

## Empowering Rural Women to Save Forests and Livelihoods

Widespread illegal land grabbing is destroying local forests and increasing poverty in the rural areas. Foreign corporations bribe Cambodian government officials and then take over community forests. They clear cut the forests and convert them to plantations (such as eucalyptus—used to make paper) for export.

Rural rice farmers traditionally harvest products from community forests for their own survival and to earn a living. Once the forests are destroyed, family members have to migrate to other countries for labor jobs. There they are often exploited and mistreated.

In 2002, when Pich was 29 years old, an agro-industrial company, called Pheapimex, tried to take over her community forest. At that time she was, following traditional Khmer culture, a shy woman who was reluctant to raise her voice in public.

Action for Environment and Communities (AEC), a local NGO supported by Friendship with Cambodia, encouraged her to get involved with the community forestry committee. Through training by AEC, she learned about land laws, forestry laws, human rights and women's rights. She gained self-confidence.

Two years later Pich was elected to be head of the Phnom Kok Forestry Network. She also became active in community development.



Over the years, Pich has grown into a self-confident and eloquent woman who can apply non-violence in confrontations between her community and companies or the police. She knows how to negotiate with



authorities and understands the process of land and forestry registration.

Pich, pictured above, encourages women in her community to participate in Women's Savings groups so they can improve their lives.

Everyday, she visits 3 to 5 families in her village. She helps them deal with the problems they face as farmers or migrant workers. She helps them peacefully resolve conflicts and she records information about incidents of encroachment by private companies on the community forest.

She says that Cambodian women need to acquire more skills so that they have the courage to address domestic violence.

Pich divorced 20 years ago and has raised her son on her own. She is proud of the fact that he is now a student in university. Pich lives with her sister, who lost her leg to a land mine. They open their home for community activists and NGO workers to meet and discuss strategies for community activities.

This year Friendship with Cambodia is funding the training of 31 women leaders, like Pich, in rural areas. They become role models for younger women, breaking the cultural traditional of weak women who have no voice.

These empowered women feel better about themselves and are making valuable contributions to their communities.

Pich and other women leaders working with AEC successfully protected their community forest from the encroachment of Pheapimex logging corporation. The company pulled out in 2015.

## 16 Students Graduated from University in 2016



**Noun Srey-Neak**, Nursing. She will work as a nurse mid-wife at a rural government health center.



**Khut Chanthy**, Agronomy. She has a job working for the Department of Agriculture in her home province.



**Hiem Meng**, Sociology. He will take the exam to become a high school teacher.



**Hay Srey-Vang**, Rural Development. She has a job at an NGO that supports children's nutrition.

...more graduates

**Yet Hel**, Public Administration

**Phem Kop**, Economics

**Mean Sorin**, Finance

**Sam Sophana**, Sociology

**Chhea Both**, Veterinary Medicine

**Sath Chheang-Ly**,  
Rural Development

**Yim Phally**, Finance

**Pon Pach**, Sociology

**Duong Saroeun**, Finance

**Kath Chanthol**,  
Primary School Education

**Saom Sok-Yin**, Sociology



**Dum Puth** (pictured above and below) is an orphan. We sponsored her for 10 years, since she was in 6th grade.

In 2006 she wrote: *I am very grateful for your generosity for sponsoring me. I promise I will study very hard in order to reach my goal and so you won't be disappointed in me.*

We aren't disappointed—we are so proud of her. Puth graduated this year with a degree in Rural Development and now she has a job with the NGO Shahakren Micro Finance.



## Friendship with Cambodia's Programs

### Education for Poor Rural Youth

41 students are currently attending university. We give them career counseling, financial support, English and computer classes, and help them get internships and jobs.

61 students have graduated from university

### Empowerment of Women

We have been supporting the training of 31 rural women as community leaders over the past three years and we formed a regional Women's Network. We provided technical support to 15 Women's Savings Groups and funding to 4 groups. Through these groups, over 1000 women are improving their lives through economic empowerment.

### Healing for Survivors of Trafficking and Gender Violence

Last year, we helped 20 girls and women who were sex-trafficked, 23 women and girls who were raped, and 37 women who were beaten by their husbands. Our partner organization, the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center, provides trauma victims with shelter, counseling, life skill training, English classes, legal assistance, and vocational training.

### Care for Street Children & Orphans

Through our NGO partner, Chamkar Morn Center in Phnom Penh, 81 children living on the streets were given temporary shelter with food, schooling, and help in finding long-term solutions.

15 children who grew up at Happy Family Orphanage in Siem Reap are being supported in university or vocational training so they can live independently.

### Help for Landmine Disabled Women

Six workshops were held for 163 disabled women to help them grow in self-confidence and make plans to improve their future. Support was given for income generation initiatives, education (university, school for the blind, and vocational training), wheel chairs, prostheses, toilets, emergency rice, wells, and home repair.

