

# Sisters Habitat for Humanity builds in Cambodia

By Carol Pedersen Moorehead  
Correspondent

It's hot and humid in Cambodia, the sun intense on this November day. Sweat is pouring onto my mortar bucket. Heat emanates from the blocks I am setting as we construct an exterior wall. Water from last night's rain puddles on the dirt road we tread to reach the construction site.

Most of us do not perform manual labor on a regular basis, certainly not in these tropical conditions. If we visit the tropics, we play in the ocean and imbibe in fancy drinks with miniature paper umbrellas. Yet, here we are day after day hauling sand, cement and water to make mortar, filling our mortar buckets, laying blocks and climbing scaffolding as our exterior walls grow beyond our reach. Moreover, we paid our own airfare and a stipend for the privilege of doing this work in the enduring heat. Most of us will stay on for a week afterwards to tour more

of this kingdom or make a visit to nearby countries.

The families for which we build have become "our" families.

A family representative was present each day at the build site and would assist in small ways. In the case of our family, Pin Chhoeu did not really meet his wife until they were married, not because of custom, but because the brutal Khmer Rouge regime that took over the country in the 1970s forced marriages to assure another generation of soldiers. Although the Khmer Rouge was driven out of Cambodia in 1979, this couple is still together, and with their four younger children relish the opportunity to have a home free of flooding, with a flush toilet.

We take care when applying mortar and leveling the blocks to assure a secure structure. After we leave the build site around 4 p.m., some of the local paid construction workers continue the work and in the morning, we inspect it, find fault

with the way the blocks now slope or fail to match up. We "own" this work and want our sweaty efforts to pay dividends for our families for years and years to come.

A team of 15 representing Sisters Habitat for Humanity flew to Cambodia recently to help build 23 homes under the guidance of Habitat for Humanity International Global Village. This Cambodia Big Build attracted 253 international participants with teams of participants from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Great Britain, Hong Kong and the USA.

Our Sisters team worked on two different houses, both made of compressed-earth blocks. The blocks are faster to make than classic fired brick and manufactured at a nearby site. There, workers scoop shovels full of soil onto a large screen where it is hand-sifted until a very fine product piles up below and is ready to combine with clay, cement and water then molded and compressed into blocks. The compressed



PHOTO BY GARY MILLER

A joyous celebration of a house built with love. A house now made a home for a Cambodian family.

blocks are set in the sun to dry. Two days later, they will be stacked and kept watered for one to two weeks before they are building-ready.

Five tools were indispensable for our project: the bricky tool — a gauge to lie upon the blocks as a frame for our mortar layer, a trowel

to apply the mortar, a level to assure a flat surface, a rubber mallet for leveling the blocks and buckets to carry sand for mortar mixing and mixed mortar for application.

A cement foundation and framework completed before

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