

# Tales from Cambodia





This book tells the story behind ten children struggling to go to school, to study, and to learn.

Through the personal stories from these girls and boys, you will be able to understand the difficulties they face daily and therefor their motives to attend school. They have dreams to become doctors, teachers, and even football players, just like any other child in the world.

These children live in a very difficult place. In Cambodia, 1 out of 3 people live with less than 60 euros per month<sup>1</sup>. 70% do not have access to piped water supply, and nearly 6 out of 10 people do not have access to improved sanitation<sup>2</sup>.

Additionally, most Cambodian villages have a primary school, but they are not completed and do not offer a full 1st to 6th grade curriculum. These children face a great difficulty trying to pursue a higher level of education because less than 10% of villages have secondary schools<sup>3</sup>.

Coconut Water Foundation has been working for the development of lifestyle for women and children in the Battambang region, the northwest of Cambodia, since 1994. Today's community development and educational programs aim to provide families with better economic opportunities. Also to promote awareness about the importance of gender equality, basic health care, human rights, and physical education.

Coconut water works to improve the quality of life for disadvantaged people from southern countries, especially women and children. Using education to teach about sustainable development, Coconut Water is actively disclosing 250 scholarships per year to those children who need it most.

Despite public schools being free in Cambodia, children who come from very poor households lack essential materials.



The scholarship kits provide: school uniforms, shoes, bags, pencils, notebooks. All things that can change these children's lives.

Coconut water identifies the children who are most in need by maintaining regular contact with communities, teachers, and parents. The local staff of committed educators, regularly conduct follow-ups of every case and monitor their improvement until they finish primary school.

The primary goal of the Coconut Water scholarship is to have every child enrolled and attending classes.

Furthermore, Coconut Water's social educators teach many important things, such as: sports, painting, English and IT classes. These classes are taught with hopes of motivating children to be confident, especially in public speaking, to develop critical thinking, and to learn by doing. Some topics are not covered in formal schools because of the lack of resources.

Environment, gender equality, and social issues are especially crucial topics in these classes. Coconut Water is committed to humanitarian values and beliefs in the education system as an engine of development.



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(1) Source: Asian development Bank.  
<https://www.adb.org/countries/cambodia/poverty>

(2) Source: The World Bank  
<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cambodia/overview>

(3) Wikipedia  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education\\_in\\_Cambodia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Cambodia)





### **Coconut Water Foundation activities in Cambodia**

Painting, English, IT and classes. Sport activities, workshops for public school teachers, school ecogardens, recycling workshops, emancipation and women empowerment, international encounters are just a few of all activities Coconut Water is conducting in Cambodia.

[coconutwaterfoundation.org](http://coconutwaterfoundation.org)



**Tales from Cambodia.**



# Sileang Roeurn

**My name is Sileang and I'm 11 years old. Despite my age, I am in 2nd grade with classmates that are 7 years old. I started school late because my parents did not have enough money to buy me the books I needed.**

**My mother died 8 months ago and then my father left us to go work far away. Now I live with my sisters and brother, and I am the only sibling that goes to school and I really like it.**





My life has changed a lot since I received the Coconut Water scholarship. Now, I wake up at 5 am and I don't have to walk for 2 hours to get to school, anymore.

I attend classes everyday and I have become very focused on studying.

My teacher is very happy with everything I have accomplished. She says that having this scholarship has helped me a lot which has made me more motivated to study and attend school everyday.

When my mother died, I had very little motivation to go to school. When my father left, he took my little sister along with him and I was left in my brother's care. He did not take very good care of me and would stay out drinking with his friends. Finding food everyday for myself kept me busy and left me very little time to attend school. I would ask neighbors to give me a dish of rice, I would also go to weddings and ask for free food.

Transportation was another problem and reason why I did not attend school as much. I did not have a bicycle and I lived far from school.



Now a local NGO has given me a bicycle and I plan to go to Coconut Water's extra classes that are offered at my school.

My teacher says my performance in class is improving despite not being very active, and lacking some of the basic information taught in 1st grade. Regardless, I am still very happy because I am improving.

I like writing, English and math because of how important these subjects are for the future. I will then be able to read and write letters and understand numbers.

## Enrollment first

Despite Primary education is free in Cambodia, several children can't attend school as they have to travel long distances, afford school materials and don't have the motivation and support from their families.

Coconut Water's first priority is to enrol children in school, so we support them by providing scholarship kits containing school uniforms, books, shoes, a backpack, notebooks, pens and pencils and other necessary materials.





# The good friend

by Sileang

For a long time, Sabuan and Sokhom, two farmers living in a little village in Battambang were very close friends.

Sokhom came from a very rich family that had a lot of land, while Sabuan came from the poorest family in the village.

One day, Sokhom's family sold their land and became millionaires. Since then Sokhom and Sabuan didn't see each other and if they did they did not say hi.

