

Story of Executive Director, Thy Bunrith (nicknamed Racky) Children's Action for Development

Why I wrote this story

Improving life by seizing opportunities to access education and life skills; learning about culture, tradition, politics, science, languages and art; learning from important events in your lives and events in your own country and the world. These are all important for progress.

I want to inform readers of events from the era of the Khmer Rouge genocide when more than two million people were killed in Cambodia during the period of 1975 till the beginning of 1979. In particular I want to tell you about the children's living situation at that time, about the work that children had to do, the lack of education and the difficulties at that time. I will tell this story through my own personal experience – through my own eyes.

I would like to dedicate this to all children and friends of mine and all people who were killed to meet heaven. I dedicate to all the deities of the world, to help the Government to take care of the management and guidance of Cambodia children in the future - to be healthy, energetic and resolute, to overcome all obstacles, to learn, to be bright, human resources with great potentiality for the development of our nation to be truly prosperous.

Thankyou

The Importance of Education

In Cambodia, the Royal Government has implemented the “four learning pillars”:

- (I) Learn to gain knowledge and skills (literacy, numeracy & critical thinking)
- (II) Learn to have a good, righteous job
- (III) Learn to be good, good people, good, values, virtuous, truthful
- (IV) Learn to live together, respect for the right to dignity and equality.

Unless education is deemed the top priority (compulsory) then we will not create a right, peaceful, developing and prosperous society. We must have a clear strategic plan, law, resources, transparency and accountability, as well as proper evaluation.

I created a charity, called Children's Action for Development that wanted to cultivate a new mindset focusing on philanthropy and economic improvement through education. I am optimistic that this charitable cause will lead to alleviation of poverty and illiteracy, both in the region and in the world.

To understand why I feel so strongly about education and why I started this charity, you must first understand the story of my childhood.

The Early Days

My name is Thy Bunrith (nickname Racky) and I was born in a poor family in rural countryside. Unfortunately, my country went down the worst political crisis when the whole country was occupied by Pol Pot-Khmer Regime on 17th April 1975. At that time, I was a young age (around 9 years old) and had young appearance. My mother did not remember the date of birth clearly because the condition of her health and memory was weak.

I had a very difficult life because my parents and I lived in these Blind days of the Pol Pot Regime from 1975 to the beginning of 1979. (Blind day means it is dark day - people cannot see goodness, it is like a nightmare). During these years, it was a tough situation for children, adults and the elders because members of each family were not allowed to live together. Also, the regime brought in forced labour and eliminated land ownership.

During the time of the Khmer Rouge, I lived with other children in the childrens workplace. Many kids were bigger than me, but some kids were as small as me. Many children lived together but boys were kept separate from girl children. Some of the children and adults were assigned to manage the children in the children workplace. All children lived and slept in a open large stall, with un-cleaned boards, or bamboo flooring with a plant-string mattress (the long water-plant).

Children had few important belongings with 1 or 2 old outfits, a pair of black rubber slippers and a thin cloth for wiping and sleeping. When we wake up, we hear the screams and snarls (when people frown angrily with teeth bared like the dog) from the people in charge. The children wake up and collect the covers then lined up to listen to instructions for the day.

The children's work included; keeping the sparrows away from the rice in the fields, send seedlings to old people, cutting wild string to tie seedlings, collecting cow dung and small plant to make compost for rice growth etc. The site was located in the middle of a rice field, near a large snail lake - near Phnom Sampov (Sailing Boat mountain).

The children were abused - they did not let the children live or meet with parents or relatives and they separated the children. When eating, sleeping, taking a bath and working we were constantly monitored. Anyone who had urine or stool at night time was punished by giving them more work to do and cleaning the stool on his own. According to their law: "Most of the food has the power of the urine and the stench". This means, if someone had urine or stool at night time, it was because the children ate a too much rice and water in the day time - and it made the children have urine or stool at night time.

When the children were sick, all of us were given a boiled traditional remedy water with bitter taste, or a few loaves of traditional tree-root medicine with bitter taste for a few day. I heard they followed one proverb: "pretending to be sick, but more eating!". I do not understand this at the time! I know now it means if someone was sick or had fever, he must work because he eats the food of the organization.

