

## VOICES OF CHANGE



ks to **empower people** to earn a dignified living, raise healthy families and participate in democratic life. Pact achieves this through strong communities through strengthened linkages among civil society, government and private sectors and building their capacity to obtain social, political, economic and environmental justice. Pact has helped **curb corruption** by creating a regulatory framework with laws to control dishonest behavior and training journalists who are able to effectively and ethically expose wrongdoing. Pact **strengthens local government** by improving their ability to address the pressing needs of the people through active engagement with Cambodia's citizenry. Through a network of local partners, Pact raises public awareness of the psychological and social impacts of HIV. Through its award-winning women's empowerment program, Pact helps to **lift women out of poverty** and away from desperate circumstances such as sex trafficking by providing opportunities to earn an income through microenterprise projects. Pact works to **empower people** to earn a dignified living, raise healthy families and participate in democratic life. Pact achieves this by building strong communities through strengthened linkages among civil society, government and private sectors and building their capacity to obtain social, political, economic and environmental justice. Pact has helped **curb corruption** by creating a regulatory framework with laws to control dishonest behavior and training journalists who are able to effectively and ethically expose wrongdoing. Pact **strengthens local government** by improving their ability to address the pressing needs of the people through active engagement with Cambodia's citizenry. Through a network of local partners, Pact raises public awareness of the psychological and social impacts of HIV. Through

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Shattered by decades of war and unrelenting strife, Cambodia and its citizens took a dramatic leap forward in 1992 by voting for stability and peace in the nation's first ever democratic elections. Progress on multiple fronts has been made with a burgeoning economy, and improvements in standard of living. Prospects for even greater national wealth in the form of natural resources, such as gas and minerals, are paving the way for the nation to emerge onto the international stage.

However, corruption and lack of rule of law continue to undermine Cambodia's ability to emerge from its dark legacy into a vibrant state in which citizens play an active part in their nation's development. As Cambodia navigates through its growing pains, and as its nascent democracy begins to mature, Pact is committed to developing an enduring relationship with its citizens in their ongoing journey toward a better life.

Pact's overarching focus on positive social change is a cornerstone of the country's move toward becoming a credible international player. We see the three pillars of government, civil society and the private sector as essential to that growth. Pact is a bridge builder between these sectors, focusing on empowering people at the local level to participate in decisions that impact their nation's future while encouraging national leaders to improve their responses to citizens' needs.

Our programs are helping to strengthen and build a new generation of forward-thinking leaders who are highly motivated to create a healthy, thriving society supported by an accountable and more representative government.

This collection of success stories demonstrates the results of our commitment to this vision and a dedication to quality programs that deal with some of the country's most vexing development issues. They reveal building blocks as told by the people touched by Pact and our partners in the journey for a brighter future for all Cambodians. Join us in this journey.

**Kurt A. Macleod**

Vice President of Pact Asia and Eurasia



# I INTRODUCTION I

A young drug addict receives outreach from a commune chief and turns his life around. An HIV-positive police officer harnesses the courage to speak out against discrimination. A journalist uses the truth as a shield in the fight against corruption.

These are the stories of a country and its people who are emerging from the ravages of war to create a better society. These are the architects for the future. These are the voices of change.

In post-conflict Cambodia, where a majority of the population lives in grinding poverty and where the repercussions of a genocide and protracted war still define daily life, survival has been a prevailing concern. As people struggle to stabilize their lives, they lack the resources, motivation and capacity to actively participate in civic affairs.

More than 30 years later, Cambodia is now moving away from its dark past and taking meaningful steps toward a democracy. Literacy rates are slowly improving. The economy is picking up its pace. Poverty is on the decline. With peace and progress, ordinary citizens are realizing they have both a say and a stake in their nation's future. They are taking charge, working to improve their lives and the lives of their communities as part of a growing movement of civic engagement and social change.

This groundswell of activism is reverberating across the nation. From a small village in rice-growing Takeo province to the urban bustle of Battambang province, people are pushing past their personal limitations, and social and economic constraints to take a stand. Their battles are numerous, from the fight against land grabbing and domestic violence to the war on corruption and drugs; and their crusades are spurring dramatic cultural shifts that include an increasing number of peasant families that allow their girls to attend school and more residents finding peaceful solutions to highly charged land

disputes. Around the nation, common citizens are developing the capacity and skills to make a difference through a network of Pact-sponsored programs aimed at improving lives by planting the seeds of change. Pact works at the local level to promote a government that is accountable to the people, where citizens have equal access to opportunities and where their voices are heard. By building skills among ordinary people in areas such as conflict resolution, microfinance, advocacy, outreach, accountability and effective communication, citizens are learning to take ownership of their communities. They are learning to lead.

These pages provide a snapshot of the grassroots efforts by some of these individuals. They explore the motivations and inspirations behind the fight of the common citizen for a just and prosperous society. These are the voices of a people and a proud nation finally coming into its own.











# LOCAL ADMINISTRATION AND REFORM PROGRAM

LAAR works closely with government to help guide the process of decentralization and smooth the path for 356 locally elected councils to allocate funds to address pressing social needs identified by citizens. Pact's partner organizations train Commune Councils on a range of skills, from accountable and transparent record-keeping to community problem-solving.

Community Monitoring Committees, consisting of volunteer citizens who serve as bridge builders between citizens and their elected Commune Councils, further guarantee that citizens' needs are represented in policy and development decisions that directly affect them.



A portrait of a young woman with long dark hair, wearing a striped shirt, smiling slightly. The background is a textured, brown wall.

