



Promoting Safety of Women Workers in the Beer Industry

*Significant Change Stories*



Collected: 2013

## **Preface**

This collection of Significant Change (SC) stories aims to show how CARE's project Promoting Safety of Women Workers in the Beer Industry (PSWWBI) has influenced its beneficiaries.

After three years of implementation at individual level, community level and structural level, many changes have been noticed. These changes have been among beer promoters (BPs), judicial police officers, outlet owners, community members and even at national level.

As a result of the project, BPs reported that they feel more confident and believe that sexual harassment in the workplace is not a part of their job. These SC stories were used as a tool for the monitoring and evaluation of the project within the M&E framework.

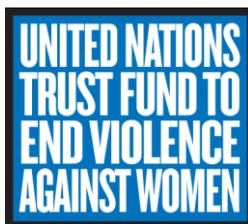
The SC stories collected within this report are from BPs, students, judicial police and outlet owners. The stories show the change of perception that has taken place in relation to beer promoters in the workplace, the commitment of young university students to end violence against women and support from judicial police in response to GBV. They also demonstrate the wider role this work has had in influencing social the attitudes.

## **Acknowledgements**

Promoting Safety of Women Workers in the Beer Industry (PSWWBI), a CARE project, would like to voice our thanks to all project partners including the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), Ministry of Interior (MOI), People Health Development in Cambodia (PHD) and the Solidarity Association of Beer promoters in Cambodia (SABC), all of whom have worked really hard for women's empowerment and for women to access justice in society. All project partners put effort into bringing about change in people's quality of life and without their coordination, these stories could not be collected.

The project thanks all beer promoters, university students, judicial police agents of MOWA and outlet owners who gave their valuable time to provide these significant change stories which reflect on the impact of the PSWWBI project implementation. Their stories are appreciated.

The significant change stories in this book could not be published without support from the United Nation Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women.



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## Project context

**PSWWBI** started its implementation in late 2009. In 2010, the project conducted base line surveys with 252 beer promoters. The results showed that:

- 75% of beer promoters had experienced disrespectful behaviour
- 67% had experienced unwanted sexual touching
- 38% reported experiencing physical abuse
- 36% reported that they had experienced threatening or coercive abuse.

It was this environment that had already led to the formation of the Solidarity Association of Beer Promoters in Cambodia (SABC) in 2009 with guidance from CARE.

Read more about the background of the SABC and the situation in Cambodia below.

### **Beer promoters in Cambodia: Reinventing Solidarity for Safe Workplaces**

In today's competitive world, solidarity may seem an old-fashioned idea to many. For Voleak, however, reviving the meaning of this almost forgotten word has led her to a decisive life change. A beer promoter in Cambodia's Phnom Penh Province, 25 year-old Voleak looks back in time, to her early years as a beer seller, with a mixed sense of pride and concern: "I was perceived as a bad girl because I worked at night, with a group of women with limited education, and we competed to serve the big-spending clients."

It is estimated<sup>1</sup> that there are over 4,000 beer promoters in Cambodia. The impact of the global recession left more than 20,000 women in the country's garment industry unemployed. Many of these women turned to the entertainment industry in search for alternative work.

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<sup>1</sup> CARE Cambodia, UN Trust Fund project-document

In a move that defies the conventional work-life rhythm, beer promoters in Cambodia begin work after night falls. The entertainment outlets – beer gardens, bars, karaoke parlours – are their destination. Once there, precarious work conditions await them. Oftentimes paid on a commission-only basis, beer promoters are exposed to high levels of alcohol consumption and alarming rates of violence and harassment: 83 per cent have faced unwanted sexual touching whilst 38 per cent have experienced coerced sex<sup>2</sup>.



Voleak conducts a beer promoter focus group discussion in the neighboring Prey Veng province, in June 2011  
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## Coming together

Driven by shared dreams of workplace improvement, Voleak and other beer promoters in Phnom Penh decided to form a solidarity group for the rights and safety of women working in the beer industry. She recalls that the task was not easy: “When the solidarity group was first established, most of our members were congratulated, but not by the beer companies. Beer companies were very concerned about this kind of group, about how it would work, including our goals and objectives. Sometimes the group was also challenged by beer promoters, as the idea was very new to them also.” Despite initial challenges, the Solidarity Association of Beer Promoters in Cambodia (SABC) came to being in 2009, nurtured by life-skills sessions and guidance from CARE International Cambodia, currently supported by the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women.

As a SABC member, Voleak soon became a peer leader and a source of motivation for others. In her role as treasurer, she organised focus groups with other women beer sellers, teaching them life-skills and increasing their self-esteem and knowledge of their rights. She asserts, “This work has given me a chance to learn and be a role model for other women. It has taught me to reflect and adapt my thinking and behaviour.”