Sokhom's family stopped working and started gambling and spending all their money very quickly. Despite that, they would sometimes win money, but not enough because they started to accumulate debts and had to sell more of their land. The debts kept growing so they have to sell more and more of their land until there was nothing left.

In the meantime, Sokhom quit school because his family told him he did not need to attend

since he was rich. He then became the village gangster and behaving badly by disturbing and bullying people.

One day, Sabuan and Sokhom saw each other and Sabuan was surprised at the condition of Sokhom. He was in dirty clothes and his hair was a mess and he looked very thin and sad.

Sabuan said hi and asked him what happened, Sokhom was ashamed and tried to run away.

Sabuan told him that he should go to school again and start behaving better.

Sokhom felt very sad and explained that he lost hope and wasn't sure if he could go to school again. Sabuan told him not to worry and offered to help him study.

Sokhom was happy that Sabuan was not upset with him and that he offered such a nice thing.

**Moral:** It is never too late to change your life.



A young girl with dark hair, wearing a light blue school uniform, is sitting on a large, dark, textured rock. She is looking slightly to the left with a gentle smile. In the background, there is a school building with a red-tiled roof and yellow walls. Several other students in school uniforms are visible walking around the schoolyard. The ground is reddish-brown dirt.

# Sovanna Chhoun

My name is Sovanna and I'm  
12 years old. I'm finishing  
Primary School and next year  
I'll be starting my life as a  
Secondary School student.

I live with my grandmother and my sister. My parents live in another province far away from my home. My father has no specialization as a construction worker, but still manages to get 5 dollars per day when the contractor can find him work. I don't get to see my parents very often, maybe once a year during the Khmer New Year celebration.

I call my grandmother, my mom because she is the one in charge of me and my 9 year old sister Khana. My grandmother has a little greenhouse, where she plants and takes care of vegetables that she then sells in the market. This can usually earn 1-2 dollars a day.

I've had a scholarship from Coconut Water for two years and this has helped me a lot. For example, being an average student with a rank of 3rd in my class to this year having a rank of 1st. I want to keep this rank because in secondary school I will be able to get a scholarship. With this goal in mind, I will continue to study and not worry about the school materials and uniform.

I met the social educators from Coconut Water in my school while they were conducting a workshop there. They then visited my house and talked to my grandmother, and then offered me a scholarship.





## **Cambodia's education system**

In Cambodia, attending school is mandatory. Children spend 6 years in Primary School, 3 years in Secondary School and 3 more years in High School.

The number of students in a classroom goes from 25 to 30 in urban areas up to 50 in rural areas, where it is common that children of different ages study the same grade.

Despite the efforts of the education community, lack of proper infrastructures, resources and materials are common in public schools.

I know my grandmother is very proud of me and encourages me to continue to study. I hope I can go to high school when I am 16. If I continue studying hard enough, who knows?

One of my favorite parts of my school, is the library because I read everyday and I love it. I read between 5 to 7 books a month because of how easy it is to borrow them from my school library and then take them home to read.

When I'm at home, I help my grandmother grill eggs to sell to the villagers. My grandmother walks throughout the village and offers three eggs for half a dollar. I also help her and support her business by peeling vegetables so she has more time to sell them.





# The rabbit and the grandmother

by Sovanna

Once upon a time a grandmother went to the market to buy a basket of bananas.

Since the market was so far away, she walked back to her house, carrying the basket on her head so she wouldn't feel as tired.

While she was walking on the road, a rabbit, the cleverest animal in the world, saw her and noticed she was carrying a basket full of delicious bananas. So, he decided to eat some of them since he was very hungry.

The rabbit was unsure of how to go about it so he thought for a long time and followed the woman.

Suddenly, he came up with a good idea, he will pretend he is unconscious, so she would pick him up and put him in her basket of bananas and then he could eat them.

As expected, when the grandmother saw a cute rabbit laying in the middle of the road, she picked him up.

"Poor rabbit" thought grandma. "I will take him to my house and take care of him until he feels better."

So, she picks him up and puts him in the basket on her head.

The smart rabbit began to eat the banana and once he was full and jumped out of the basket and fled to the forest.

Once the grandma arrived home, she noticed a lot of the bananas had disappeared.

She immediately knew the rabbit was pretending and tricked her so he could eat the bananas.

"Fortunately, I still have some bananas and I learned a good lesson", said the grandma.