# ONE YOUNG WOMAN'S DETERMINATION TO PUSH PAST POVERTY AND IMPROVE HER COMMUNITY

When Phat Lvor's father died in 1996, she was 14 years old and appeared destined for a life of labor in the rice paddies alongside her widowed mother. She remembers countless hours spent back-bent in the fields during harvest season and lugging 25-kilogram bags of rice to sell at the market. She remembers the dirt that never left her nails no matter how hard she scrubbed while her friends flaunted perfectly polished nails.

Mostly, she remembers the constant concern over food, and whether the two hectares of rice her family farmed each year would generate enough income to feed a family of five. For Lvor, indulging in loftier ambitions when her three younger siblings were hungry was a luxury beyond reach.

Still, her mother encouraged her to keep studying.

"I have no property to give to my children in the future," said Hun Nhen, Lvor's mother. "All I can give my children is knowledge. That is something they can always keep."

A decade later, Lvor's persistence in pursuing an education has paid off. She attended high school in her village, and eventually she became a primary school teacher. Lvor was also recognized as a leader by her community. Last year, she was elected as the only female Commune Councilor in Takream Commune in Battambang province— a role that has cemented her reputation as a soft-spoken yet effective community leader.

As Cambodia moves increasingly toward democracy with a shift of power from the central government to local villages, Commune Councilors play a pivotal role in ensuring local voices and concerns are heard

Pact recognizes the need to engage more women in the democratic process to promote a truly representative government. Currently, about 14 per cent of total Commune Councilors are women, up by nearly 50 per cent from the previous term in 2002. To encourage these women and promote retention, Pact works through the Female Councilor's Forum conducted by the local nongovernmental organization, Women for Prosperity, to strengthen their leadership skills by supporting regular forums and workshops designed to provide opportunities for networking and mentoring.

# PHAT LVOR



and addressed in the nation's capital. While Commune Councilors number more than 11,000 throughout the nation, what sets Lvor apart is her motivation to succeed and her unwavering determination to improve the lives of fellow villagers.

Lvor's path to prominence started when she was a volunteer. A local Pact partner identified her as someone with the potential to lead. Before becoming a Commune Councilor, Lvor spent a year as a member of the Community Monitoring Committee, which oversaw the work of the Commune Council. The committee was formed under a Pact program for good governance in which volunteers help build bridges between citizens and their local government. Then, as now, she has served as an effective advocate for change, pushing priorities in her community that range from problems with gangs and domestic violence to improving health and hygiene for women.

Lvor's accomplishments are doubly impressive: she overcame both poverty and bias against women as leaders.

"As a woman, I can help other women in my village," Lvor said. "At the commune meetings, they need the voice of a woman."

The single issue that best defines her work is encouraging more parents to allow their daughters to go to school.

"When I talked to parents, they would say, 'Girls have no use for education,'" Lvor said. "I said, 'No, society needs educated girls. If girls are not educated, they can not get jobs.'"

As a result of her outreach, Lvor has persuaded more than a dozen parents to allow their daughters to attend class—an enormous achievement in rural Cambodia where families rely on their daughters' help harvesting rice in order to make ends meet.

Lvor's success has not gone unnoticed.

"She has a good, positive approach when she talks to villagers," said Im Bun You, Takream Commune Chief. "She is a good representative because people trust her."

Lvor says she has been able to succeed with the support of the local nongovernmental organization, Amara, whose staff, working in the Pact program, encouraged her to become active in her community. Through Amara, Lvor learned a range of new skills, from basic accounting and record-keeping techniques to effectively communicating with her constituents who elected her. As a result, she feels tremendous responsibility to make good choices for her community.

"Before, I had a difficult time speaking up," Lvor said. "Now, when I speak, people listen. I have a face. I have a voice. I have respect from the people."



## A FORMER DRUG ADDICT TURNS HIS EXPERIENCE INTO A LIFE LESSON FOR YOUTH

In 2003, Prum Vichet's life had spiraled out of control. The 26-year-old wasted his days in a drug-induced haze, stalking the streets at night and stealing chickens and ducks in his village to make money to feed his habit.