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<sup>2</sup>CARE International, *Situation of beer Promotion Women*, 2005

The SABC movement has gained support from the Ministry of Women Affairs that has initiated dialogues with outlet owners on their responsibility for beer promoters' safety in the workplace, and introduced them to women's rights, gender-based violence and country-related law. Meanwhile, CARE International has encouraged beer companies towards compliance with the Cambodia Beer Selling Industry's (BSIC) code of conduct for beer promoters, including employment contracts with salaries and benefits, safe transport to and from work, dignified uniforms, and sessions on sexual and reproductive health and negotiation with customers.

SABC and the Ministry of Women Affairs have jointly embarked on a mass media awareness campaign that has, among other things, placed lighted signs in drinking venues to remind customers that "Beer Promoting is a Job that has Value and Dignity" and "Dignity and Honour is the Demand of all Human Beings".

### **Challenging discrimination beyond the workplace**

Voleak is aware that some of the key battles for her and her SABC peers lie beyond the boundaries of the workplace, in broader society, where the stigma and discrimination they face due to being considered as "bad women" find their deep roots. Moved by social change aspirations, they have targeted male clients, especially university students, with sessions on power dynamics, ideal man and woman stereotypes, and the impact of gender-based violence in their society.



Beer promoters challenge ideas about gender with university students at a gender awareness session in Phnom Penh, in October 2011

© Nicholas Axelrod

Today, Voleak has grown from treasurer to administrator and finance coordinator of SABC, and has been able to ensure education for her little son. "All this" – she says – "is thanks to my work with other beer promoters through SABC. I have come to know myself and who I want to be".

As the Ministry of Women Affairs put it during the 2011 International Women's Day, violence against women, especially in the beer industry, requires multiple responses from all actors. Voleak and her SABC colleagues have taken the first step, upholding solidarity and leaving competition behind. What they now expect is for outlet owners, government, clients, beer companies and ultimately, the entire society, to join them on this path.



## **Project activities and impact**

The **PSWWBI** project focused on the prevention of violence as well as supporting survivors through a variety of methods.

These have included life skills training for BPs, expansion of solidarity groups, collaboration with government departments, and educational and advocacy efforts targeted at male customers, outlet owners and police officers.

As a result of these activities, the significant change stories collected within this report highlight a number of key changes impacting the lives of BPs.

### **Primary outcomes – directly relating to BPs' working environment**

- Reduced incidences of violence and harassment
- Greater respect from customers
- Increased ability to protect themselves through improved knowledge of their rights
- Increased support from outlet owners
- Increased support from police and authorities

### **Secondary outcomes – affecting their life and well-being**

- Increased self-confidence, both at work and in the community
- Improved family relationships
- Changed attitudes within communities
- Improved academic knowledge and soft skills

## Case studies

Through the final evaluation of the project, a number of significant change stories have been reported, demonstrating the move from a culture of both physical and emotional abuse towards an environment of social acceptance and respect.

### Examples of harassment

During three days of training with beer promoters (BPs), some incident cases were collected from them. Below, two BPs share their experiences of working in beer gardens, illustrating the need for improved protection of their rights and changes in the attitudes of others so that they encounter respect rather than abuse.

#### Minea's Story

*Minea shares an example of physical harassment that she has experienced while working as a beer promoter, highlighting the prevailing attitudes among male customers.*



My name is Minea and I am from Phnom Penh, the capital city. I am the oldest sister of six siblings and my parents are getting old, so they aren't able to support me and my other siblings.

I would like to share a personal story that I faced during my career as a beer promotion girl.

The incident happened to me before Khmer New Year, 2011. That night, my beer sales were not so good. I decided to leave my work place at about 9pm and I went to wait for my friend in front of the restaurant, as she was also about to leave work. While I was waiting, a customer who was riding motorbike saw me standing in front of the restaurant, so he asked me what I was doing there. I told him I was waiting for my friend and when he heard I

sold beer at the restaurant, he said, “You don’t have to go home now. Go and take your beer! I want to drink yours”.

That night the three of us drank together, my friend, the customer and I. We drank 15 bottles of beer. While we were drinking, the customer tried to touch my hand. I did not allow him to do so and I took his hand off. However, he continued to touch me and put his hand on my thigh. He also said, “I really love you”. In order to keep him from becoming angry, I replied, “I also love you”, but at the same time, I took his hand off my thigh. He asked me many questions during the night, such as where I was from and where I would go during the New Year. As he spoke, he kept touching my arms and thighs, despite me taking his hands off me repeatedly.

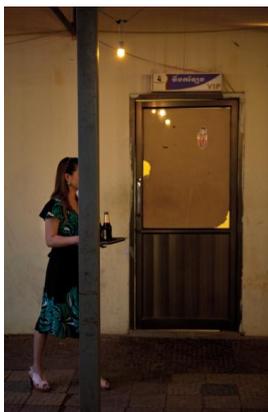
A little while later, he must have become angry about my refusal to let him touch me. At this point, he unzipped his pants and took my hand to put on his penis. At first, I did not realise what he was doing, but when I did I was really shocked and ran away from the table. My friend followed me and asked, “What just happened to you?” At first, I did not answer as I was really shocked. Instead, I returned to the customer and asked him, “Why did you do this in a public place?” He responded, “What’s so surprising? Sometimes, I let many other girls give me a hand job; I did this because I really wanted to have sex.”