I was so thin, my knee was bigger than my head, my belly was bigger, my head was bigger, my eyes looked like very deep holes. When time of eating, children ate only porridge and have just a few pieces of rice counted in 1 bowl. This porridge did not taste of anything but salt and water. Children were given this 2 times a day, day and night. Eating was scheduled, if anyone comes late to an overnight meal, there was nothing left to eat, or they would be not allowed to eat.

One time when I was not able to come for eating time because I went very far to collect cow-dung and small plants, I had nothing to eat. I was so hungry, hungry. But the organization determined I did not collect enough. I was punished, not only no food, but they took me to the education building and said that I was doing wrong and lazy and then they took me to pick fruit up the tamarind tree, which was very big. They forced me to climb up the tamarind tree with their anger- face and voice - because they said they wanted to eat it. At that time, I was shocked and had tears, but my stomach was hungry, and I thought that if I did not go up, I would probably have died

Sometimes I saw some children at the childrens workplace disappeared without knowing reason. So I tried to climb to the top of the tamarind tree and I picked up a lot of fruit for them, but they did not really want it so they did not wait to pick up fruit from me. They did this only to be cruel to me and I kept picking fruit. Suddenly I looked down, I saw dried grass, rice-straw they had gathered to put around the tree and set the fire on, and they walked away with big laughter. As for me I was on top of the tree and I was scared and I thought that this was the day of this little boy's death! I do not remember anything except praying to the angels, help me, help me! But soon, the wind blows hard and mixed with the raindrops, that put out that fire. I went down and returned to the children's place. Without eating porridge, I ate tamarind fruit so I got sick- diarrhea for one night and one day. They let me take traditional tree-root remedy and then I became normal and I work normally.

There was another time when I come back too late because I went far again to collect cow-dung and small plants. I was punished again. This time they were very wrong, they did not give me food and punished me by telling me to jump from high shore into a river that was flowing fast and underneath was deep water. I was horribly shocked, unable to speak, tears just flowed down and I almost could not breathe. They do not understand this, they build up voice, shouting at me, and force me to jump because they say I made a mistake and showed laziness. They do not want to let others follow my

example. I know that no one can save my life, my self-esteem; so with the eyes closed, I was jumping from the shore, nothing aware, I lost control. By the power of life, I tried to catch the trees in the water, but the wave kept pushing and I was floating along the water. As the flow of water was gradually weaker I could climb up the shore safely.

This time, I did not go back to the children workplace, because I know I will be killed later. This poor child sent his life into the jungle, walking without knowing where to go. I kept walking and running in fear and don't know where to find a booth (a place/shelter to stay or sleep in).

On this horrified trip, I saw a lot of dead bodies- smelling so bad and I heard voice of squirrels crying that made me not sure of being able to survive or die. Run far and wide, I'm tired and hungry, I eat small, black plant fruits that grow in the bush, melt, sweet, bitter and somewhat tangy (I remember those fruits so well that I asked my grandmother about those local fruit and she said they were wild pear/ pongroeng fruit, krochokchab fruit, Khneong fruit, Dongkieb kdam). I drank water in the fields for survival.

I spent a lot of time running and walking through the forest, aiming to find my relatives. Until in the evening, the sunshine was nearly gone, there was no brightness and the mountains and big trees hide the sun, I saw a long booth with thatched roof. I saw the smoke and the voices of the old men and women talking. At first, I did not dare to go in but, because my belly was in tightness and hungry, I walked in the long cottage and I saw my grandma and a few old men who helped my grandmother there. Then I was happy to cry with grandma. A few moments later, I saw another old man approaching. He looked at me with astonishment and sadness. Without saying one word, he went over to split-cut firewood, and prepared to cook rice for the field people to eat because the time was near when the field workers come back to eat the evening. My grandmother and other old men cooked rice for people who work in rice fields.

Before field people came to co-operative kitchen, my grandma had to take the whole good cooked rice, leaving the over cooked rice-crust at the bottom of the pan. She also took a spoon to scratch it and piled into two or three pieces which are equal to chicken-egg size and gave it to me to eat. My grandmother was keeping watch at that time, because even the rice crust was watched if it was lost from pan, so she did not dare to bring too much rice-crust for me to eat. After I ate, my grandma told me to go to the children's workplace, but I told her that I could not go back, telling her all the things that happened to me. And then she brought me to a cottage where she lived with two or three grandmas that was not far from the kitchen.

