

# The Global Food Crisis

## Section 2 – Cambodia’s rice?

For the full article on which this section is based see:  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/jul/20/food.cambodia>

**Age group: 13-16**

### **Aims:**

- To identify causes of the Global Food Crisis
- To evaluate the part free trade policies play in the Crisis
- To identify the links between causes, impacts and solutions of the Crisis
- To develop problem solving, decision making and presentation skills.

### **What to do:**

You will need:

- Large sheets of plain paper, scissors and felt tip pens.

## Activity 1

**'Lush paddy fields as far as the eye can see. So why can't this farmer afford to feed his family'**

*Alex Renton. The Observer. Sunday 20 July 2008*



*Thok Tel stands in his rice paddy, Oxfam Words and Pictures*

Learners should be asked to brainstorm the following question in groups and try to think of any plausible answers. (You can photocopy and handout the following page or project it.)

When each group has finished the class should come together and try to agree on 10 possible reasons. Write the reasons down.

**‘Lush paddy fields as far as the eye can see. So why can’t this farmer afford to feed his family’**

**Alex Renton. The Observer. Sunday 20 July 2008**



*Thok Tel stands in his rice paddy, Oxfam Words and Pictures*

Why is Thok Tel, the rice farmer, standing in a vast field of rice, unable to feed his family?

## Activity 2

### Free Trade

This section explains the meaning of **free trade**.

Free trade is the main idea behind free trade communities such as the European Union (EU) and the international trade body, the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

However **free trade** is very controversial. In this activity learners work out some of the problems associated with free trade

In small groups learners read the description of free trade on the following page. Then they should brainstorm any questions they have about free trade and any problems they can see in making it fair for all.

You can learn more about the EU at [http://europa.eu/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/index_en.htm) and the WTO at [http://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/whatis\\_e/inbrief\\_e/inbr00\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/inbrief_e/inbr00_e.htm).

## Free trade

Free trade means trade between countries that has no restrictions or barriers placed upon it.

Some countries have advantages at producing certain goods. For example South Korea has developed the ability to produce electronic goods at low prices. South Korea could also produce rice, but it makes little sense for it to concentrate on growing rice if it is better at producing electronic goods.

However Cambodia, a neighbour of South Korea, lacks the skills and industries to make electronic goods. Therefore Cambodia is advised to concentrate on what it does best – grow rice.

Free trade should allow countries to specialise in the things they do best. This is said to be good for all countries. This is because every country does what it is best at and buys the products it is not so good at producing from other countries. With everyone in the world doing what they are best at and then engaging in trade, everyone is better off.

*For example much of the meat for sale in the UK comes from New Zealand. It could be argued that this is bad for UK farmers. However if New Zealand can produce cheaper and better meat, then supporters of free trade argue that the UK should stop producing meat, buy New Zealand meat instead and then focus on producing things to sell to New Zealand that the UK is better at making. UK farmers who lose their jobs will find work in more efficient industries*

When goods are traded freely there is a single price for goods across the world. This is for two reasons. No buyer will pay a higher price than that the price being paid for the same goods by other buyers. Secondly no seller will sell their goods for a lower price if they can get a higher price elsewhere. The result is that there is a single price for basic goods such as rice all over the world.

## Activity 3

# How Free Trade Affects Cambodia's Rice Farmers The Global Food Crisis in Action

This activity is adapted from The Observer, Sunday July 20 2008. See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/jul/20/food.cambodia>

In this activity learners work out the impact free trade was expected to have on Cambodian farming and compare it with what has happened in real life. Then they make connections between free trade and the impact of the Global Food Crisis on Cambodia's poor.



*Working in a Cambodian rice paddy, Oxfam Words and Pictures*



*Rice stall in Dem Kor market, Phnom Penh Oxfam Words and Pictures*

First hand out the facts and questions below, ask learners to consider the question. After a few minutes hand out the second box of text and ask learners to compare their own answer with the actual events described in the subsequent box. Learners should give their judgements about whether Cambodia benefited from free trade in the ways they may have expected. What are the differences they can identify between the supposed benefits of free trade and the actual events?

Cambodia and Thailand are neighbours with a shared border

Cambodia has rice fields as far as the eye can see. It grows more rice than it needs.

Thailand has built warehouses to store rice and factories to mill and polish rice so the rice is ready to cook.

**Think about the idea of free trade**

1. What might Cambodia and Thailand do so both countries would benefit?

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**Think about the idea of free trade**

3. What might Cambodia and Thailand do so both countries would benefit?

## Free trade in Cambodia

Cambodia has recently followed the advice of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) that advocates all countries should allow free trade.