I was really angry and I told him that I was not like the others. This rude guy thought what he did was right. I took my friend’s hand and made her leave with me, saying angrily to the customer, “Even if you want me to continue sitting here, I will not sit anymore”. After saying that to him, I left the restaurant.

## Lin's Story

*Lina explains how many customers treat beer promoters with disrespect and have no qualms about using physical violence or humiliating them in public. Her story emphasises how many women are reluctant to report the abuse they experience as they do not think they will gain anything.*

My name is Lin. I sell beer at a restaurant near Bak Kheng and I have been working as a beer promotion woman for almost ten years.



Over the years, I have seen and experienced sexual harassment, physical abuse, touching, and threatening behaviour almost every night. I have been asked for sex and when I refused had customers threaten to have me fired from my job. I have experienced having a gun pointed at me to force me to go out after working hours. Working at night, I face a lot of risks such as touching and physical violence and I got used to living in this

environment.

I have never shared what happens at my workplace with anyone as I did not think I would gain anything. No matter whether I share or not, the neighbours and people around me discriminate against me as beer promoter anyway.

In early 2011, there was a middle-aged customer who violated me. It started when he wanted to order beer from me and he asked me to bring another glass to drink with him. However, I told him that I could not drink because I was not feeling well. At first, he did not say anything, so I walked away to serve another table. After walking a few steps, he called me back and asked me to pour the beer out of the glass if I did not want to drink with him. I came

back to his table again in order to pour the beer for him, but saw that he had already poured the beer into his own glass. He then tried to force me to drink that glass of beer and used some rude words, cursing me and forcing me to drink. I took the glass and drank a bit of the beer, but he warned me that if I didn't drink it all, that he would throw the beer over my face. He said I was just pretending to be sick, but I still did not want to drink it. I replied to him politely that I would drink, picked up the glass up and drank the beer, but I could finish it because I was sick He grabbed the glass and threw the remaining beer on my face. He then threw the glass in front of me and slapped me. I was really hurt and embarrassed because everyone in the restaurant was looking me. I did not know what I could do other than cry. The customer yelled things at me like, "You sex worker! I only threw a little beer on your face, it will not hurt you. I came here to be happy, not to be sad with you, fucking girl". I answered that I was not sad but that I was crying because I was really embarrassed. He could not stand the situation anymore, so he called the outlet owner. I walked away and did not come to work for a few days afterwards.

From my experience, whenever these kinds of situations occur, no one who is going to help us because we are beer promotion girls. The outlet owner will always try to calm the customers while we, the beer promotion girls, will be blamed for all the mistakes.



## Increased confidence and improved attitudes

A number of program participants share their stories of how their lives have changed. Two themes run through all of these tales.

Firstly, all the BPs interviewed describe an increase in confidence, including confidence arising from their improved academic skills and confidence about their ability to handle situations which might arise in the workplace.

Secondly, they all refer to the positive impact their involvement with the program has had on their interactions with others, whether this be within their family or with neighbours. This change in attitudes is an important factor both for the quality of their lives within their communities and as a vital step towards wider social change.

### Chit's story – From promoter to peer facilitator

*Phuak Chit describes the incredible change her involvement with the program has wrought – from helping her to improve her literacy to gaining the respect of her neighbours.*



Mrs. Phuak chit preparing to sell beer at the restaurant near Prek Leap commune in Phnom Penh, in July 2013

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My name is Phuak Chit and I am a beer promotion woman. I live and work in Phrek Leap vicinity where many beer gardens and entertainment places are located. I live with my eight-year-old son and, as a mother, I have to be responsible for my son's life. I want him to have a decent life and to be well-educated. I don't have regular salary because I get paid based on commission. This means that my living conditions are based on quantity of beer that I can sell.

I have been working for beer companies that have clear rules and policies. For beer promoters' safety, the company sends a van to transport beer promoters to and from work. However, whenever, I dressed up and

left for work, my neighbour often called me “Srey longse<sup>3</sup>” which hurt me a lot, but I did not know how to respond or explain to them.

Not long ago, I was asked to join CARE’s training program. I am not an out spoken woman, so when I go to work I barely talk to my co-workers, often bringing a small notebook to review and read what I have written in training. I only reached second grade at school, so I can barely read but I can just read vowels and consonants. However, I still try. I have learnt a lot about women’s health from the training and I am now able to talk about it without feeling shy.