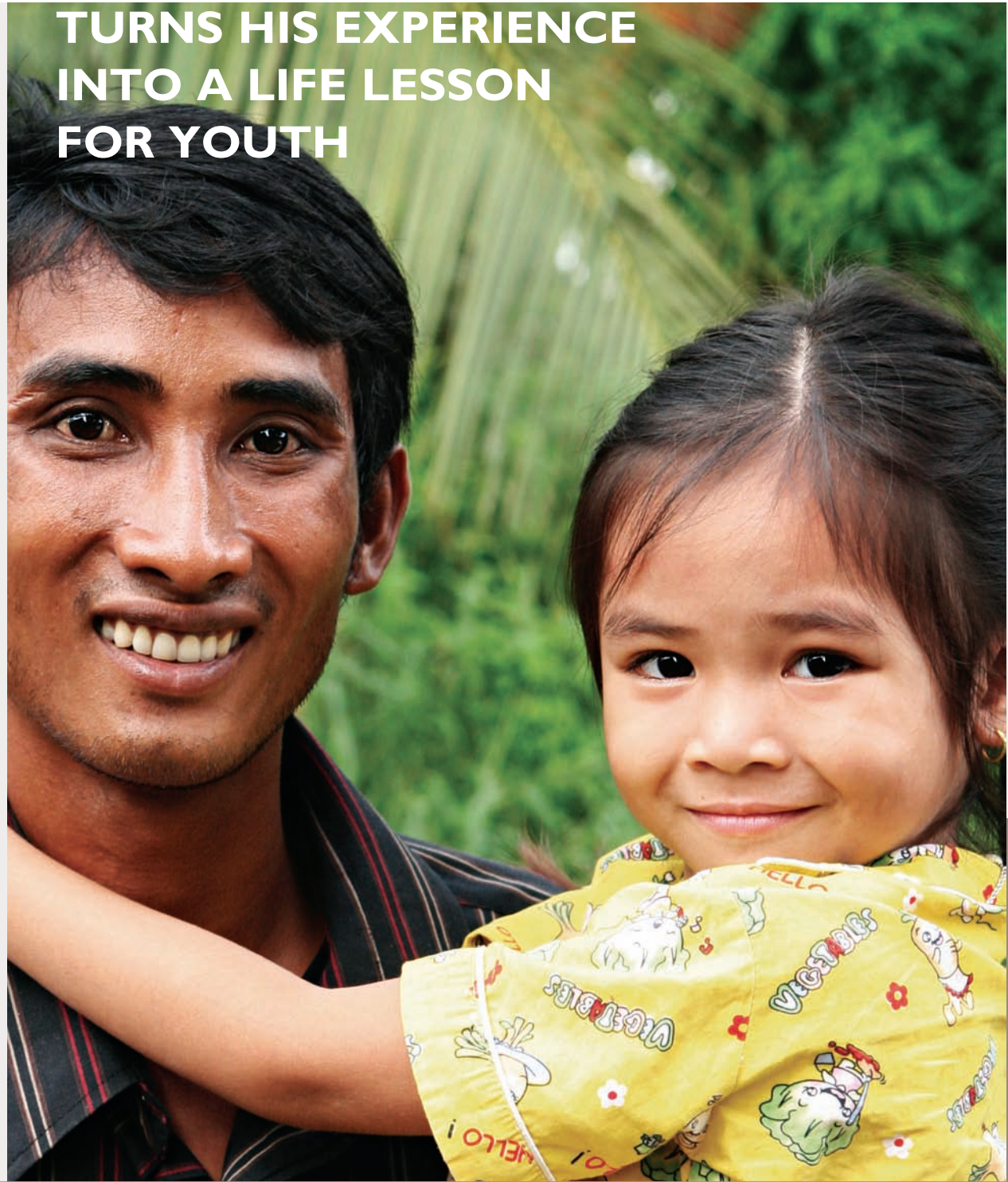
He had graduated from high school with top marks but his life took a turn when his aunt and uncle, who raised him, could not afford to send him to university.

**"I was really depressed in my life when I started using drugs," Vichet said. "I was poor. I didn't have money to continue school. I felt I had no future."**

In 2006, after wasting three years of his life, a number of events helped shake Vichet awake. He fell in love with a girl. At the same time, residents of Otakom 3 village where he lived discovered he was a drug user and began treating him as a pariah. And, the friend who had first pressed drugs into his hands—a yama (amphetamine) pill—died of an overdose.

It was at this point that Vichet received help from an unexpected source—a local official who took notice and reached out. Kea Thavy, Commune Chief of Tuol Ta Ek commune, began spending long afternoon hours talking to Vichet about his life and encouraging him to change—an intervention he says likely saved his life. Thavy had been trained in a Pact-supported program that improved her outreach skills and allowed her to access critical funds for social improvement projects such as drug prevention.

**"The Commune Chief inspired me and encouraged me," Vichet said. "She taught me about the effects of drug use and she said any individual deserves a chance. She gave me a chance. If she did not talk to me, I would still be using drugs. I would have been dead by now."**



Thavy says as a result of the Pact-sponsored training, she now spends a majority of her time out of the office, where she listens to community concerns and offers solutions. She says drug abuse, in particular, stifles progress for the whole community, which depends on young people as the economic backbone and the next generation of leaders.

Two years after Thavy's intervention, Vichet has turned his life around. He stopped hanging around friends who had pressured him into drug use. He has been living completely drug-free and continues to date the young woman with whom he fell in love. And he found a new high that comes from sharing his experiences and encouraging other young people to stay away from drugs.

Vichet began speaking publicly about his experiences before being elected in 2007 as a member of the Community Monitoring Committee—a volunteer post designed to link citizens with their elected leaders to promote improved coordination in tackling community problems and forging a path for development.

Thavy says without CMC members like Vichet, Commune Councils would not have a complete picture of daily struggles and concerns of citizens.

**“Community Monitoring Committees are very important to us,” Thavy said. “They dare tell us the truth. They are the eyes and ears of the village. We get ideas from CMCs to help us do a better job.”**

As a CMC member, Vichet received leadership training from the local nongovernmental organization, Amara, one of Pact's partners in the program for good governance, whose staff helped him improve his public speaking skills as well as show him how to engage with villagers and Commune Councilors. Vichet said there has often been a disconnect between the people and their elected leaders, who frequently lack the time or inclination to get down to the village level.

As a Community Monitoring Committee member, Vichet fills that gap. The community representative spends his days campaigning for change as he talks to people and notes their problems before taking those concerns to monthly Commune Council

meetings. He also encourages others to attend the meetings so that local officials can hear first-hand what's on the mind of villagers at forums that publicly compel elected leaders to act.

**“Now, villagers trust me and come to me with requests for help, like if they need a well in the village,” Vichet said. “I listen to them. I try to find solutions and ask the Commune Council for help.”**

Today, Vichet also volunteers at a local NGO where he visits schools throughout his province to educate students about drug use, always framing his public presentations within the context of his own struggle with drug use. He also volunteers as a coach, teaching orphan children how to play soccer.