Grandma thought "I know a good way to make a place for you to live in". My grandmother and other grandmothers dug a landhole for me to sleep and hide from the people's eyes, so they could not find and kill me. I remember that place was not big, but I could sleep and hide from the puppet-guy leader from the children workplace and other people. Grandma put grass over and left a tiny hole with air coming in and the pipe of the papaya as a pipe to breathe. It gave me place to hide when people come to look for me.

I do not know how long I have been in the pit, because I never count, but it's too long. They came to find me at my grandma kitchen several times because they suspected I did not die. However, after they searched for me many times, they did not see me, so they stop at searching for me. And I also changed my name from Sothea to Koymoy. (In childhood, my name was Sothea, but I did not want someone recognize/know my name when I stayed with my grandma, so my grandma called me Koymoy. But after liberation day, I changed from Koymoy to Bunrith).

Living with grandmother was better than living in the children workplace, but it was still the fact that I cannot go anywhere and have to stay in the pit and use papaya roots to get air in, and go hide when strange people come. Every day, I went out of the pit and I always walk straight to the pit when I hear the screams /signal voice from my grandma, immediately I go into the pit. Every day, she gives me rice to eat.

And I started thinking what else to do? I cut small wood, made clay as cattle, horses, elephants, crabs and fish. I wanted to learn a language but there was no school and I did not have the full right to learn a language. Every day, I listened on the wind blowing down to the animals crying, laughing sound of

people working, and shouting voices to order people to work hard to achieve the goal of the organization state.

Sometimes I listen to Pol Pot radio on air blowing down. Pol Pot speaks about the Vietnamese state, traitors and Pol Pot Radio voice educated people to work for the State and promoted ideas of hate, killing and so on. I never heard good words, songs of children, beautiful songs, and never heard any Buddhist monks chanting because pagoda and schools were destroyed completely. And I never hear love songs as well.

I think and asked myself: Why is this happening? How did it happen? Are other places the same? I do not understand it. However, there is no answer and no one can give the answer at all. Then I began to think that learning/literacy would be great!

Both young and old were scared to speak out. Pol Pot supporters were talking rude, so other people lived with fear, oppression and had no rights even when living in their own house. They were scared to eat their own food. They had no right to enjoy any wealth or to have their own opinion. I was at that time a young child, so did not think much, but I knew I wanted to learn.

A bad story about my grandfather. My grandfather was killed by the Pol Pot in the cave of Phnom Sampov in the blind days. Under unreasonable accusation - as he was innocent. He just did not obey the orders of Pol Pot who ordered him to kill his wife.

My Grandma was hungry, so she picked up the pineapple and oranges that she grew on her own farm, but she was accused of stealing Angka's wealth that Angka state prohibited. (Angka was the name of the Pol Pot political party). I do not understand! Grandma told me with tears across her cheek down that grandfather could not kill her (grandma), so he asked Angka to kill him instead. They took him away and we never saw him again. Grandma was shocked and angry but she had to continue to work as usual, otherwise she would be killed.

One day, a good day, there was a group of soldiers wearing green hats like bowls, and Khmer soldiers coming to help. (I later was told these were North Vietnamese soldiers who had driven out the Khmer Rouge). My grandmother and I joined the other people who were looking for their relatives. We found my father, my mother and we all found relatives together. We enjoyed with tears flowing down and then all of us were sent by command of the Vietnamese army to a new place to rebuild a new life. That day was the day of the liberation of the Cambodian people from the Khmer Rouge regime of Pol Pot, on 7 January 1979.

After liberation, all the people are happy, have rights, there is no violence, no threats or punishment. But many people and children were lacking food, clothing, medicine, schools and teachers. Many had died of starvation, disease and torture by Pol Pot/ Khmer Rouge armies in the most brutal killings. Because the country was emerging from war, insecurity, turmoil and widespread chaos was across the country, with famine and inadequate governance. No international aid was given at this time because the USA and United Nations did not like the Vietnamese government.