Mrs. Phuak Chit educating her seven-year-old son at her rental house near Preak Leap Commune in Phnom Penh, in July 2013  
© Keout Sokharany

When a new training program started I was given opportunity to participate again. I promised myself that I would be more focused and concentrate as much as possible in the training. I loved the training because it helped me learn to read and write again. I was able to memorise the lessons, and I can now share this information with others in detail. I have met many amazing peer facilitators though SABC, including Touch, Avina and Ah Lek. They are all very good at talking and teaching, explaining the lesson clearly and informatively. They gained respects from all the participants and I am always proud of them. They also used to be beer promotion women just like me, but now they are moderators and peer facilitators. They are my role models and my inspiration. I also wanted to be one of them, a moderator and facilitator, so I worked hard to improve my reading and writing.

Throughout the encouragement of the committee, I had the opportunity to participate in another training program to become a peer facilitator of SABC and CARE Cambodia. I am so proud of myself because finally I made it. I am now a peer facilitator, and my life has completely changed. I love my work

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<sup>3</sup> This is a derogatory terms implying that someone is promiscuous or a prostitute

because I can help women who face difficulties. I bring women to check up on their health.



Mrs. Phvak Chit learns to facilitate with SABC at Khmer Sorin restaurant, in April 2013  
© Keout Sokharany

I have also noticed that my neighbours also changed their attitude towards me. They speak to me politely and even admire me. They say “Wow, you are great that you can be both a beer promoter and teacher. You can teach others now, when before you could barely read. Work harder! Your life is getting better. Many people are admiring you.”

I think what I am today is because of the association. My living conditions are better, much better. I got back my honour, reputation and respect from others as a beer promoter. When I carry the bag of peer facilitator, my neighbours ask me “Are you going to teach?” I feel so honoured when I hear this question.

I follow the executive committee of the association. What I learnt from them is “We are beer promoters, so we help each other.”

## Davy's story – Overcoming family prejudice

*Davy share's her mother's reaction to her career choice and demonstrates how the project has helped her rise above prejudice within the community to achieve harmony within her family once more.*



Davy is working in Opus one company (Guinness beer), in Phnom Penh, in July 2013

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My mother did not allow me to work as a beer promoter. She wanted me to work at my auntie's house where I received 60000 Riel (\$15) per month. She thought a career doing beer promotion was not good because the women were not respectable. She thought that they made themselves attractive by dressing like prostitutes. She chased me out of the house by saying "if you don't want to uphold our family's dignity, get out of my house. No one in my family has ever been a prostitute." I tried to talk to her, telling her that I wanted to try it for a month and promised her that I would return home right after work.

She still was not happy, and she kept blaming me for dishonouring the family. At that time, I also hesitated about doing this job because I too had some of the same thoughts as my mother. However, because I wanted to make money, I decided to do this work. When my neighbour asked, I told them that I sold cosmetics. I was not brave enough to tell them that I was a beer promoter. When I sold beer, I found this job was easy. I just needed to sell beer – like selling other products for companies, it required hard working people who are skilled at selling and communicating. I love my job.

After a month, I talked to my mother again about this job. She was still mad at me, and she



Davy trains a new beer promoter at a restaurant in Phnom Penh, in July 2013

© Keout Sokharany

continued to berate me whenever I tried to talk to her about it. She said that I was single, by which she meant that I was a virgin, so I should not work in this kind of environment late at night.

Later, my friend, Roth, asked me to join a training program of SABC. At the time, SABC was looking for peer educators and I volunteered. Again, I tried to explain my mother about my job, using a document from the training about beer promotion women. Once she had read this she stopped discriminating against my job, even though she did not completely believe what was written.



Davy is learning facilitation skills with SABC in Phnom Penh, in May 2013  
© Keout Sokharany

From then on, I kept talking to her and showing her what I learnt from the training. Once I brought my mother a poem for International Women’s Day. This led her to have a serious talk with

me and she said that she was wrong to forbid me to be a beer promoter. If she had known that this job was good and

would be supported by training such as this, she would have allowed me to do it. Hearing this, I was so surprised and happy that it brought tears to my eyes. Surprisingly, my mother also permitted my sister to be a beer promoter and encouraged her to become a member of the association so that she could learn more and be able to communicate appropriately with clients. This has been an important year for her as she has changed her perception about beer promotion women.

As a result of this, I feel more confident at work. I have changed my mother’s perception and convinced her that my job is valuable. I am happy with what I am doing, and I can openly tell everyone – my neighbour, my partner or anyone else that I meet – that I am Davy and I am a beer promotion woman.

## Sean's story – A valuable and dignified vocation

*Sean struggled with the perception her neighbours had of her occupation, but the knowledge she gained through the project's training and workshops empowered her to stand up to the stigma and promote a positive image of her profession.*



Mrs. Sean reading the BP curriculum at her house in Phnom Penh, in June 2013  
© Keout Sokharany

I am Sean, and I have been working as a beer promoter for many years. I used to work for a company with strict policies: it would not allow beer promoters to sit with clients as they were drinking beer; and for all beer promoters' safety, the company required everyone to take the company's van to and from work. I discussed this with my husband, and we both decided that this career was safe if we followed the company's policies. I personally always follow the policies, and I have never faced any trouble at all at work.