**Moral:** Before you help others, you have to carefully think about the impact of your help.

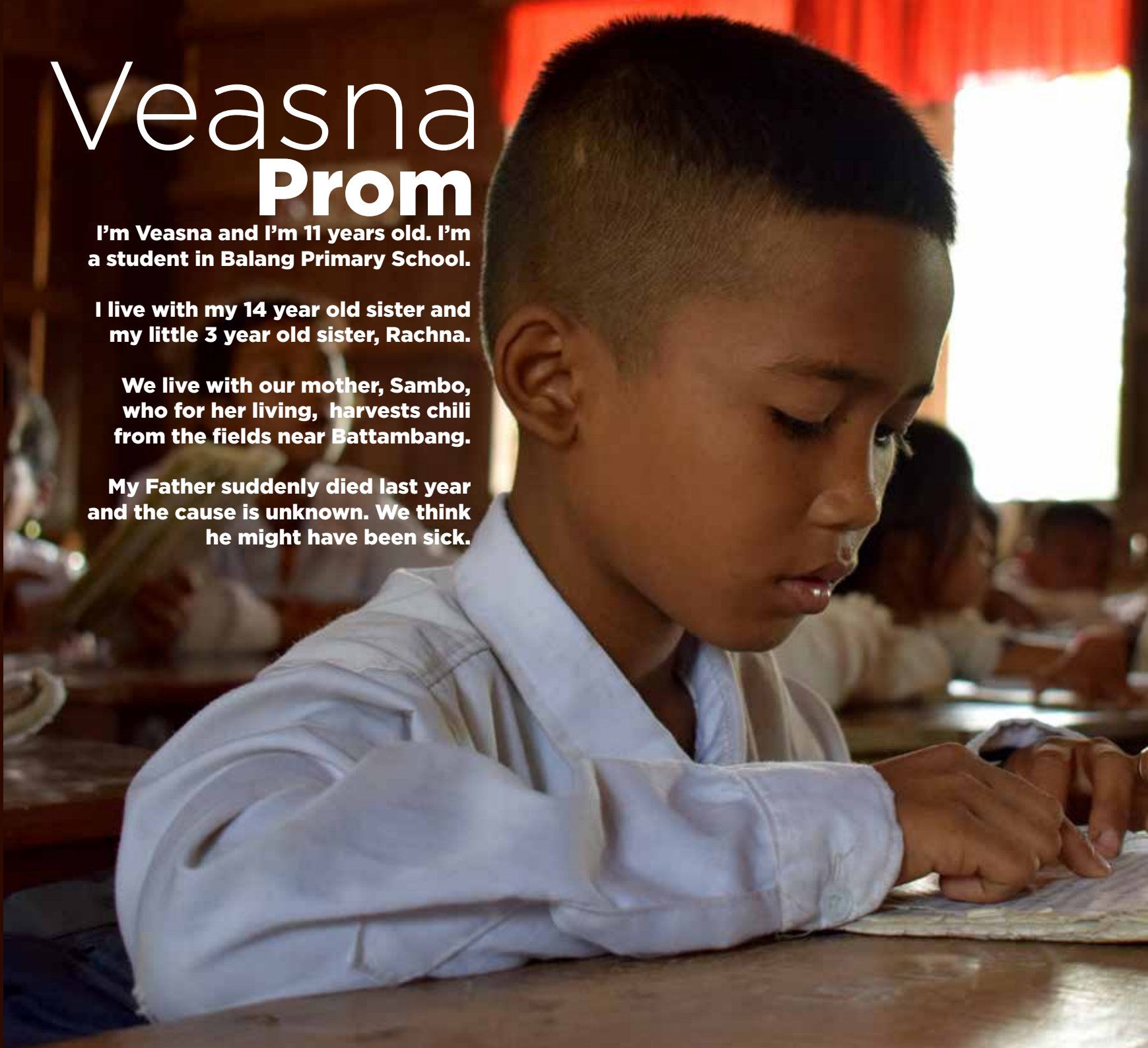
# Veasna Prom

**I'm Veasna and I'm 11 years old. I'm a student in Balang Primary School.**

**I live with my 14 year old sister and my little 3 year old sister, Rachna.**

**We live with our mother, Sambo, who for her living, harvests chili from the fields near Battambang.**

**My Father suddenly died last year and the cause is unknown. We think he might have been sick.**









I am very lucky to have the school just be a ten minute walk from my house. My friends and I usually walk to school together and talk along the way. When we walk home from school, we talk about what we learned and the homework we will have to do.

During the time on the playground in school, I like to French knit and play the tail game, even though only a few boys like to play it.

I think Khmer is the best subject to learn, and society is the worst because it is sometimes difficult to understand.

I think studying is not only just good for learning, but it also helps you to become a good person.

My favorite thing at school is when the teacher asks me to go to the blackboard. My least favorite part about school, is going during the rainy season. I get covered in mud and have to clean everything.

I wake up at five in the morning and make the bed that we all share with my mother and wash myself before going to school. If there is old rice from dinner the night before, I will then eat that for breakfast at home. If not, I will buy my breakfast at school, which is normally rice and fried eggs.

I finish school at 11am and go home and prepare lunch for my sisters and mother. I know how to cook rice, fry fish and eggs and meat. I'm not the best cook, but I have to do it, so I try my best. After lunch, I take a nap and do my homework,

and my mom tells me that I need to sleep a lot so I grow quickly.