**“People need to know the bad effects of drug use,” Vichet said. “If I have these experiences and don't share them, no one else will learn. No one can benefit if I don't help. Now, people see me as a role model for other youth in the village. If I can change my life, other people can change.”**

# PRUM VICHET



LAAR's emphasis on social change has meant that local leaders are prioritizing issues such as the burgeoning number of youths who join gangs. In villages across the country, commune leaders are using public funds to address these critical social concerns with outreach and advocacy programs intended to improve the lives of citizens and reduce social ills.



# ONE ROAD AND ONE MAN'S BATTLE TO KEEP A VILLAGE ALIVE



Sin Ngon understands what it's like to be poor. The son of a farm worker, he recognizes the dignity of labor but also understands the hardships of eking out an existence from the land. He knows how the poor are marginalized and vulnerable to abuses of power. He also knows that when push comes to shove, the most righteous fight of all is the right to survive.

That's why, when he first learned about a wealthy landowner's attempt to close off access to a critical road in Tek Chenh village in Battambang province in order to build a home, he leapt into action.

**"I went to the village chief, he agreed with the landowner. I went to the commune chief, he agreed with the landowner. I went to the Commune Council and even to district officials, but they all agreed with the landowner,"** said Ngon, a feisty 53-year-old father of six children who suspects the landowner bought the support of officials with bribes. **"Then I talked to the landowner. Finally, after some months, the district officials agreed to keep the road open."**

Ngon is a volunteer Community Monitoring Committee (CMC) member in O'Cha commune in Battambang province. Pact initiated the concept of CMCs in 2006 as part of its good governance programming. Ngon is one of an estimated 2,500 of such volunteers throughout Cambodia who are the nation's driving force for change, serving as critical bridge-builders in a country-wide decentralization effort aimed at transferring power from Cambodia's central government and placing it back into the hands of people at a local level. As problems arise at the village and commune levels, volunteers like Ngon are there to listen and take those complaints to the Commune Council for resolution.

To Ngon, the land dispute in Tek Chenh was one



Community Monitoring Committee members serve voluntarily as bridge builders between citizens and local leaders to bring attention to salient community issues and concerns for elected Commune Councilors to address. They are the “eyes and ears” of the community, encouraging citizens to exercise their political right and to track whether Commune Councils are spending public funds responsibly.

# SIN NGON



of countless examples in which poor villagers trying to fight wealthy landowners are destined to lose without outside support and intervention. He was determined to resolve the row peacefully—restoring the road for public use while calming tensions between villagers and landowner.

Although the road at the center of the community clash is short and muddy with hardly any motorized traffic, to the 24 families who live along it, it is a lifeline ensuring access to the community’s most basic need: water. Three times a week, a water truck trundles down the 100 meter stretch of road to pump fresh water into each family’s set of clay jars—the only source of potable water for the village, which lacks water wells. The road’s most common use is marked in mud: dozens of small footprints from school children who skip along it each day.

In case of an emergency, it is also the only way for help to get in.

**“I asked the local leaders, ‘What if one of the homes catches fire and the road is closed? How will the fire trucks come and save us?’ No one was listening to us. No one was helping,” said Un Sak, 43, a mother of seven school-age children, all of whom work daily**

## **scavenging for recyclable scraps that can be sold.**

By the time Ngon got involved, the land dispute had escalated to violence. The landowner dispatched military police with guns to intimidate the villagers and the villagers fought back, shoving for control to prevent construction workers from erecting a fence—the first step in the property owner’s planned construction.

Tasked and trained to assume the role of linking community members with the elected Commune Council, Ngon met with countless officials to plead the village’s case. When the Commune Council refused to take action, Ngon took his fight to the district level where he secured the sympathies of the district land department officials.

**“I explained that this was a public road and that the villagers use this road to go to school and work,” Ngon said. “A public road cannot be closed for one person’s private use.”**

Ngon’s efforts paid off. After three months of ongoing negotiations, the district land registration officer ordered the landowner to discontinue construction of her home and keep the road open.

Ngon has since moved on to other issues affecting his commune, such as helping families resolve cases of domestic violence and advocating for more latrines. As a volunteer Community Monitoring Committee member, Ngon says he has learned that an ordinary citizen can make a difference.

**“I love my community,” Ngon said. “If the villagers have a problem, I want to help them. I want them to understand the laws. I want them to have courage to ask questions and solve their own problems.”**

What’s more, the case has proven to him that Cambodia’s slow but steady plod toward a decentralized government where citizens are part of the process is critical to the nation’s ability to grow and develop in positive ways.

**“Before, we didn’t have the right to decide our priorities,” Ngon said. “Now, we can solve our own problems. We can decide our own future.”**







# **MAINSTREAMING ANTI-CORRUPTION AND EQUITY PROGRAM**

MAE takes a multi-faceted and innovative approach to fighting endemic corruption in Cambodia. Through massive public awareness campaigns, training journalists in investigative reporting to expose wrongdoing, and supporting the national government in creating policies that serve to legislate and reduce incidences of corruption, MAE has been highly successfully in tackling corruption head on. A new “Clean Business Initiative” will also broaden the fight to promote a corrupt-free business environment.



# A JOURNALIST USES WORDS AS HIS WEAPON TO COMBAT CORRUPTION



As a former government employee in the Propaganda and Education Bureau in Cambodia in the 1980s and '90s, Sam Bunnath had become highly attuned to the rhythms of corruption that reverberated throughout the halls of his department.

So, years later when he became a journalist and heard of a scheme involving contract teachers who were solicited for bribes in exchange for jobs, Bunnath suspected this was more than merely a rumor.