## *The amazing results of ONE person's efforts*

### **ONE woman is raising 47 orphaned children**

Ms. Thou Ream lost all her family in Cambodia's genocide (1975-1979). She started working in a government orphanage. The government provided \$4.50 per month per child - to cover food, clothes, and staffing. It was extremely poor.

In 2004 an Australian organization took over the orphanage. They said that Ms. Ream didn't have the qualifications to continue working there. She refused to leave and when the military came to take her away, the children surrounded her and begged the soldiers "don't take our mother."

At that point the orphanage split was split in two. Ms. Ream created Happy Family Orphanage and is doing a beautiful job of raising 47 children (ages 6 to 22).



*Happy Family Orphanage in 2003*

### **ONE man is helping the orphans with careers**

Bob Lee, a retired executive from Oregon, was visiting Angkor Wat with his wife in 2002. They were distressed to see so many begging children, so they started feeding them. Some of the children took Bob to visit Happy Family Orphanage, and Bob started helping the orphanage.

A non-profit organization in Japan set up a **Foster Parent** program to raise funds to feed the children. Bob Lee set up a **Career Sponsorship** program to help the orphans after they graduated from high school, and to pay for English and computer classes for the younger children.

Bob's effort is a program of Friendship with Cambodia. Thus far, he has given a favorable future to 15 orphans. Two became medical doctors, two are nurses, three have degrees in agriculture, two are working in hotel management, and we have a chef, accountant, beautician, tour guide, driver, and business man.



### **ONE orphan is now a Pediatrician at Angkor Children's Hospital**

Theavy was sponsored from 2003, when she was in 10th grade, all the way through medical school. After the 12th grade exam, she ranked 4th in the nation. She completed eight years of medical training and is now a doctor at a hospital that provides free care to children whose families are extremely poor.

John Dennis, one of the first board members of Friendship with Cambodia, tells the story of a 12 year old girl who rode her bicycle for hours to bring her seriously ill baby sister to this hospital. Her family had no money to pay for medical care or transportation to the hospital. The baby had the deadly Dengue Fever. Fortunately, she survived.

### **ONE orphan overcame rejection from her parents**

When Chengleang's parents got divorced, neither parent would take her. They dropped her off at the orphanage.

Chengleang was a straight A student. When she graduated from university with an Accounting degree, she was among the top 35 in her class of 4392 students. She was recognized by the Prime Minister of Cambodia, who personally gave Cheanleang her diploma.

#### **Take Advantage of the New Tax Law**

If you are over 70 1/2 years old you can now donate directly from your IRA to charitable organizations like Friendship with Cambodia without paying income tax on funds withdrawn.

## Life for women in Cambodia - Ratha's story

In Cambodia, women are expected to speak softly and to submit to their husbands' will. According to a 2013 report from the United Nations, ninety-eight percent of Cambodia women agree with this tradition. Forty-five percent of local authorities think it is permissible for men to beat their wives under certain circumstances. Three quarters of Cambodian women feel women should keep silent about abuse in order to keep "family harmony." Most women are economically dependent on their husbands and are afraid to leave the marriage.

Ratha completed 12th grade and was married in 2009. After her son was born, her husband completely changed. He became addicted to gambling, alcohol, and drugs. He often beat her.

In 2014, Ratha could not stand it anymore and came to Cambodian Women's Crisis Center for help. CWCC helped her

file for divorce, which her husband appealed. Ratha was afraid her husband would come and take her son.

When she first arrived at the shelter, which is supported by Friendship with Cambodia, she was always sad and cried a lot. The staff gave her emotional support Ratha participated in vocational training including baking, cooking, sewing, and making handicrafts. Her son was in the center's day care.

"After I spent time in the shelter, I became strong and feel confident," explained Ratha. She was able to return home a year later. Her divorce is still pending, because her husband is in prison for fraud. Ratha was recently offered a job at CWCC's shelter and now she is on staff at the day care center. She feels very happy.

Cambodia is developing a National Action Plan on Violence Against Women to coordinate government efforts on this issue.



PO Box 5231  
Eugene, OR 97405

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

## Caring for Children in Crisis

Mircela (9 years old) was living on the streets with her mother and baby sisters (ages 2 and 4). Her mother was suffering from AIDS and was too weak to care for her children. Her father was in jail for robbery. Our social workers connected Mircela's mother with an agency that could care for her and the younger children. Mircela came to stay our Chamkar Morn street children protection center.

For the first time in her life, Mircela attended school, and started learning basic reading, writing, and mathematics. She received good nutrition and health care.

We hope that her mother's health will improve and that her father will be released from jail and be able to support his family so Mircela can return to live with her parents.

This is the goal - to stabilize the family, so the children can grow up with their parents.



---

### Friendship with Cambodia

Founded in 2003 as a non-profit organization to provide humanitarian aid to Cambodia and education about Cambodia.

(541) 952-2009 [www.friendshipwithcambodia.org](http://www.friendshipwithcambodia.org)

Please support our programs. Donations are tax-deductible.