I usually wash two or three times a day I have to refill my bucket to take a shower because it is really hot and you get sweaty very fast.

Before going to bed at 7pm, I take care of my little sister, and we usually play cops and robbers. She's the robber and I'm the cop.

On Sundays I hope my mother harvest the chili so I can get some money to buy food at school. My mother picks the chili from the field two or three times a week.

I've had a scholarship from Coconut Water for two years. I met the educators when my sister moved to secondary school and they offered me, her scholarship. They gave me everything, a bottle of water, a brand new uniform, and a pair of sandals!

But, the thing I like most are the notebooks because now I can review the lesson at home. Before having the scholarship I couldn't do this because we did not have money to spend on paper. Now I have 10 notebooks, and I can share them with my sister.

## Buying breakfast at school

**Public schools in Cambodia allow people to sell food inside the school. But these foods are not always healthy, for example; candy, soda, or ice-cream. All of these things are still cheaper than cooking at home.**



# The son with no father

by Veasna

Once upon a time, there was a poor man named, Komsan. He was orphaned when he was younger and had to work and study very hard to make his living.

He struggled in life but managed to handle every obstacle that got in his way and he then graduated from high school.

“Now it is time to get a proper job”, he thought. So he travelled to the city and tried to find a job, but no one gave him a chance.

Komsan got very sad, but he did not give up.

One day, he decided to apply for a job at one of the biggest banks in Cambodia.

When he arrived at the bank, he paid respects to the manager and gave him his application to work as an assistant.

The manager checked the form and told him:

“Look, Komsan, I am sorry, I can not accept you because we don’t need more staff. When I need staff again, we will call you.”

So Komsan thanked the manager, said good bye and exited the office very sad.

When he was walking from the manager’s office, he saw the manager’s sewing pin on the ground. It was a very valuable pin made in gold. Komsan understood this pin costed thousands riels. So he picked it up it and entered the office again to give it back to the bank manager.

When the manager saw it, he immediately realized Komsan was an honest man and thanked him and invited him to have lunch with his family.

Komsan came back to his village and continued studying preparing himself for a new opportunity.

Three weeks later, the bank manager called Komsan to come and work as his personal assistant. He worked as assistant for two years after becoming the deputy of the bank.

**Moral:** Honesty is the way to success.



# Makara Yu

**My name is Makara and I'm 13 years old.**

**I live with my two brothers and my little sister in a small village near Battambang.**

**We live with our grandmother because my mother works as a service assistant in a restaurant in the capital, Phnom Penh.**

**Despite her not living with us, she still gives us some money every two month. The money is not enough, so my grandmother raises chicken at home to sell. My brothers and I help her by feeding and taking care of the animals.**

I like to play football with my friends on the weekends and I like it because we help each other. I also like studying with a group of my friends at school.

The hardest subject at school for me is science, but I will have to be good at it because I want to become a building engineer when I grow up. It would also be cool if I became a math teacher. My favorite subjects in school are math, Khmer, English and social studies.

My favorite food is chicken with rice and fried eggs.

I've had a scholarship from Coconut Water for two years.

Before I had this scholarship, I got my school materials handed down to me from my older brother, who is now in high school.

He was receiving help from a local NGO and once he finished primary school, he would give me all of his old stuff.





Now that I have a scholarship from Coconut Water, I have brand new books, pens, pencils, and chalk.

I also have enough notebooks for the rest of the year.

The scholarship also gives me a ruler, towel, rubber, sandals, and a school uniform.

These past two years have changed the way I learn and study because the materials my brother gave me would be in bad condition and sometimes books would be missing pages so I couldn't study.

The thing I like most about my scholarship is that now I have a school uniform, which is normally very costly. I have a new uniform and an old one, so I can go to class clean every day. I am very grateful for receiving all of these materials so I can continue my studies.

## Why wearing school uniform matters?

In Cambodia, non enrollment and absences from school are very high. Uniforms provide communities with valuable information, such as spotting children in uniforms which means they are attending school.

School uniforms give children a strong feeling of pride and motivation to keep studying and strengthens their sense of belonging.

Coconut Water's scholarship kits give school uniforms to children who can't afford to get two uniforms for the year.





# The crocodile and the cart driver

by Makara

Once upon a time, a crocodile lived in a certain pond. When the dry season started, the pond began to dry up so he had to leave the pond.

The crocodile walked for miles so when he saw an old man riding a bullock cart he asked the cart driver: "May you take me to a pond where water is abundant?". "Of course," said the carter.

Then, the crocodile said, "Please fasten me strongly so that I might not slide down." And so did the cart driver.

A couple of hours later, the cart driver saw a pond full of water and told the crocodile: "Here you are a good pond go and live here happily!"

The crocodile instead of thanking the man accused him: "I've suffered a great deal from your tight bond, so I have to eat one of your oxen!"

"I did what you asked me to. I think you just want to eat my oxen!" said the cart driver.