Gradually, the domestic situation began to improve and people began gathering people into villages. But for Grandma, she kept her sorrow because her husband was killed brutally in Pol Pot/ Khmer Rouge regime so she ate less rice and had less sleep, had severe stomach pains and a hemorrhoid. Soon she became seriously ill with no cure and she died in 1983.

The State began gathering survivors of the killings of the Pol Pot regime, preparing schools where they could learn and educated survivors of the killings to work to build up the nation. Some schools and educating place were under the trees.

The State health department was organized people to understand health work wherever possible, or at a hospital space if that had not been destroyed by Pol Pot/Khmer Rouge. Not many leaders remained from Khmer Rouge regime after liberation day so the state organized for groups of people to control 5 houses (led by chief of commune) , and another group of people control 10 houses (equal District Governor).

But the civil war between government troops and the Khmer Rouge soldiers went on and insecurity continued across the country, such as massacres, killings, child abuse and malnutrition. The school was often shuttered because of shelling of Khmer Rouge soldiers from the jungle. I always run away from the village with my parents and other villagers from gunshots fired by the Khmer Rouge soldiers from the forest into my village. I only learned three or three days a month.

At this time, farming practices were not cultivated because the villagers have to run from bullets almost every day. This civil war continued until 1981 when the fighting got less. Although there were still some shells from the Khmer Rouge in the forest, the children could learn and the farming population was comfortable and can catch fish, frogs and snails in the fields for eating. I was going to primary school and strived to be at number 1 every year.

Rebuilding my life

When I finished primary school, I continued to go to a secondary school, which was about eight kilometers away. I usually went to school on foot. The road was laterite and the forest grew alongside the road. Whenever it rained it broke down into mud and was slippery. I usually lifted my pants up to my kidneys to walk from school to home every day. I was happy to go to school, even though it was such a difficult situation it was not the same as my past time in Khmer Rouge regime.

I always thought when I was growing up, I wanted to help many poor children like me to have a lot of knowledge. And if they have a lot of knowledge, they will become moral and social children/people so my country will not have the brutal day/genocidal day as in the past.

I graduated from secondary school in 1988. My life was difficult so I always went to pick leftover rice stalks, after the rice was harvested, in the paddy field after school. I got hired to do bean picking, chili picking, I was a farm laborer and did some housework for others. And also I cooked rice for my parents because they worked far away in the fields and came back home late evening. I looked after my siblings after school as well. Fortunately my parents love me, although they are poor, they were trying to earn for my study at college.

At that time there were no high schools in the commune as there are now, they were only in Battambang. I had no relatives in town, so it was difficult to learn because it was far from home and I had no means of transport. So I then went to live in the pagoda for my high school education. I worked daily for monks in the pagoda before going to school and also before going to bed. Every weekend I followed the monks to get food from people in the villages or on the street. But my friends who studied with me, looked down on me by calling me "pagoda boy" - every child who lived in pagoda was always orphaned and poor, and suffered discrimination.

I learned English from monks at night because I did not have money to study English at private school like other children. I had to work for monks - like give the monks a massage or make tea for them - in exchange for my English lessons. In class at school, there were only two hours of English lessons per week. I tried to read English daily and practice English speaking with monks.

When I was following the monks, I tried to talk to the foreigners along the road beside me. Sometimes I ask for a book to read at a pagoda when I am free from school. When I finished college, I wanted to be a lawyer, because I see many injustices and abuse of children in society. Unfortunately, the exam was not held in Battambang city and I was not able to go to Phnom Penh because my family was very poor, and there was a lot corruption in the past. At that time I was a monk for a year, but I could not keep watching poverty in the community so I decided to leave the monkhood.

The civil-war ended almost exclusively at the end of 1988 and Cambodia prepared its first election in 1993. The election was supported by United Nations UNTAC.

There was a big shortage of qualified teachers at this time because so many had been targeted and killed by the Khmer Rouge - and others had escaped to live overseas.

Later, I went to work with a non-governmental organization helping poor orphans and children in Battambang as a volunteer. Two years later I went to work at a non-governmental organization called the Asian Children's Education Fund and I stopped the previous volunteering job.