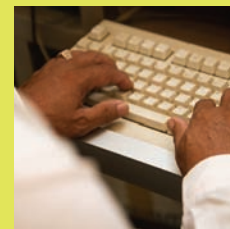
The persistent 57-year-old reporter dug deep, locating and interviewing more than a dozen teachers who had paid the bribes. He spoke with local law enforcement authorities who began receiving written complaints from the teachers. And he rounded up a stack of official documents—including fraudulent contracts prepared by the corrupt education official at the heart of the scandal—that helped reinforce his story.

The end result: a front page expose in Rasmei Kampuchea, Cambodia's largest daily newspaper. The story told of one of the biggest scandals to shake the Ministry of Education—a scandal in which some 500 rural contract teachers sold their land and livestock in order to pay up to \$450 in “handler’s fees” to a crooked education official in exchange for a promise of full-time work.

“We have a role as the watchdog,” Bunnath said. “We are the bridge between the people and the government. We can point out the problems so the government can solve them.”

Political will to prevent corruption has increasingly shifted toward improved transparency as a result of better and more investigative stories that shine a light on corruption and wrongdoing. Through Pact's programs, a core group of journalists have been trained in investigative journalism. This new generation of journalists has served as an impetus for overall improvements in the professionalism and ethics of Cambodia's media, while creating a groundswell of support among the country's predominantly partisan media to increasingly report on government processes with a critical eye.

# SAM BUNNATH



Bunnath's story caused an immediate chain reaction of change. It quickly caught the attention of Prime Minister Hun Sen, who ordered an investigation into the scandal. The corrupt education official was fired. And, the Ministry of Education was pressured to overhaul its hiring practices for teachers in a way that would limit the potential for further exploitation.

Bunnath developed his skills to report and write investigative stories as part of a unique, Pact-funded project through Internews Network aimed at curbing corruption by training Cambodia's media to properly expose it. The program is designed to give print and radio journalists the tools they need to be able to peel back the layers of a story to get to the kernel of truth behind every rumor—skills obtained through a combination of thematic trainings, intensive one-on-one mentoring with an international media expert, and small

scholarships that provide technical support for journalists as they are dispatched to the field. More than 100 journalists have been trained, producing hundreds of stories that increase both the quantity and quality of reporting on corruption.

The program emphasizes professional, fact-based reporting and critical analysis as opposed to the routine practice in Cambodia of reporting rumors as fact and writing stories populated by anonymous sources.

It also seeks to clean up the media. Corruption among journalists is part of the battle, as many journalists practice "reporting by envelope" in which they get paid to attend press conferences and events by the people who hold them.

Bunnath's story, which won a U.S. Embassy-sponsored award for best investigative reporting of the year, has set the standard for excellence in journalism and serves as an important symbol of the power of the press to make change and the courage it takes to fight for it. In a nation like Cambodia, where journalists are often targeted and at least 12 reporters have been killed since 1992, a journalist's best defense is the truth, Bunnath said.

**"We only have the truth," Bunnath said. "If we do not expose corruption, the public will never be aware of these issues."**



# ONE MESSAGE, ONE MILLION VOICES, AND ONE MAN'S MISSION FOR HIS PEOPLE TO BE HEARD

As a boy, Yong Kim Eng remembers watching his grandfather, a Commune Chief in Siem Reap, ride his bicycle up and down dirt paths of various villages in the shadows of the Angkor Wat temples. His grandfather was in search of the latest problem to solve. Whether it was a dispute between a husband and wife or a quarrel among neighbors over a mango tree straddling property lines, the old man was there to mediate.

Kim Eng's grandfather would have been expected as a local official to exploit others and to parlay his political power into personal profit. But the old man did the opposite, giving of his time and effort generously. He wanted nothing in return.

**"He never did anything bad. He never took anyone's land," Kim Eng said. "He just loved his people."**

From his grandfather, Kim Eng learned the traits and tactics of a good leader. He realized that there was a higher calling that goes beyond personal gain when you commit yourself to working for the people—a philosophy he came to adopt while studying political science in university.

More than a decade later, Kim Eng has taken those lessons and adapted them to suit his own convictions. As director and founder of the local nongovernmental organization, the Pact-funded People Center for Development and Peace (PDP), Kim Eng is committed to working on improving the lives of Cambodians by advancing simple tenets of democracy, such as human rights and freedom of expression.

PDP's projects aim to create a healthier, more productive society. They include alcohol abstinence campaigns in the run-up to the elections, and mentoring youth to become more civic-minded.

But the group's biggest success so far pays particular homage to his grandfather's legacy of grassroots organizing and outreach. For more than a year, Kim Eng and his small staff traveled to more than a dozen





provinces—including to his grandfather's former stomping grounds in Siem Reap—as part of an unprecedented drive to collect signatures from a cross-section of society who want the nation's political elite to pass an anti-corruption law. The “Million Signature Campaign” was the biggest advocacy campaign Cambodia has witnessed, garnering national and international attention from the media. It was successful in its ability to mobilize public support and encourage all but one of the eleven political parties competing in a national election to place anti-corruption as a priority.

Corruption has become a rallying cry for Cambodians generally, and for Kim Eng personally. The father of two school-age children, Kim Eng worries that the increasing levels of corruption will hinder progress for his country, which has been slow to emerge from decades of war and conflict, while neighboring nations blast ahead with their booming economies. Cambodia ranks consistently high as one of the world's most corrupt countries of the world. Kim Eng wants to reverse this trend. According to recent reports by the UN, the World Bank, and other international bodies, corruption has become a top concern for the people.

In the stairwell of his office in the capital city, Phnom Penh, bundles of petitions with blue thumbprints and the occasional signature—a testament to Cambodia's still relatively low literacy—are stacked against a wall in plastic bags marked with Cambodia's ubiquitous anti-corruption stickers. PDP, in coordination with 40 other community-based organizations, succeeded in collecting their millionth signature in April 2008.