Cambodia is more efficient at growing rice than building the warehouses and factories to mill and polish the rice and make it ready for market. Cambodia experienced war and conflict from the 1970s to the 1990s that destroyed much of its infrastructure and resources.

Therefore Cambodia was persuaded to concentrate on what it does best and just grow rice. It relies on Thailand to do what it does best, mill and polish the rice so it's ready to cook. This is what is meant by free trade between the two countries.

However Cambodia is now unable to mill and polish much of the rice it grows. The rice picked in the fields cannot be eaten unless it is milled and polished first, and this is now done mainly in Thailand. As a result many Cambodian farmers, and all farm workers, actually buy food in the market rather than eat what they grow.

This causes two problems. The first is that Cambodia is buying back rice it has already grown at a higher price than it sold it for. This is because milling and polishing adds value to the rice and increases its price.

The second problem is that Cambodia has to pay the world market price for rice it grows. When the price of rice suddenly rises, as it has by 50% in the first six months of 2008, even rice farmers cannot afford to feed their families.

## Working out how the global food crisis affects Cambodia

The cards below should be cut up and used by learners to make links between the different events they describe.

The cards should first be **grouped** and then used to make **consequence chains**. There is no requirement to use all the cards for a successful lesson, nor is there a 'right answer' to this activity. The work should promote 'confident uncertainty' amongst learners

There are blank cards for learners to write any additional ideas or information they feel is useful.

### Grouping the cards

Learners should place the cards into four groups representing the following;

- **Background information** that sets the scene and helps to explain the background to the Global Food Crisis in Cambodia.
- **Causes** – changes that are making life harder for poor people in Cambodia
- **Effects** – the results of these changes, how they affect people's lives
- **Solutions** – how food security in Cambodia is being improved.

### Consequence Chains

A consequence chain links background information, causes, effects and solutions.

Groups of learners require a large sheet of paper, felt tip pens and glue.

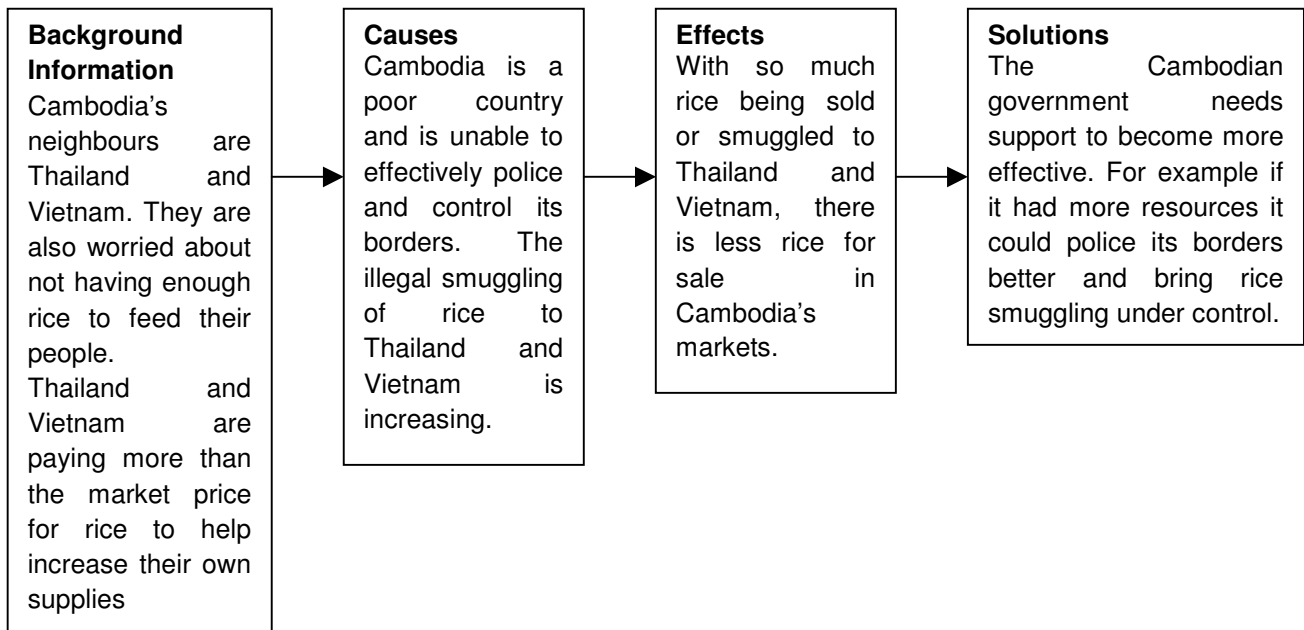
Learners should place the cards on their sheets of paper and begin to work out how they are linked together in consequence chains. As there is no 'correct' answer for this activity learners should be encouraged to discuss their opinions and reach judgements.