However, what has challenged me the most in these past few years has been the attitudes of my neighbours. They thought that I was a *longse* woman, so they did not allow their kids to play with mine. I was really scared to face them as I could not handle their words or criticism. To some extent, it also made my husband upset with my career.

When the company needed to reduce some workers, I was one of those laid off. I did not want to stay at home, so I asked an imported-beer company for a job. However, I would not get paid a monthly salary, rather a commission based on the bottle caps. Through this company, I was asked to join the activities of the Solidarity Association of Beer promoters in Cambodia (SABC). I found this really interesting, so I applied to be a peer educator.

I have joined many programs of SABC, such as Life Skill Training for peer educators and the workshops of the Ministry of Women's Affairs on International Women's Day. It helps to have better understanding and knowledge so that I can use this to explain to others what my job is all about. I also help the association with mobilising beer promoters, waitresses and

their families to understand that beer promotion, even though working at night, it is a valuable and dignified vocation.

Within the support of the association and through frequently advocating for the rights of beer promoters, people in my vicinity have changed their perception of me. People no longer call me and other women who work at night “Srey Longse.” They also no longer forbid their kids to play with mine. They address my son by his name or Sean’s kid, when in the past he was just called “Srey Longse’s son”.



Sean’s children review their lesson from school at their house in Phnom Penh, in June 2013  
© Keout Sokharany

When I changed my job to work on a commission-only basis, my husband worried about me a lot. However, I explained him that even though I did not have a company to protect me, I had the association who were willing to help me. More importantly, I was a peer educator. If something happened to me, I know I could rely on them. After this explanation, my husband is happy for me to

do this work.

I am proud of myself that I am able to be financially independent. In addition, my work is safe, so I never tire of doing this job. My neighbours say that “You’re amazing. You sell beer and you have people to protect you. Whenever have problem, you can call to the association, police and many others.” Besides, if little things happen, now my neighbours will also help me.

Typically, a change in the society could not happen because of just one person. Similarly, the changes in my neighbours’ perception is not just because of me, but because of the help and support of CARE Cambodia, the Solidarity Association of Beer promoters in Cambodia, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and all others who have supported both me and my fellow beer promoters.

## Vanna's story – Rising above fear to champion change

*Vanna shows how her fear of going to work changed to pride and confidence in her abilities. She shares how important it is that her boyfriend has come to accept her work and how he is also now encouraging others to change their attitudes.*



Vanna is working as beer promoter at Prum Bayan Restaurant in Phnom Penh, in June 2013  
© Keout Sokharany

My name is Vanna. I started my career as a beer promotion girl one year ago, when I took one of my friends to her workplace. The female supervisor there wanted me to work there as a beer promotion woman, assuring me that this work would not be tiring.

I did not want to do this job at first and approached it with a lot of curiosity and worry. On my first day, an old man told me that “Ngeng<sup>4</sup> just wait and see. There will be powerful and rich men who will force and torture you. There will be no one to help you, and you will not be able to sue them.”

After listening to what he had said, I went to work with fear, and I did not tell anyone about my work, especially my boyfriend because I knew that he would mind about this job. He works for a private company in Phnom Penh.

After I had worked there for around two months, my supervisor asked me to participate in the training from the Solidarity Association of Beer promoters in Cambodia. After the training, I found myself more confident, and I lost all the fear that I had before. I told myself, “From now on, I will not be afraid.” Every night when I sell beer, I move confidently from one beer garden to another.

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<sup>4</sup> Ngeng is a word for a girl or a woman. It is considered nasty to use in current Cambodian society. However, in some rural areas, this word is quite common for an elder to call younger women.

Once I met my boyfriend and his friends at a beer garden that I was working in. He was so shocked when he saw me working there and told me that he would die of embarrassment if I continued selling beer. He said all beer promoters were harassed and touched by clients. I tried to explain him I was different from what he was thinking. I just sold beer and there was a van would always pick me up to work and bring me back home. I told him this job was not difficult and it fit me well as although I am not a highly educated person, I can still earn money with this job.

My boyfriend did not feel at ease, and kept following me almost every day; however in time he started to understand about my job. When he and his friends go to eat at a beer garden, he frequently explains this to them and suggests they use appropriate and polite behaviour towards the women. I have seen him stopping his friends from teasing and touching or asking the women to go out.

I cannot believe that my boyfriend support me. During these last few months, I have seen some of my boyfriend's friends have changed their attitude to the women. They no longer touch women, and the way they talk to me and my co-workers is also changed. Actually, not just my boyfriend's friends have changed; many of the clients who often visit the beer garden also have changed, showing more respect to beer promoters. More importantly, whenever clients see the lit posters explaining the law relating to harassment and potential punishments they could face, they become scared to touch the women. Some of them say things like "Hey guys! Be careful. You can mistakenly or randomly touch them. They can sue you" or, "They just sell beer, nothing beyond that."

