and logs for years. But the tools needed to get started, like honey pressers and bee brushes, were prohibitively expensive for young adults. While, as in Gwanda, beekeeping was not viewed as an activity for young women and a fear of bees pervaded, they knew that beekeeping could be a way to help their families and continue their schooling.

The training on handling bees, paired with the provision of protective suits and smokers that keep bees calm when their hives are opened, left group members feeling confident. "We're no longer afraid because we are trained," Kuu Dulama Munkuli says with a smile.

Each attendee received four commercially produced beehives. Having these structures meant that new beekeepers wouldn't have to cut down local trees in an already fraught ecosystem to craft traditional hives. KMTC also provided guidance on where to position the hives on their families' properties, so that the bees would have sufficient food and water.

And the group's apiary ambitions quickly paid off.

In times of drought, having honey and beeswax on hand has allowed them to know the sweet feeling of financial security. Their neighbors buy honey for its medicinal properties, with many using it to help with high blood pressure. Additionally, the group knew that there was a market for products like lip balm and shoe polish. So, they taught themselves how to make these products from the wax left over from honey production.

Honey is in such high demand that 20 liters (5 gallons)



Members of Samende's youth beekeeping group hold skincare products and shoe polish made with the wax from their beehives.

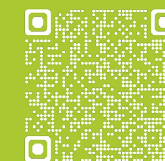
typically fetches about US\$200 — an equivalent to several months of average rural income in Zimbabwe, making the work more lucrative than mining. And it's more reliable than vegetable farming.

"Someone who has a beekeeping project can harvest better than someone who is depending on the crops," says Chasombwa. "Bees don't need much water like crops. So the bees can still survive" during droughts.

Because they have found stable sources of income close to home, group members plan to stay close by, leading and serving their communities, into the foreseeable future.

"We don't have plans of leaving our community," says Dulama Munkuli — unless, she adds, it's to fulfill orders as their business grows. "As long as our project is doing well, we'll stay." ■

Sienna Malik is managing editor of A Common Place magazine. Annalee Giesbrecht is advocacy engagement animator and coordinator for the Peace & Justice Office of MCC Canada.



Video: The buzz around beekeeping



Max Bennett, Dane Yoder and Roslyn Shenk gather for a festive photo.

“Seeing the kids unite to decide how to spend the money was a joyful and meaningful moment.”
- Emiley Shenk



Scan for more from Toledo Mennonite Church

Christmas giving

Every year, MCC supporters find unique ways to engage their families, friends and communities in MCC Christmas giving, sparking fun traditions, successful fundraisers and eye-opening conversations about the world around us.

Here’s a look at one church’s creative Christmas giving fundraiser.

Church: Toledo Mennonite Church (Toledo, Ohio).

Participants: 10 youth group members, ages 4-14, including Dane Yoder (14), Max Bennett (13) and Roslyn Shenk (14).

The Fundraiser: Acts of service during the 2024 Advent season.

The youth took actions like doing yard-work for elderly neighbors, sharing food with someone in need or sending hand-drawn pictures and kind notes to

people in the community. During worship services, the youth shared about the work they did and invited the congregation to make donations toward MCC Christmas giving. “This church can really come and donate when it is needed,” says Yoder.

On teamwork: At the end, the youth counted the donations and together explored gift options from MCC Christmas giving. Gifts were chosen by a voting system. “Seeing the kids unite to decide how to spend the money was a joyful and meaningful moment,” says Emiley Shenk, Roslyn’s mother and the chair of the church’s Christian Formation Commission.

Gift selections: Clean water, wells, ducks, goats, pigs, fruit trees, plant a garden, keeping girls in school — and more!

Why these gifts: “We all thought that education was really important, and

especially for keeping girls in school,” Roslyn Shenk says. And the group opted for goats because “we wanted everybody to be able to have food and animal products so that nobody will go hungry,” says Bennett.

Challenges: The youth considered how to approach their work with a sense of humility, not wanting to center individual contributions. So, when they spoke of their service work at church, they spoke as a group, emphasizing collective efforts over individual ones.

Joys and learnings: Young participants learned about challenges that so many people face worldwide — but also about the many ways to help. “I learned that I really enjoy giving, and I didn’t kind of realize that until I started doing it for more people,” says Roslyn Shenk.

Learn more about Christmas giving: mcc.org/christmas

for children

hello

CAMBODIA

How can you greet someone in Khmer?

chom reab sour

(Say “chom reab so-ur”)

In Cambodia, names are in a different order than in the U.S. So we would call our friend “Reachsei” (pronounced reach-sai)

My name is Ni Reachsei.

Age: 10 Lives in: Tram Dom village, Cambodia

I live with my mom, my dad and my older sister, Reaksa. I also have a dog named Alok, who always runs to greet me when I come home, and we play together every day.

When I wake up in the morning, I help my mom wash the dishes and cook rice and then I go to school. I enjoy playing ball with friends. I also help collect cashew nuts from the cashew trees near our farm. My parents use the money from selling the nuts to buy food for the family.

My mom has taught me that trees in the forest are important for wildlife and producing oxygen and that protecting the river means there are enough fish for everyone to eat and sell.

My favorite food: stir-fried chicken

My favorite subject: math

What I want to be: police officer

The mighty Mekong

Ni Reachsei lives near the Mekong River, home to over 1,300 species of fish and one of the world’s most diverse ecosystems. His mother is part of a team that helps care for this very special river.

What amazing life might you see as you float on the river? Search for these plants and animals (just the green words):

IRRAWADDY DOLPHIN

WATER SPINACH

GIANT CATFISH




CHICKEN EGG BANANA TREE

GIANT IBIS


WILD WATER BUFFALO

FROG-FACED TURTLE

FUN FACT: Many smaller rivers connect to the Mekong. One of these, the Tonlé Sap, flows in different directions during different times of year!



O	E	W	M	B	I	F	G	E
L	M	H	V	A	B	L	P	G
A	H	P	C	N	I	M	X	Y
F	B	S	E	A	S	P	Z	R
F	X	C	X	N	N	Z	V	I
U	K	R	A	A	N	I	C	S
B	O	Y	F	T	K	G	P	J
R	I	K	A	R	F	D	F	S
E	E	A	N	E	W	I	S	R
T	D	Z	H	E	T	E	S	P
A	E	L	T	R	U	T	L	H
W	H	D	O	L	P	H	I	N





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