The consequence chains do not have to be linear – for example one cause may have two effects and so on. It is not necessary to use all the cards.

Once learners are confident about their consequence chains they should glue the cards onto the paper and use felt tip pens to illustrate the chains that link the cards together. They could write a short explanation of each link along the chain.

Groups could then be asked to present their work to the class and explain the thinking behind their ideas.

This is one possible example of a consequence chain.



## Follow up work

Learners could make a presentation outlining the effects of the Global Food Crisis on Cambodia. They could brainstorm additional solutions to the Crisis (ie: how the various effects could be addressed). Their ideas could be grouped into two categories

Local – just relating to Cambodia

Global – relating to Cambodia's neighbours and the wider world community

Learners could conclude by producing a policy manifesto suggesting how Cambodia's food security could be improved and any role they believe people in the UK could play to support these changes

## Cambodia Consequence Chains

<p>The price of oil has increased from \$75 per barrel in mid 2006 to \$147 per barrel in mid 2008.</p>	<p>Farmers waiting for the annual harvest have no rice to sell but the price of rice at the market is rising. If a hungry family borrows a cup of rice from a neighbour or a shop, they are expected to pay two cups back.</p>	<p>Cambodian rice farming is old fashioned. This means farmers can reap only one harvest per year, compared with two or three in Vietnam. The months before the November harvest are often hungry times.</p>
<p>Seng Phon, a farm worker and single mother, has sent her daughter to work in a tourist resort and has taken her two sons out of school to search for snails in the forest that they can sell in the market.</p>	<p>Moped-taxis provide transport for long distances that are too far to walk. The price of taking a moped into the nearest town, where the school and the market are located, has doubled.</p>	<p>Lai Phon is a housewife. She is finding it more difficult to feed her family. Sauce made from a few fish heads isn't enough to provide nutrition for all her children</p>
<p>Many families have reluctantly taken their children out of school and have put them to work in the fields. The moped-taxi fare to the school in town has become too high.</p>	<p>There are many farm workers who own no land and have no rice to sell. A day's pay in the rice fields is 40p.</p>	<p>The snack sellers and moped-taxi drivers in Phnom Penh become poorer themselves</p>
<p>Poor people cannot afford to pay higher prices for food or transport.</p>	<p>Fish live in the lakes that irrigate the rice fields. Fish could be a nutritious supplement to the farmers diet.</p>	<p>Oxfam supports farmers to claim legal rights to fishponds and teaches them how to fish in a sustainable way.</p>

<p>With so much rice being sold or smuggled to Thailand and Vietnam, there is less rice for sale in Cambodia's markets.</p>	<p>Many poor people in Phnom Penh, the capital city, make a living by selling rice snacks or running moped-taxis</p>	<p>Cambodia is a poor country and is unable to effectively police and control its borders. The illegal smuggling of rice to Thailand and Vietnam is increasing.</p>
<p>Cambodia's neighbours are Thailand and Vietnam. They are also worried about not having enough rice to feed their people. Thailand and Vietnam are paying above the market price for rice to help increase their own supplies.</p>	<p>However most of Cambodia's rice is organic. Farmers don't understand what this means. They lack the knowledge and facilities to sell their organic rice on the European market where it would be worth a higher price.</p>	<p>Mothers are searching for any food that adds nutritional value to rice. Fish heads make a basic sauce. However they are not especially nutritious and are brought by moped from a nearby town. With the rising price of oil even fish heads are becoming more expensive.</p>
<p>In 2006 a day's pay in the rice fields bought enough rice to feed a family of 6 with a little money left over. In 2008 the same pay only buys half the rice the family's needs.</p>	<p>Oxfam is helping Cambodian farmers to market their organic rice in Europe and benefit from the higher prices it is worth.</p>	<p>Snack sellers and moped-taxi drivers are facing rising prices for rice and petrol. But they cannot pass these price rises onto their poor customers.</p>

Old-fashioned farming methods and lack of knowledge mean that farmers are unable to sell their rice at the world price. Farmers become poorer while rice traders make big profits.

The Cambodian government is asking for international investment to improve its farming system. This would enable it to improve yields and mill and polish its own rice. Cambodia would therefore have greater control over its food security.

Many farmers and people in the towns and cities face debt. Debt means that families are unable to invest in their children's education and farmers are unable to invest in making rice farming more efficient.

The Cambodian government needs support to become more effective. For example if it had more resources it could police its borders better and bring rice smuggling under control.

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Write your own ideas here

Blank Card  
Write your own ideas here