The changed perception of my boyfriend and the clients towards beer promotion women is really important to me. It has led my boyfriend to trust me more. We have been discussing and planning about our future. He



Vanna is facilitating gender session with BP in Phnom Penh, in April 2013  
© Keout Sokharany

accepted that my job could improve and make our living condition better. When we get married, I believe that he will not mind about my job. Thus, we are going to live with each other happily because each of us respect and value each other's job.



## Male perspectives

The project also targeted men through training at universities, media campaigns and the provision of information in beer gardens. Two young male students open up about the profound impact the training they received has had on their interactions with their families, demonstrating the success of the project in changing attitudes.

### **Veasna's story – A male perspective of gender stereotypes**

*Veasna opens up about how he used to take the women in his family for granted and disregard the sacrifices his mother had made for him – until workshops from People for Health Development Association (PHD), one of the project's partners, helped him to reassess his values.*



Veasna is helping his mother to cook Khmer traditional cake (num Ansom) in Phnom Penh, in May 2011  
© Keout Sokharany

Before I became a peer educator of PHD, I was a brother and a son who was a trouble maker in the family. I used to hang out late at night with friends and spend a lot of money, arguing with my siblings and parents almost every day.

I have a little sister who is three years younger than me. I thought because she was a girl, she had to do all the household work such as cooking and washing the dishes. If she didn't, I would tell my parents. As a guy, I did not think I needed to do anything. I often asked her to do things whenever I felt like, without considering whether it was her

break time or study time. I remember once when I asked her to bring me a glass of water and she refused, I was so mad that I hit her. She cried and did not talk to me for several days. At that time, I did not care what I did to her.

My mother was a busiest person in the family. Every day, she had to wake up at four in the morning to go to market and buy ingredients for the num pum and num chak choul (Cambodia traditional desert) that she sells from early morning until late evening. No matter how busy and tired she was, I never

helped her, not even during the weekend. Instead, I went out with friends. All I ever said to her was “Mother, Money!”

I also did not get along with my father. Once I argued with him until he decided to leave home without telling anyone. Everyone in the family was worried and looked for him, but I sat at home, pretending that nothing happened. I did not feel guilty at all. I feel so regretful when I think about my past behaviour.

PHD’s workshops helped me to reflect on what I had done to my parents. The workshop, “Ideal Man and Ideal Women”, made me realise that my parents were my ideal people, which surprised me. My mother is illiterate and can’t read a single word, but she raised me well so I was able to gain a bachelor’s degree.

When I learnt about beer promotion women through PHD’s debate on the topic of gender, I gained a better understanding of their situation. They have faced lot difficulties as because they are discriminated by the society. They sacrifice themselves for the benefit of their children, parents and family members.

Since I joined the training with PHD, I have a better relationship with my little sister. This year she is in 12th grade, so she is going to have a national exam soon. I encourage her to study harder and read more books, helping her with housework so that she has time to concentrate

on her studies. Because of that, I can cook three dishes for my family. I also help my mother with her business.

Every day before going to school, I take my mother to the market and help her to organise her stall. I want to help my mother save more money, so I decided to find a job. I am now an English teacher. I might not be able to support my mother, but at least I can feed myself.



Veasna helps his mother to sell Khmer traditional cake (num Ansom) in Phnom Penh, in May 2011  
© Keout Sokharany



As a result of his participation, Veasna was a quest speaker of the Change Starts with You Program at WMC in Phnom Penh, in October

2012  
© WMC

I regret that I did not help her sooner. I do not think what I am doing now is enough, but I am going to do my do best to make it up to her. However, I can see that the change in me is bringing joy to my family members, as well as the fact that I have a job.

Almost every morning, other sellers tell my mother, “It’s amazing that you have your son helping you with organising every day.” I have noticed that whenever she hears it, she always smiles with happiness. Her smile makes me think of what I had done in the past. I will do everything I can to erase the scars from what I have done to her and my little sister. I feel that I am a lot closer to my little sister. We are even friends on FACEBOOK.

## Significant change in my family

*This university student, who did not wish to be named, illustrates the impact that domestic violence can have on all members of a family and shows how the project has helped to overcome social and cultural barriers dictating that victims, and witnesses, remain silent.*



Challenging ideas about gender with university students at a gender awareness session in Phnom Penh, in October 2011  
© Nicholas Axelrod

I am second year student of undergrad program of Pannasastra University. I am the eldest child in my family and when I was younger we experienced domestic violence.

I think that disputes within families are inevitable and antagonism can exist between family members at any point in their life. However, from this project I have learned two important ways to deal with this: firstly, patience; and secondly, not being afraid to tell others about their family issues.

I used to be told that when parents were fighting each other, we children did not have the right to intervene, and we should walk away or stay silently in our room. To hear screaming, crying, cursing and swearing between parents is unbearable for all children. I can't stand these sounds, and they make me not want to be at home. No one who has not experienced this themselves can understand the feelings that I have.