The campaign's success can be measured by its effectiveness in persuading citizens who are weary of the risks involved in participating in political campaigns to pledge their support.

**“This campaign caught the attention of the whole country and the whole world,” said Sek Bariso, director of the Mainstreaming Anti-corruption for Equity program through Pact. “You get one million out of 14 million people expressing concerns over corruption; this is serious. Two or three years ago, this (campaign) would not have worked. People did not understand what corruption was and how it impacts them, and they would have been scared to participate.”**

Bariso credits committed and tireless leaders like Kim Eng to the campaign's success.

**“A lot of people participated in this,” Bariso said. “But Kim Eng's voice was the loudest and most constant.”**

While he is a stalwart for social change, Kim Eng's conviction to spread democracy has come at a cost. He has been shoved and threatened, and more than once detained by law enforcement authorities while collecting signatures. Still, he refuses to back down.

**“If we back down, we can not move forward,” Kim Eng said. “We would not have progress.”**

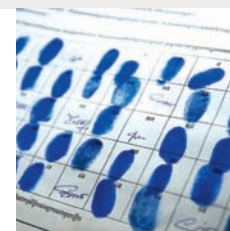
For every setback, there were also important gains.

In one province, Kim Eng says he was met with resistance by the governor. As Kim Eng explained the impacts of corruption, the governor began listening.

**“I told him, ‘What happens the day he is no longer governor and he loses his power?’ He would become the victim of corruption in the future,” Kim Eng said.**

The governor signed his name, becoming one of the million voices who are speaking out for real change.

# YONG KIM ENG



A majority of Cambodians feel the daily impacts of a corrupt society when their children must pay bribes to teachers and they are forced to pay additional “fees” in order to receive standard personal records such as marriage and driver's licenses. Cambodia's culture of corruption is so entrenched that few know how to effectively combat it. Pact's awareness-raising projects such as the Million Signature Campaign provide opportunities for citizens to be educated about the impacts of corruption as well as to participate in productive, peaceful methods of battling corrupt practices.







# **HIV/AIDS PROGRAM**

HIV/AIDS remains a growing concern in Cambodia. Pact's proactive and comprehensive strategy in addressing the problem focuses on prevention through education, reducing stigma, and securing care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS. In a first-of-its-kind project, parents living with HIV/AIDS have created "living wills"—unique inheritance documents that ensure their children retain legal rights to family livestock and land. Additionally, more than 415,000 brochures and books written by and for people living with HIV/AIDS have been distributed by Pact throughout the country.

A close-up photograph of a man with dark hair and a white shirt, speaking with his mouth open and his right hand raised in a gesture. In the background, a woman is partially visible, looking towards the camera. The background is blurred, showing some greenery.

## AN HIV-POSITIVE MAN'S CRUSADE TO STOP THE SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS

When To Chea discovered he was HIV-positive, he thought he knew enough about the deadly virus to feel seduced by instant surrender.

**"I thought I would take some clothes and a hammock and go somewhere to die alone," Chea, 52, said. "I was so ashamed."**

He burned his test results. He told no one. He was determined to spare his family embarrassment and to vanish quietly from the world. But something more powerful beyond the prospect of an incurable illness tugged him back toward an indefatigable will to live. Chea thought about his wife and their three school-aged children. He thought about his elderly mother. And he thought about another trying time in his life, more than 30 years earlier, when he was forced to harness enough courage to live: In 1975, when Chea was 19, he was among the survivors of the Khmer Rouge genocide, which claimed 1.7 million lives, including that of his younger sister.

If he could survive a war, he thought, he could outlast a vicious disease that weakens the body's immune system and is treatable but incurable.

**"When I tested positive, I thought, 'Should I stop living, or should I do something?'" Chea said. "I was determined to live. I knew before I died, I had to tell people about HIV/AIDS. I needed to help as many people as I could. I wanted to share my story."**

Chea's regret over contracting the virus was compounded when he discovered he had infected his wife, Som Hern, 40.

**"I made mistakes," Chea said. "The most important thing is that people don't follow my path."**

Beyond surviving, the buoyant father and career police officer is now thriving. Four years after contracting the virus from unprotected sex while stationed in northwestern Cambodia, Chea has developed a steadfast determination to live, and



Cambodia is leading the region in HIV prevalence reduction, where targeted and ongoing prevention measures have effectively contained the epidemic's stubborn spread. However, with that success comes a resurgence of complacency in the overall HIV response. Pact works to ensure continuing efforts in prevention and awareness, as well as treatment and care for people living with HIV/AIDS to sustain any gains made in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

# TO CHEA



this has fueled his advocacy work in HIV/AIDS education and prevention. His crusade has taken him from his small village in Kvav commune in Takeo province to the most far-flung frontiers of the country, as well as to the capital city, Phnom Penh, to share his experiences at workshops and community forums with audiences as large as 500 people.

While he is committed to sharing his story, the advocacy work can be daunting. It is never easy, he said, to promote acceptance and understanding among a rural and largely uneducated populace about a disease that ultimately ravages the body. His friends and co-workers cast him out, worried they might contract the virus by being near him. His mother chased him from the family home—a memory that still floods his eyes with tears.

Banished from his village, Chea decided he would fight against the stigma and discrimination of people living with HIV/AIDS.

**“People were afraid and disgusted with those who are HIV-positive,” Chea said. “People were saying those who are HIV-positive are not human. I told them, ‘People who are positive, we have rights, too.’”**

His years of efforts appear to have paid off. Chea says his community is beginning to understand the

disease, and his friends and neighbors have gradually come to accept him. He has been taking anti-retroviral drugs, exercises regularly and eats healthy foods. His mother, now 81, is living with him again.