"Then, go find out a judge who can resolve this problem!" said the crocodile.

The cart driver found a rabbit, the wisest animal on earth, and asked him to judge.

So the rabbit came and observed the crocodile and the rope and asked the crocodile to climb up the cart and the cart driver to tie him as he did.

Then, the rabbit asked the crocodile, "Was it as tight as this, crocodile?"

"Oh no, it was not like this."

"Tighten it a little more!" the rabbit said.

"Was it as tight as this?". "No", said the crocodile. The cart driver tightened until he couldn't move or breath at all.

As it was impossible to tighten with hands, the rabbit asked the crocodile again, "Was it as tight as this? Yes it was!" uttered the crocodile with difficulty.

"That is impossible!" said the rabbit. "If it was tighten like this you will have marks along your body and you didn't when I saw you before. You were lying, and you didn't show gratitude to the cart driver that helped you. In punishment you will stay tied in here until the rope breaks.

And the rabbit and the cart driver left the crocodile and went home in peace.

**Moral:** You should show gratitude for someone that helps you.



# Sokheng Chhin

My name is Sokheng and I'm 11 years old.

I live with my sister and my grandmother who is the person I love the most in this world.

My parents and little brother live in Thailand, where the work in a chicken farm. I don't get to see my father, but my mother recently came to see us and give us some money after not seeing her for two years.

My 68 year old grandmother works a lot by planting vegetables for her boss and she gets 2.5 dollars a day for this.



I get up at five in the morning and wash my face, brush my teeth, and get my things ready for school.

I ride my bike for one hour normally or two if it is the muddy season to get to school. Once I reach school, I have no time to have breakfast, so I eat some rice during the first break at 8am. Sometimes during the worst months of the muddy season I can't make it to school because of the mud in the road and have to turn back around and go home.

The route I take during the dry season is very bumpy and dusty, so I have to stop 3 or 4 times to rest and look for shade under a tree to get a break from the heat.

After school, I like to study or go for a walk with my friends. I also help my grandmother clean the plants and cook and fill our water deposit.

My favorite subject at school is Khmer, which is Cambodia's national language, and I think math is my hardest subject. I wish to continue to secondary school, but I don't know if I will be able to attend high school because it is 20 km away from my house I have never ridden that far before.

In the future I want to take care of my grandmother when she gets old.

I met Coconut Water when their educators came to my school to teach English, painting, and hygiene. Now I have a Coconut Water scholarship for two years.

From all of the materials I receive, my favorite is the backpack because now I can carry my books more easily when I go to and from school. I don't get as tired now, so I have more energy to study and that motivates me to not drop out.

Despite being 11 and my sister being 8, we study in the same class because I wanted to wait for my sister to be in the same class as me so she is less likely to drop out of school. Now I motivate and support her to keep studying.

## Migration

Due to the lack of jobs in Cambodia, several people enter every year illegally in Thailand to work in non-specialized and informal works because wages are higher than in Cambodia and the language is similar.

These informal workers have no labor-rights, and they're exposed to mafias. They live in very poor conditions to save enough money to send to their families in Cambodia.









# The crow's daughter wedding

by Sokheng

Once upon a time the King crow lived in the top of a palm tree. One day, the crow prepared his daughter to get married. The King crow invited other animals to join his daughter's wedding and the day of the wedding all the animals were there to enjoy the party. They were very excited, eating good food and dancing.

The Queen Turtle also come to enjoy the party but because she was slow she arrived late. When the turtle arrived at the party and looked at the top of the palm tree she saw the birds, rabbits, tigers, lions, monkeys eating and dancing she felt very hungry but she didn't know how to climb the tree.

Immediately, the snake came and the queen turtle asks her where she is going, and she responded that she is going to join the party.

The snake asked the queen if she wanted to come with her and gave her, her tail asking her to bite it so she could carry her up the palm tree.

The snake told the Queen not to talk while climbing the tree because if she opened the mouth to talk she will fall down.

"This is extremely important, my dear Queen," said the snake. "Because I have no arms, I will not be able to help you if you fall down. Keep your mouth closed."

Once they have arrived at the middle of the palm tree and the Crow King saw the Turtle he saluted her from the top of the palm tree.

"My dear Queen Turtle, Thank you for coming to my daughter's party. How are you?"

The Queen turtle opens her mouth to answer and suddenly she felt from the snake's tail, falling on the ground and breaking her shell.

That is why turtles' shells look broken up until today.

**Moral:** Think before you talk.





# Ly Sinh Nhonh

My name is Ly Sinh, and I'm 11 years old. I live with my family in a little village near Battambang.

Because my father doesn't have a job, he stays at home and takes care of the family while my mother works a few times a month as a traditional Khmer singer for weddings. She gets 10 dollars each time. My 24 year old brother, Lyna, sometimes works as a construction worker, when needed.

My brother Phanha and I, are students. He gets assistance from an NGO that helps people with disabilities, and I have the Coconut Water scholarship.