The Next Step – Helping Others

In 2006, when I was out of permanent work, I was teaching English to children at a private school in Battambang. I set up “**Cambodia Education Center**”. Cambodia's Education Center offered free English language tuition to the children rural area and 2 volunteers in the community helped me. At first, there were only 25 to 30 students because the community did not have faith and trust in the education provided by our place, but later the community people started to know and be more interested and the children then registered to learn English at “**Cambodia Education Center**”.

At that time, I saw major challenges in rural education:

- (1) Many children in poor households did not have enough nutritious food, poor learning outcomes, and high rates of drop out from school
- (2) Communities and parents did not fully understand the value of real education and there was corruption;
- (3) Many children were poor in math and Khmer language.
- (4) The teaching techniques of teachers was limited
- (5) The leadership and management of the school directors was poor
- (6) High gap between equitable education and gender (girls not supported to go to school)
- (7) Educational services at rural schools were inadequate and not appropriate (a large number of teachers had never been trained in the new techniques of learning and teaching, lack of teachers, and inadequate infrastructure),
- (8) Parents or career takers represented a poor and less educated population (some of whom had not completed primary school).

We cannot solve all of these problems but I met the Commune Chief and discussed these problems. He encouraged me to find ways to improve and that was why I decided to change “**Cambodia's Education Center**” and set up a non-governmental organization, “**Children's Action for Development (CAD)**”.

CAD was registered with the Cambodian Ministry of Interior as a Non-Government Organization (NGO) in 2011. Since that time, CAD has established a Governing Board, written procedures manuals and entered into agreements with the Ministry of Interior. We have made partnerships with International NGOs and have been able to support the education of thousands of children in the Battambang area.

CAD's aim is to tackle major problems around education for children in rural areas in Cambodia because the government pays primary schools only \$2.25 per child per year to operate and maintain their schools (excluding teacher salaries). Many children drop out because parents take their children out of school to work on the land. This creates many basic problems for children at a very young age and is a cycle that CAD wishes to break.

For information about CAD (Vision, Mission, Strategies and projects) see our website www.cadcambodia.org

Supplementary Class

We formed a project which was aligned with the Education Strategic Plan of Education of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, called “**Supplementary Education Class Project**” and many children enrolled:

- We started with 30 children, this increased to 100 in 2012, and 360 in 2013.
- We started with 1 center and now have 3 centers
- We had 2 community teachers in the beginning and this increased to 10 teachers in 2013.

The aim of the project was to catch children who had dropped out of school, or those at high risk of drop out, and help them gain knowledge on writing, calculating, numeracy, virtue, and child rights. This project has contributed a great deal to the strategy of the Royal Government educational policy by reducing dropout rates.

In the beginning, I funded the supplementary classes myself and through donations of tourists. Local people allowed us to use houses for free and Ek Phnom pagoda allowed us to use part of their pagoda. At this time, all the teachers were volunteers from Battambang University.

Then in 2011, I met a representative from Future Sense Foundation (FSF) which is a UK based volunteering organization who arrange for international volunteers to visit Battambang for periods of between one week and a few months. Now they pay for the costs of running the supplementary classes, including paying the teachers.

FSF volunteers improve the teaching skills of CAD teachers and work with them to:

- teach English, Khmer, math, life skills and sport,
- improve health through first aid, drug education, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation, clean water,
- providing healthy snacks
- support the Womens Handicraft Shop at Ek Phnom.

There are three CAD supplementary class schools in 2019. Children attend for 5.5 hours per day and are educated free of charge. Students are given pens, books, pencils and other materials. Children are also provided with water, food/snacks such as local cakes, bread and fruits. As at 2019:

- 360 poor children are enrolled in the class each year.
- 2,160 children are enrolled in free basic nutrition classes.

Early Childhood Programs

As part of the supplementary class, two pre-kindergarten classes have been running since 2018, with 50 students successfully enrolled every year. The aim is to ensure these children receive Early Childhood Education (ECE) services before they go to primary school. The basic programs include literature, letters, drawing, numbers, colors, morals and songs.

They are poor children who lack school materials and nutrition and their parents are very poor and have irregular jobs. Some parents are farmers, some are fisherman, some are construction workers, farm workers and laundry workers. The kindergarten education class is free for them and they are provided school materials such as pencil, book, school bag and snack and water.