My parents used to quarrel really often, and my father often hit my mother when they quarrelled. Once there was just little misunderstanding between my parents, but it eventually turned into a serious argument. My father kicked my mother so that she fell down hard on the ground. My mother got up and angrily threw a plate at my father, which caused his head to bleed. He threatened to divorce my mother and later decided to leave home. That day no one came to help us, and no one knew about it either. I could not do anything, but felt helpless.



I once showed a video of my group discussion among university students to my father. He was so happy to see it and is proud of what young people are doing now. He said, “young people now are really knowledgeable. We elder people should be well-behaved, so that we can be their role models.” My mother also accepts what I try to explain to her and I noticed that she does not complain a lot like before. These changes are really significant for all my family members.

I am so happy that I have this kind of knowledge so that I can find ways to influence my parents in a positive way. I am really thankful to all the people who organised the training, which came at just the right time for my family and our problems. I now believe that one of the best solutions for coping with violence is to speak up about it.

## Businesses and authorities

The project has engaged many relevant businesses and authorities to ensure that structures for supporting BPs exist and are implemented. A member of the authorities and a beer garden owner explain how the project has increased their ability to protect the rights of women, even against powerful people, and has enabled them to foster safer and more respectful working environments.

### **Mai's story – Confident about helping women in crisis**

*Police agent Mai explains how participating in the project's training sessions has not only helped her to identify cases of domestic violence, but has given her the courage to stand up to powerful people in the pursuit of justice.*

My name is Marnn Mai and I have been working with female victims of violence for 9 years. Currently, I am the Office Director of the Department of Legal Protection for Women and Children in the Ministry of Women's Affairs.



Judicial Police attended training on gender and related laws at MOWA, in Phnom Penh, in October 2011  
© Nicholas Axelrod

In 2010, I had the opportunity to join a training program which was organised through the collaboration of CARE Cambodia and the Ministry of Women's Affairs. I told myself that it was a great opportunity for me to learn more of topics such as awareness of laws and I really love to learn from people.

When I joined the training, I concentrated on all the lessons, as everything that they taught was relevant to my work, such as the training about gender based violence, awareness of laws and the legal procedure for bringing cases to court. This sort of knowledge has really helped my work; in the past, I faced a lot of difficulties as I was not sure whether I was really helping victims. When they reported cases of violence, I was not brave enough to follow up these or help to them because I was not confident enough and I was not sure myself whether I could

distinguish of different forms of violence. I only helped with writing down their cases and I knew that victims did not really trust me. Many of them might have thought that I was not capable of helping them and I think some of them felt rather helpless.

Nevertheless, after the training I understand better and I have more confidence in my ability to help women who are victims of sexual violence. Now, when someone comes to report a violent incident, I can easily recognise the form of violence. For example, domestic violence was occurring in the home of a high ranking officer in Phnom Penh which the neighbours decided to report and eventually this became a legal case. I tried to help the victim by collaborating with the Cambodia Women Crisis Center and brought the case to court without fearing that the officer would threaten me. Recently, I have been helping with a rape case where the abuser is biological father of the victim and also happens to work in a high position in the government. Having participated in the training program, I feel confident about working on this case.

I noticed that before, I was so scared and I did not even want to ride bike alone when I went anywhere. However, I am now much braver and more confident about helping victims with their cases.



## Heang's story - Significantly reduced violence in the workplace

*The owner of a beer garden in Phnom Penh explains how the awareness of relevant laws that he has gained through the project has helped him to better protect the women working at his outlet and to stand up to abusive customers. He describes the impact that some of the project's initiatives have had on reducing incidences of harassment and creating a safer working environment for beer promoters.*

My name is Kim Heang and I am the owner of Koun Taeng Bei Beer Garden near Phnom Penh Tmei, named for my three siblings (koun bei means “three siblings” in English). We all started this business long time ago. When I first opened it, I was a head chef for almost 10 years. Working with beer promoters for many years has allowed me to learn a lot about their stories and their work conditions.



Mr. Kim Heang attended the national workshop organised by MOWA at Sun Way hotel in Phnom Penh, in June 2013  
© Keout Sokharany

Based on my experiences, I have noticed that many beer promoters who sell at beer gardens are very vulnerable. They face discrimination, threatening behaviour and sexual harassment by male clients during their work. Even as an outlet owner I have faced a lot of difficulties in protecting women from such harassments

sometimes. No outlet owner wants any trouble to occur in their beer garden as no one wants to be forced to

shutdown.

However, since I have been involved with CARE Cambodia, joining many meetings and trainings, I have become more confident and I am no longer afraid of anyone that uses power to threaten people, especially women. This country has laws and if anyone violates the laws, they will be punished. I have better knowledge about laws and, more importantly, I have many people and

sectors that will support me. Because of this I am not afraid to talk to clients, and I believe that clients will listen to me.