**“People see me living a normal life. I’m healthy. I live with my family and no one near me has contracted the disease. Most people now understand how it is contracted,” Chea said.**

Chea’s life is now dedicated to working on HIV/AIDS issues. Once a month, he volunteers to speak to school children and engage the community in public forums about the virus. He is on paid leave from his job as a police officer and has now turned his full-time efforts to volunteering at the Cambodian People Living with HIV/AIDS Network (PPN+) and working at the Takeo Provincial Hospital, where he cares for patients whose family members are too fearful of the virus to even help their sick relatives into their hospital beds.

Chea says he draws strength in fighting the disease from his wife’s unwavering support. Through Pact-supported projects, she also has been able to access support and treatment. He credits his ability to advocate to a Pact-supported program which trained him in public speaking and deepened his

knowledge about the disease.

Through the training, Chea gained the confidence he needed to jump back into his community to begin teaching others about ways to prevent the disease. He learned how to fundraise, initiating a drive to place donation boxes at pagodas and markets to raise money for low-income people living with HIV/AIDS. He organizes community forums. And he has gained the skills necessary to communicate effectively with rural audiences who are often misinformed and sometimes hostile.

Most importantly, he said, he learned how to write a living will for his three children so they will retain legal rights to his property in the event of the deaths of he and his wife. Chea is currently working with other families living with HIV/AIDS to draft their own inheritance documents.

**“Pact never gave me any money,” Chea said. “But they gave me knowledge. Now I can help teach my community. If people have courage to speak about their experiences, others will change their behavior and take steps to protect themselves.”**







# WORTH PROGRAM

**WORTH** is Pact's award-winning model program for reducing sex trafficking by empowering poor women in rural areas through economic and educational opportunities. The program helps village women establish savings groups where they learn the basics of microfinance while improving their ability to read and write. More than 144 such groups have formed, many of which have transformed into village banks where they have saved a combined total of more than \$53,000 in a country where a majority of the population lives on less than \$1 per day. Some 1,500 women have taken loans to create new or improve small businesses.



# SAVING MONEY, SAVING LIVES: RURAL WOMEN FIGHT POVERTY THROUGH MICROENTERPRISE

For Nar Roth, the dream to open a beauty salon in her small village in Kompong Cham province started when she was a little girl, and she would sit happily in the shade of a coconut tree while her sister cut and curled her hair.

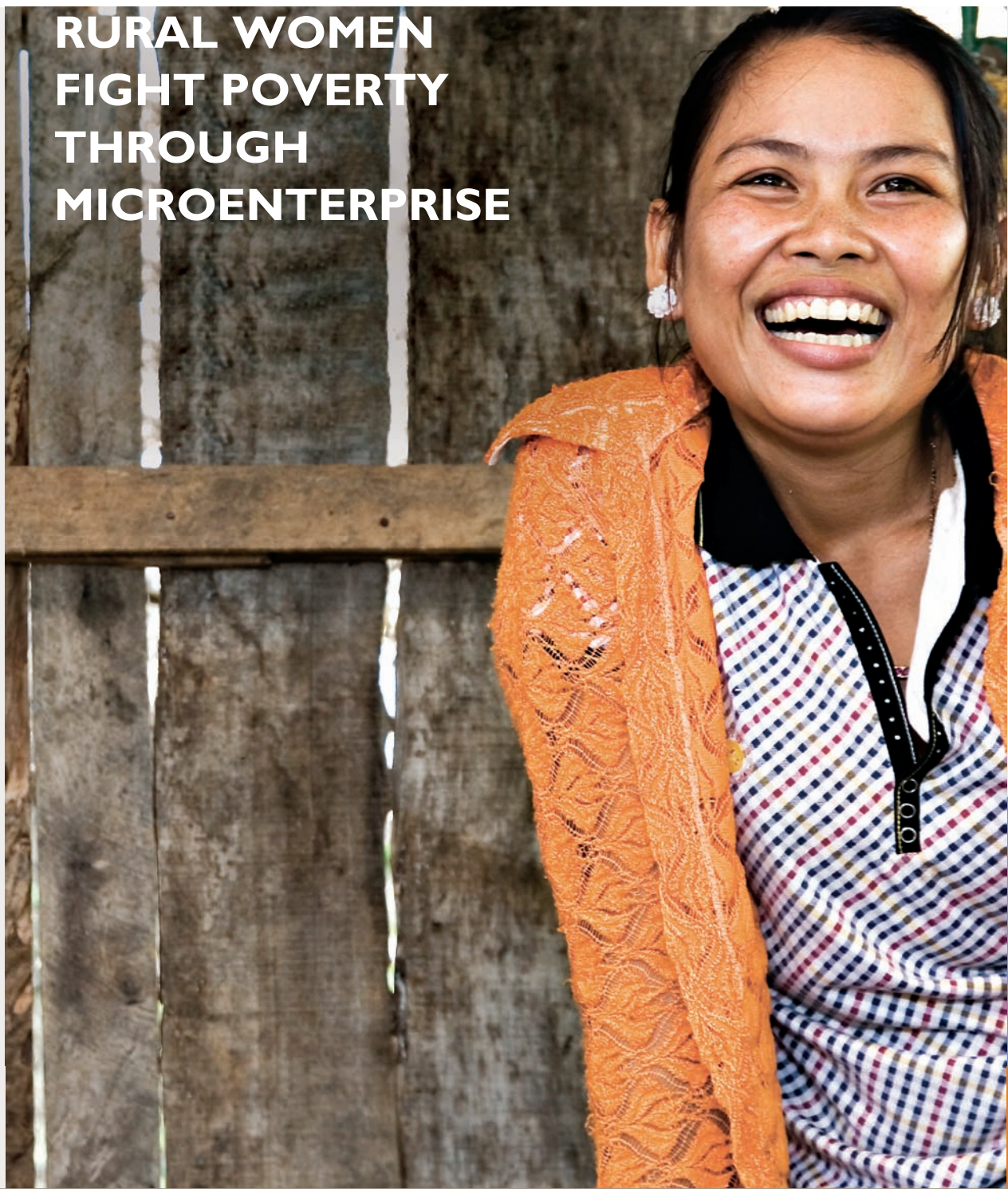
Roth and her sister finally opened their salon in Veary Keut village, Svay Teap commune, in a rented clapboard storefront off the main village road where the clink! clink! of a motorcycle repair shop next door competes with the whirl of a blow dryer. It's the kind of homegrown business that waxes and wanes, where profits pour in during wedding season and plunge with the coming of the monsoons.