The Pre-kindergarten school was set up in the community by CAD with the support of Future Sense Foundation-UK.

Supplementary Class Teachers

Teachers who work in Supplementary Education Class (SEC) Project, are young people who live in the local community and they love to help the poor children in their community to have better life. All of these youth have worked very hard for these poor children and they also learned a lot of things about charity jobs, skills of teaching, learning English, communication skills and especially social work. They always love their job teaching the kids and love the students. Each of them has worked with our organization at least 2-4 years. They are a good youth role model for the nation.

Community teachers attend training provided by the supplementary class project on Methodology of teaching and lesson planning on the subjects of mathematic, Khmer literature, English, class management & child rights. This training is for 2 weeks and provided by senior staff officers from District Office of Education (DOE) and other training is given by more experienced volunteering teachers from our partner - Future Sense.

Supplementary Class Supervision

The senior officer of the supplementary class project has regular meetings with social and project staff and they visit the target schools to make sure that the children have improved in their study and also behave morally. They follow children who are often absent from their class and children who have problems with health, and work closely with parents and community to encourage these children to go to school regularly.

CAD staff visit children at home to make sure there is no child abuse or child labor action from parents. CAD staff encourages parents to understand the lawful obligation of parents in sending their children to school and share child right issues as well. CAD staff meet children and parents to improve their study and we tell them that education is the most important for children, family and society because the root cause of poverty comes from illiteracy and poor education.

The project staff also join quarterly meeting with local government to share and receive updated information which relates to the children and women in the target area.

Other Supplementary Class Programs

Sewing Skills. We implemented a livelihood activity program to help older youths who are too old to go to school or want to learn sewing skills. This program also assisted parents who do not have enough income.

Dance Class. To keep the children happy with their studies, we set up a dance class and run it every weekend on Sunday. The children who love this subject can register and come to learn the traditional dancing.

Drawing Contest. "Drawing and Painting" was offered at each of CAD's supplementary class centers under the theme: "**I love my community**". It was open to any children grade 4 to 6. All boys and girls must find their own way of painting, but the composition must be in accordance with the above topic. It's nice when they are able to show their achievement to each other. This is an activity that promotes children's right to participate in the expression of ideas or opinions and sends a message to the local authorities and other stakeholders to be more interested in the children and focus on the needs of children. The program is organized annually at community level.

Soccer! We created a happy sport, a soccer game for boys and girls at CAD. All of them have a full opportunity to play soccer together, share love, fraternity and experience to improve the children's health, decrease discrimination in gender equity and ensure lifelong learning for all, especially make the children happy including in their own life. There are 6 teams of soccer (72 children including 25 girls). We train our children at weekend and our children are invited to join in provincial regional soccer tournament every year.

Lifeskills. We teach the children life skills with vegetable growing because when they grow up it will improve food their food security. Life skill is done once a week in all centers - they grow flowers and other crops in their bio-gardens.

Technology. The technology day is moving forward so children have to learn about IT. Knowledge of English and electronics (such as computer use) by teachers in grade 4-6 is limited, especially as new principals have not yet been trained to learn electronic skills. We set up a computer class with 10 computers in community and there are 6 sessions per day. Each session is an hour duration. The children can learn from Monday to Friday. CAD also created our computer course with 3-6 months' duration which is aligned with MoE's IT program for all children in remote area. If they can use computer well at primary education level, it will help them in their higher education level and it will be easy to find a job in globalization day.

Health and sanitation. CAD conducted awareness raising on food safety, dengue fever and importance of clean water to community. Almost all people in rural areas did not know about food safety and they do not have enough clean water to drink. They did not boil water for use for their daily life. Now, many rich people use chemical fertilizers to kill insect in their rice field and when the rain come the rain bring all chemical liquid that affects health from field to the pond and wells and the children and people at rural area use this water. And people use chemical fertilizer to grow vegetables and use preservative powder to keep meat and vegetable fresh and longer age. These practices are often dangerous to the people and children at rural area. CAD social staff did awareness raising on these issues and tell them to keep away from chemical poisoned products and food.