I get up every day at 6 am and make my bed, wash my body, comb my hair and brush my teeth.

I then ride my bike to school and get breakfast there. My favorite breakfast is rice with soup.

Classes are from Monday to Saturday, from 7am to 11am. We get a 10 minute break every 50 minutes of class. I take advantage of having this break and I play football, which is my favorite.

When I am done with class for the day, I come home and I eat lunch, which is usually rice and then I wash the dishes. Washing the dishes is my job at home.

Then the best part of the day comes around, I get to play football until 4pm, and then I go home. I wash myself for a second time and then have dinner and read or do my homework.

I started playing football three months ago after I joined the Coconut Water Team, this helped me discover that I wanted to be a football player.

My heroes are my parents and my teacher. They encourage me to keep studying and to not give up. I know my mother is very proud of me, and when she asks me to perceive, I listen to her and her wise words.



When I grow up, I want to live in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. I want to play football and teach English so I can help my family and poor people.

I've had the Coconut Water scholarship for five years now. I like Coconut Water because they help poor families and encourage students to study more.

My favorite part of the scholarship, is the uniform. It makes me feel confident because it shows everyone that I am a student and this encourages me to study even harder.

Coconut Water has taught me that playing sports is very good for your health. It is also a good way to spend time with your friends. My coach is doing a good job of teaching me a lot of football techniques.

## Informal work

The main source of Cambodian employment and economic output is its informal economy.

Cambodia's informal economy is defined as businesses that do not register with the government, do not pay taxes and hire few employees.

Several workers lacking from education are forced to work in non-specialized jobs where they have no fixed salary and they just work when needed having no regular income nor insurance or labor rights.



# The goat and wolf

by Ly Sinh

Once upon a time, an old mother goat lived with her seven kids in a pretty little cottage on the edge of the forest.

One day she gathers them and said: "Listen carefully, my dear children. I need to go out to get some food, and I want you all to be very careful because I heard there was a wolf near our cottage. If he comes here and sees you, he will surely gobble you all up. So stay inside the house, and don't open the door for anyone!"

"Don't worry mother", the kids replied, "we will be very careful and do everything you told us to". So, she said goodbye and made sure they locked the door.

The old wolf, hidden behind a near tree saw the mother goat leaving and a few minutes later, he went to knock the cottage door.

"Who's there?" asked the eldest of the kids. The wolf replied, "It's mummy, and I've got some nice things for you all!"

But the kids heard the rough voice and knew that this was not their mother, so they said:

"You're not our mother. She has a really nice sweet voice, and you sound all rough and rotten. You must be the wolf. Go away!"

So the wolf went to buy a pint of honey, which he downed in one go, to make his voice nice and sweet. Then he went back to the goats' cottage:

"Open the door," he called out. "It is your dear mother, and I've brought some wonderful things for all of you to party!"

But without thinking, in order to make sure his voice was gentle, the wolf had placed his great big black paws on the window.

"No! No! No!" shouted the eldest kid, "our mother does not have great big black paws like that! Hers are dainty. You must be the wolf! Go away!"

So the wolf went away defeated by the clever kids who had followed her mother's advice. "I can't defeat these kids," thought the wolf. "Better look for an easy prey."

**Moral:** Children should listen to their parents.



# Socheata Rith

**My name is Socheata and I'm 9 years old.**

**I live with my mother and my little brother near Battambang. I never see my father, but I think he lives in Phnom Penh.**

**My mother works very hard collecting trash and selling it. Sometimes she finds good pieces for cooking or old machinery.**

**Now, some relatives of mine have let us live in their house. Despite it being far from school, I really like living here because it is much bigger and nicer than the house we used to live in and we don't have to pay any money to stay here.**





I get up at 6 in the morning, wash my face, brush my teeth, and prepare school materials to go to school.

Since I don't have a bicycle and school is far and the traffic is dangerous, my mother takes me to school everyday on her scooter.

My mother is very busy and since school starts at 7 o'clock, I always get breakfast at school. Rice is my favorite!

I am in school until 11am, then my mother picks me up and we go home. I help her wash our clothes and cook, but I only know how to boil rice and fry fish and eggs.

One of the cool things from Coconut Water, are the English classes that are at 1:30pm three times a week.

My mother has to take a break from work to take me to school so I can attend these classes. I really enjoy playing and singing during the activities because it is very different from what the teachers do in my school.

I've had the Coconut Water scholarship for two years, and since then I have been first in my class in 2nd and 3rd grade. Before I had the scholarship, it was not like that.





I really love my backpack because now I can carry and store my books and it is so fancy and pink, which is my favorite color!

I don't like bad people, so when I grow up I want to be a policewoman so I can arrest those who steal from and cheat the good people.

I also don't like people who leave their babies or loved ones behind and don't take care of them. When I become an adult, I will take my mother with me to live in Phnom Penh, in a beautiful building with lots of people living in it too.