I regularly organise meetings to meet and talk to the women who work in my beer garden. I often bring up the knowledge that I have gained from the training to encourage them to be braver about responding to any behaviour from clients that they are not happy with.



Non-violent workplace posters talk about the dignity of BP's work in Phnom Penh, in October 2011  
© Keout Sokharany

Not long ago, a client was harassing a beer promoter in my place. I encouraged her to sue him through Ministry of Women's Affairs. However, she did not do it because she was scared to report to the ministry. I often tell the women in my beer garden not to be scared to report incidences of harassment or violence, telling them that I am happy to help whenever they need, as are all the supervisors in the beer garden. They are there to help them and if anything happens to them, they can tell any of us.

In the two years since I started working with the project, I have seen a lot of changes in my beer garden. Firstly, since the posters publicising the laws on harassment were installed, I now rarely see harassment or violence against women in my place. I have heard clients say, "women now cannot be mistakenly or randomly touched. They have rights to sue us if we harass them." At the same time, women also value themselves more, and have respect for their job. As an outlet owner, I am no longer afraid that someone will close my business.

I think it is really a good start that the Ministry of Women's Affairs has involved outlet owners. As a deputy of the committee for the outlet owners working group, I hope that by joining in many social activities, I will help to improve the working conditions of all workers in beer gardens. Besides, I think all members of the working group have the potential to be role models for creating safe workplaces for all beer promoters and female workers.

## Significant Change

These stories all serve to highlight how the PSWWBI project has brought about significant change in the lives of many BPs, as well as influencing broader notions about gender and attitudes to BPs within families and communities.

This final story reiterates how CARE has successfully achieved its goal of creating a safer and more respectful working environment for BPs, free from harassment and violence.

### **Working together – Beer promoter and outlet manager both attest to significant changes in the workplace**

*A beer promoter and her outlet manager reflect on the changes they have witnessed since the project began, including a 90 per cent decrease in incidences of abuse in the workplace.*

Veata\* is a 26 year old single mother whose works as a beer promoter, supports her seven year old daughter and both her parents. Veata has worked as a beer promoter for over six years. In that time, she has experienced a range of harassment and abuse.

On one occasion, Veata was threatened with a firearm. “I was very scared and I didn’t know who I could contact and at that time the managers at the outlet also did not help me.” The client, who was drunk, had grabbed her and refused to release her. When she was able to break free, Veata says, “He shouted, very loudly, that if he saw me working in that outlet, he was going to kill me.”

Since CARE commenced the program *Promoting Safety of Women Workers in Beer Industries*, things have changed, Veata says. “Since CARE began working with the outlet, I feel there has been about a 90 per cent reduction in relation to sexual harassment or violence towards the woman who worked in the outlet.”

CARE works with beer promoters to explain their rights and the law, provide information on where they can go for help and encourage them to take action if they experience harassment. CARE also works with the beer outlets to educate them on beer promoters' rights and how they can address harassment in the venue.

Veata explains, "Before [the program] when clients came to the outlet and they asked the beer promoters for the beer they also harassed them frequently, almost every night." She observes that harassment has reduced significantly and that beer promoters are now aware of their rights and how to get support. "Beer promoters themselves also know who they can inform or they can report to in instances of harassment or violence."

The program has created change, not only in reducing violence towards women, but also in how beer promoters view themselves. Veata describes how after engaging with the program, she was able to stand up for herself with clients and communicate that harassment would not be tolerated.

Veata also works as a peer educator and trains other women on the law and their rights, as well as leading group discussions on topics such as gender based violence and what constitutes sexual harassment. In beer promotion work, Veata says, there was a belief that 'minor touching' is normal. Women were expected to allow clients to touch them. But Veata's discussions educate women in their rights – Minor touching is sexual harassment and it is not right to allow someone to touch, even a minor touch.

Ly, the Outlet Manager of a beer garden, agrees that the program has brought significant change. He says, "I have noticed that they [the customers] understand the sexual harassment laws, for example before when they came and had a drink they were touching the beer promoters, but now since they see the local anti-harassment guidelines placed on the table, we rarely see this."

He agrees the perception of beer promoters has changed as well, "I also hear the way that the client talks to the beer promoter has changed. Because now for the client and the beer promoter, the work is professional as any other work," Ly explains.

Her involvement in the program has also led to increased self-confidence for Veata. She says, “When I engaged with the project I changed the way I communicate, I know how I can speak, I know how I can listen to everyone. And this changes not only me; I also can change my friends, who are working as beer promoters. I teach them how to value themselves before they ask someone to value them. And this I can say is change that I have been doing, and I’m proud that I can change people.”

For the first time, beer promoters like Veata are demanding the respect that they deserve, and this is leading to a largescale change in both client behaviour and social attitudes. Supported by CARE, these women are reclaiming their dignity and the right to a safe workplace, something that everyone should have.

\*Name has been changed to protect privacy.