Road Safety. To prevent and protect the children from traffic accidents and save money on health treatment, CAD educated the children about how to ride safely. This includes child protection and promote the children to be aware of traffic signs. We have also provided helmet and bikes.

Boxing. CAD and community boxing guys set up traditional boxing gym with the purpose of providing another kind of sport to boys, girls and youth who love this sport, and to protect them from drug use and keep all youth healthy. "Strong bamboo-shoot will grow into strong bamboo in the future". These youth learn boxing every day, 2 hours a day, from 4:00pm- 6:00pm.

First aid training. To respond to the child protection policy, first-aid training was conducted with student council groups in all target schools on cuts, wounds and bones broken.

International Donors

Let me introduce when I met all of my good friends from Australia. One day it was a destiny that I met my friend, Mr. Duncan Ward when he came to Cambodia and visited Battambang Region as tourist. Soon after that I met Wendy Trow when I joined in NGO partnership for Education networking meeting in Phnom Penh. Wendy had come to Cambodia to work for 18 months as a member of Australian Volunteers for International Development. Wendy and Duncan are both from Perth in Western Australia.

We have similar vision in charitable and social work and I told them about the issues in education and my future dream. Then my new Australian friends started to work very hard to help Children's Action for Development (CAD) until they can raise a lot of funds to help the children at rural area in order to improve education and living in Ek Phnom and Sangker districts of Battambang region in Cambodia. Duncan and his friends helped us in three stages:

- Phase 1: He helped fund the process of refining and strengthening staff capacities.
- Phase 2: He created a charity organization called Classroom of Hope with some of his friends
- Phase 3. In 2013, Classroom of Hope (COH) got a grant from Navitas and CAD began implementing "Child Friendly School Project.

Classroom of Hope (COH) is an international NGO raising funds to support Cambodia and other poor countries. COH is a strategic partner with the Children for Development Action Program, which has been helping thousands of poor children and hundreds of teachers in rural areas improve their lives and teaching skills. www.classroomofhope.org.

Wendy Trow from Australia, she sacrificed herself to help Mr. Thy Bunrith (Racky), a director of Children's Action for Development until this non-profitable organization received funding for implementing the "Child Friendly School / School for Excellence" project. She set up a generous small charity called One Family, helping CAD and also providing project support for Child Friendly Schools Project.

Child Friendly Schools Program.

This is a great and beneficial project that has improved the quality of education in rural areas in Ek Phnom and Sangker districts in Battambang province since 2013. Up to now, funds from the Classroom of Hope have been spent with renewed dedication and effectiveness on:

- (1) capacity building, teacher, principal and Central Committee supporting the schools. Focus on school development planning, governance, leadership and management,
- (2) improving infrastructure, organizational structure and systems, clean water, toilet hygiene, basins water, drains, playground.
- (3) providing scholarships to poor student,
- (4) effective teaching and learning training,
- (5) building school libraries and improving the environment of schools,
- (6) promoting child rights and involving children, families, and communities with schools.

Generous funding from the international donors shown at the end of this document resulted in the following key achievements between 2013 and 2019:

- One new four classroom school was built at Ek Phnom (see section below about school builds).

- Refurbished 11 school buildings
- Supported 420 scholarship students
- Providing training workshops and materials to improve quality of teaching at 12 primary schools.
- Playgrounds were installed in 12 schools with the purpose of improving happy activity for the children while they are at school.
- Build toilets at 3 schools and repair toilets at 4 schools.
- The life skill on vegetable growth was done in 12 government primary schools to keep schools green, good environment. We built 10 gardens and 8 geometric gardens.
- Installed water system, water basins, washing station etc at 11 schools
- Built water well at 4 schools
- Built 1 new library and 4 reading huts
- Built/repared school entrance and fence at 6 schools
- Increased number of teachers from 29 to 43 and student ratio dropped from 61:1 to 38:1.

The Success

All of these inputs have made schools change their management and school support committees are now working with each other; teachers gain new knowledge, and methods on teaching and learning, the absence of children has decreased.

- Reduction of repeat rate from 15% to 5%
- Drop out rate was reduced from 20% to 3%

Teachers are excited to teach their students and decorate their classrooms with a variety of child-friendly classroom environments such as display the hand-crafted works in math, Khmer, social studies and social sciences.