## Divorce in Cambodia

Although the law in Cambodia protects children's rights in similar terms as in Western countries, culturally, specially in rural areas, parents must allow couples to get married at very young age.

These marriages are not registered and commonly, spouses have no education nor income. As a result of this, they can't sustain their children, and a high number of marriages are broken. Generally, mothers kept the children and have to struggle to feed them because they have no support from exhusbands.





# The good heart of the hen

by Socheata

Once upon a time, in a small farm near a lake, there were a hen and a duck. Regardless they were still very close friends, the hen was hard-working and responsible while the duck was lazy and preferred to sleep near the lake.

When the dry season came the hen had her chicks and the duck had her ducklings. The farm was full of chicks and ducklings.

The hen started feeding her chicks but the duck preferred to rest near the lake. One day, the duck was tired of being followed by the hungry ducklings, so she ran away from them and left the farm.

The hen, seeing that the duck's ducklings had no mother and they were hungry, decided to take them to live with her and her chicks.

When the hen's chicks saw their mother coming with a bunch of ducklings, they asked:

"Mother, why did you invite the ducklings to live with us?"

The hen sat down and asked them all to pay attention to what she was about to say.

""Because they have no mother and they need to be cared for, just like you. You should help those who are in need. Remember, my children, in this life we have to support each other. How can I leave these ducklings without their mother and nothing to eat?"

The hen's chicks continued asking:

"But mummy, will they be living with us forever? How will you feed them if there's no food for all?"

The hen answered:

"Then we will have to share it. You will give half of your food to your new siblings"said the hen and added"When they grow up and they can live by themselves I will stop feeding them, same as I will do with you all. That's the way you will find your on path in life."

**Moral:** Do not run away from your responsibilities.



# Sreynory Soa

Hi, my name is Sreynory and I'm 11 years old. I live with my parents and my four siblings.

Since both of my parents can't work, my brother is the head of the household. He is a construction worker whenever he is called on for a job.

My mother used to sell mice in the market that my uncle caught in the rice fields, but she broke her leg. Now she can't ride a bicycle to get to the market, so she stays at home and I help her with the daily chores.



My father was a soldier and got shot in 1979 during the war in Cambodia. Until 1997 the government paid him a veteran pension, but they stoped and we don't know why.

Because of his wounds he is very sick and he can't work. He stays at home and plays music for me. He knows I like to sing a lot.

I want to be a singer. Every evening I practice at home and some days, in school, the teacher asks me to sing for my classmates. Even if I get very nervous and embarrassed while performing in front of my friends, I still really like it.

I wake up at 6 am and after getting ready, I ride my bicycle to school. Since the road to school is in very bad condition, during the rainy season commuting to school can be very hard. I have to stop a lot and clean the mud off the wheels since they get stuck in the mud.

I like telling jokes with my friends and chat while we ride to school to make the commute nicer.

When I get to school, I buy my breakfast and then go to class until 11am. Between the lessons, I like to play French skipping since it is my favorite game.





## How war affected Cambodia's education

A whole generation from people coming from rural areas struggled with insecurity and lack of schools during Pol Pot regime.

This generation was not able to attend classes and several people aged 40 or more have no basic education, the most of them can't read or write.

Once Pol Pot regime was over, lack of infrastructures and schools forced many children to study in Pagodas -Buddhist temples- where the monks helped children to study.

My favorite subjects are Khmer and math. I'm very focused on studying and learning because my parents told me they were not allowed to study during the Pol Pot regime because they had no school.

When I get home from school, I cook for the family and wash the dishes and clothes.

During the evening, I do my homework if I have any and sing for a while before dinner.

Before I received the Coconut Water scholarship, my mother had to buy all of my school supplies.

The family struggled with these expenses because of a tight budget and buying school materials is almost 30 dollars a year, which is really expensive!

Going to school now is a lot easier because I have all of my materials and I can concentrate on my studies. I also attend painting classes 2 times a week and computer workshops four times a month, that Coconut Water offers. These classes are the most fun classes at school.

In both painting and computer classes, we play together. We learn English and computer skills and how to draw and make crafts.



# Big bird, big pot

by Sreynory

Once upon a time there was a mother and her daughters who were living closely to the rice field.

The mother, who was a hunter, went to hunt a bird to have lunch. After a whole day looking for something to hunt, she could only find one big bird and she came back home very tired. She told her daughter to cook the bird while she prepared the table.

"How can I cook it?" thought the girl. "It's so big. Where will I find a pot as big as the bird? This is not an easy task, I better sit here and think on how to do it."

When the mother finished making up the table she entered the kitchen. "Why are you not cooking, my dear?" asked to her daughter.

"I don't know how to do it. The bird is so big, and the pot is tiny." she said.

The mother told the girl she would do the job. "It's easy, all you have to do is chop the bird in pieces and put them into the little pot. Go watch your sister while I do this."