But with access to funds from a village bank, where Roth has saved money for more than a year, the 30-year-old woman is confident she can keep her business afloat during the down times and even expand one day beyond her cramped, dusty spot on the side of the road.

**"I am saving to make a bigger business," Roth said. "One day, I want to have my own land to make a nice salon. I want a beautiful building where everyone will come."**

Roth is one of 38 women in Veary Keut who pool their scant earnings into a communal bank as part of a Pact-initiated women's empowerment program, called WORTH. The program combines improving literacy with training in microfinance to help lift women out of poverty and away from options such as the sex trade. The village bank allows the women to take small loans to start new businesses or shore up existing ones while also providing a venue for support and networking among women.

In a country where rural women lack opportunities to improve their lives, the program has been an effective tool in alleviating poverty and strengthening the role of an otherwise marginalized section of society. Beyond encouraging financial independence, the program has encouraged greater involvement by women in civic affairs. As women become financially stable, they move beyond mere survival and begin actively participating in community affairs, such as





Commune Council meetings where they speak out on issues ranging from domestic violence to building better roads.

**“Now that we have money to live, we can focus on other problems,”** said Phan Vanna, the bank’s secretary and founder, who also serves as a member of the **Community Monitoring Committee—a volunteer group that oversees the work of Commune Councilors.**

The program’s concept is simple: give women the ability to generate an income and they are less prone to make desperate decisions for themselves or their daughters, such as turning to sex trafficking. Its results are inspiring: 33 of the 38 Veary Keut women have taken small loans for a variety of microenterprises, from creating a small vegetable farm to expanding a livestock feed shop.

While the program has seen wide success in the 144 villages and three provinces around Cambodia where it is implemented, the Veary Keut village bank is among the most active. The women saved \$3,170 in a little over one year, setting a record for success.

The savings group started in 2006, transitioning to a full-fledged village bank in March 2007 when 16 members each deposited 5,000 riels (US \$1.25) per month. It now has 38 active members who deposit 10,000 riels (or US \$2.50) per month. Members earn a two percent interest rate on total savings. This has been a key

selling point for Vanna, who explains to participants the benefits of earning money off of one’s savings rather than letting money sit idle inside a pillow case at home. Loans are repaid at the same low rate.

Because the bank is informal, it lacks the red tape and high interest rate of private sector banks. Loans can be secured with a simple thumbprint on the loan document from illiterate members. What’s more, the group’s small size ensures accountability.

The success of the Veary Keut women is not lost on Tan Vouch In, 34, the chair of the women’s committee. While persistent poverty still has many villages in the province in a chokehold, the women of Veary Keut have broken from that cycle and are prospering.

**“If we have money, we can be independent,”** Vouch In said. **“Before women didn’t have any money and we had to rely on our husbands. Now, we don’t need to ask for money if we want to buy or do something because it’s our own money.”**

Vanna says support from Pact’s women’s empowerment program has led to the success of the Veary Keut villagers. Through the grassroots program, the women received a collection of books including a “How-To” guide for saving as well as techniques in how to turn a profit.

**“Pact partners trained us on how to create a village**

**bank, what to do first, what procedures to follow,”** Vanna said. **“Now, I can read financial statements. I know the proper way to record transactions. People see us managing our money well, so more and more people trust to put their money with us and want to join our group.”**

To many Cambodians, saving 10,000 riels a month doesn’t amount to much, but it’s enough to purchase a measure of hope and security for the future. Rous Thida, 33, a mother of four children ranging in age from 4 to 13, was able to borrow \$200 to convert rice paddies into arable land to expand her lettuce-growing business. She grew her business from one to four hectares of farm fields in less than a year.

**“Before, I had just enough to live,”** said Thida. **“Now, I have hope for the future. I want to have enough money so my children can have an education. I want them to have a good future. I don’t want them to struggle like me.”**

The program’s success is rooted in encouraging ownership and self-sustainability from the start, said Meas Chan Thavy, program officer for WORTH.

**“When people hear an NGO is coming to their village, they think there will be money to help them,”** Chan Thavy said. **“We don’t give money. We just build capacity and challenge them to save on their own.”**

# WORTH



More than 3,000 women at high risk of sex trafficking developed literacy skills, regularly saved money, and learned to make and take loans through Pact’s WORTH Program. As a result, living standards have improved and household debt has been reduced.

In addition, women’s voices in local level government has been enriched and expanded with six WORTH program participants elected as Commune Councilors in 2007, while another 10 were elected as village chiefs or deputy village chiefs. These women cite the confidence and leadership skills gained through participation in WORTH as key to their success.







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