In addition, the child labor abuse done by parents was reduced and they participated in school activities such as annual parent meetings and student incentives.

Four community kindergarten education centres were built during the implementation of the Child Friendly School Project. These are funded by the government and Commune Councils and community.

Building New Government Primary Schools – We Need More!

In the past time, Cambodia had plenty of forest and wood so many wooden school buildings and facilities were constructed by the Government and NGOs working in Cambodia. Now, many years later, many schools are getting old and most parts of the wooden schools are broken down by insects, termites, rain, natural disaster, low techniques of construction, poor functional maintenance of community and other corruption matters.

Even though the government and MoE have tried to work hard on this, the government does not have enough budget to repair and build more schools yet, **especially the schools at remote areas**. Many schools, including those built of concrete, are getting old and starting to break down - the walls, top roof, foundations went down and many schools have nearly fallen down so the teachers have stopped using. Some classrooms can only be used as stockrooms.

In the past two decades, there has been increasing number of children as they became enough school age, so they need school and education. Now it lacks a lot of schools in remote area so some schools have been built by the community from bamboo and thatched roof. Other schools were built from old wood with a metal roof and walls. The classrooms were too small so it made the children not safe to learn; there are not enough classrooms for the students and schools lack tables and chairs. More school construction is needed in remote area to improve education in Cambodia.

Classroom of Hope and its partner Navitas have agreed to fund **three** more schools during the period 2019 – 2022 and CAD is organising this activity so that the school meet the highest building standards.

Working with the Cambodian Government

CAD has strong commitment and we have taken strategic action with stakeholders from the level of the Provincial Education Department, the District Education Office to the local community schools level. We signed an agreement and met with the Provincial Director of Education including key officials of the Provincial Education Department to present the project plans, activities and launch the projects.

CAD also meets regularly with School Director, School Support Committee, including the members of the village and village councils, to outline the goals, plans and activities in all the target schools.

CAD is dedicated to work with the Royal Cambodian Government as well as the Ministry of Education, development partners and NGOs, to provide both technical and financial support to improve education; from early childhood, primary education and more, so that we can achieve the strategic plan - Education Sector 2019 to 2023 and 2024 to 2030, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG4).

Thankyou

I would like to thank very much to all readers who take your precious time to read my story of life and work from the beginning till now. I believe that all of the readers will at least learn a few points from this story. And I would like to apologize you in any non-intentional mistake occurred such as grammatical mistake, meaning & paragraph, and I wish all of you have good health win from all enemies and meet happiness and glory for all.

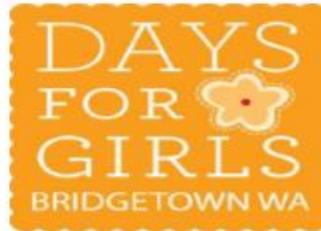
Below is this message in my own language

លិខិតថ្លែងអំណរគុណ

ខ្ញុំបាទសូមថ្លែងអំណរគុណយ៉ាងជ្រាលជ្រៅដល់អ្នកអានទាំងអស់ដែលបានចំណាយពេលវេលាដ៏មានតម្លៃរបស់អ្នកដើម្បីអាន រឿងរ៉ាវជីវិតរបស់ខ្ញុំនិងការងារតាំងពីមុនដំបូងរហូតដល់ចប់។ ខ្ញុំជឿថាអ្នកអានទាំងអស់យ៉ាងហោចណាស់នឹងចាប់បានពីរបីចំណុច ពីរឿងនេះ។ ហើយខ្ញុំសូមអធ្យាស្រ័យចំពោះកំហុសដែលកើតឡើងដោយអចេតនាណាមួយដូចជាកំហុសវេយ្យាករណ៍ អត្ថន័យពុំ សមរម្យ និងកថាខណ្ឌខ្លះចន្លោះ ហើយខ្ញុំសូមជូនពរអោយអ្នកទាំងអស់គ្នាមានសុខភាពល្អឈ្នះអស់សត្រូវទាំងអស់ និងជួបតែសេចក្តីសុខនិងសិរីល្អសំរាប់ទាំងអស់គ្នា។



DONORS & Partnership



Implemented by:



Expanding Children's Opportunities