So the girl went to take care of her little sister. She found her playing kitchen with a little pot

and some clay figures. "What are you doing, sis?" asked her sister.

"I'm playing kitchen but I don't know how to cook this clay figure. It is so big, and my pot is so tiny."

"Oh, that's easy you fool," told the eldest daughter. "See, I chop the figure in pieces and I put them in the pot."

The little sister start crying when she saw how her sister was destroying the figures she made with such love and care.

When hearing the crying, the mother came very alarmed. "What's happening here, my girls?"

"She broke my toys to put them into the pot," said the little girl.

"Why you didn't model a bigger pot so you can put the figures into, my dear?" said the mother hugging their daughters. "Come, eat and after lunch we will build a new clay figure and a new pot".

**Moral:** If you don't know how to do something, ask others to help you.





# Piset Oun

My name is Piset and I'm 11 years old.

I live with my mother and my sister in a brand-new house that some volunteers from Coconut Water built for us last year.

I help my mother cutting morning glories and picking tamarinds which she sells to buy food for us.



I get up at 5:30 every morning and wash my face, brush my teeth, comb my hair, and put on my uniform. I then eat my breakfast, which is usually porridge, and I like it a lot.

I go to school from 7am to 11am and once I get home, I take off my uniform and eat lunch. Usually, my little sister and I help our mother peel the tamarinds she picked in the morning while we were at school. Once they are peeled, she will go and sell them.

I have go quickly to my extra Khmer and math classes that are offered by Coconut Water. These are the hardest subjects for me.

When I come home from my extra classes, I help my mother cut the morning glories from my neighbor's field. He lets my mother cut and sell them because he knows this is one of the only ways she can make a living.

I then go and study at 7pm, and I will review the lessons for tomorrow and do some homework for an hour or so, until I get tired.

At 9pm I go to bed, which I share with my mother and sister.

I am very focused on studying since it is the thing I like most. During the breaks in school, I go to the library for a while and then I go and play football with my friends in the playground. I also really like reading stories, but sometime I get sad while reading them. You never know what you will find in a book.

Getting to school can be difficult because the traffic is pretty scary and I live far away, but it is worth it. It really pays off to go to school and to go to the extra classes because I want to be a doctor in the future. You need to study a lot and be very smart to be a doctor.

I want to be a doctor so I can help sick people and my relatives. It is also a good way to make money that I can then give to my mother so she won't have to work as hard. I want to work in the public hospital in Battambang and marry a doctor so we can work together.

I've happily had the Coconut Water scholarship for three years. Now I have a uniform and I dress like the rest of the students. Coconut Water has helped me improve my studies and my mother doesn't have to spend money on my books and shoes anymore. She can now use the money to buy food for my sister and me.

## Subsistence farming

The main kind of agriculture in Cambodia is subsistence farming. The food you grow on your farm is for you and you can also use it to exchange produce and other goods in the village.

About 90% of all the people who live in Cambodia live on the countryside. These people are highly dependent on subsistence agriculture.





# The blackbird and the monkey

by Piset

Once upon a time, in a beautiful forest, a couple of blackbirds set up their nest on a tree. Suddenly, a heavy rain started and a homeless monkey who was stricken with cold came to stay under the blackbird's tree.

When the blackbirds saw him terribly shivering, one counseled him " Oh, Brother Monkey, you have two hands and two legs Why don't you build a house for your dwelling? "

The monkey said."I have two hands and two legs but the truth is I cannot do it."

The blackbird insisted."You don't need knowledge to build your nest. You see the birds have only one beak, and they can build the nest which they need for their protection from the cold and the rain."

"You had better thought it over. Am I right or not? All the animals in the world have their own dwelling to protect their babies and their mates from suffering. If you cannot build a good nest, you just put branches one on another and you cover it with leaves."

"Please monkey, we don't want to see you suffering. You do not depend on another dwelling or on a branch or on a tree."

"Monkey," the blackbird continued, "you have two hands and two legs, I think you can do it. Please do it, do not wait for your knowledge to help you."

When the monkey heard blackbird's words he thought it twice. He started cutting branches and picking brush and he manages to build something that looked like a shelter."

The monkey spent a lot of time cutting, building and modelling his shelter and, the more time he spent the better the shelter looked.

Finally, after a while, the blackbirds called the monkey: "You see my friend? You just built your own nest. We knew you could do it. You must feel very tired, but we are so proud of you. Now go to bed and have nice dreams."

**Moral:** Learning by doing when you don't have the knowledge is the best way to improve.



A young girl with dark hair, wearing a white school uniform, is shown in profile, looking up and writing on a chalkboard. She has a red string tied around her right wrist. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a classroom setting with shelves and papers.

# Theary Sok

**My name is Theary and I'm 12 years old. I live with my grandmother, brother and sister.**

**My grandmother takes care of us. She plants vegetables and flowers to sell and sometimes she gets 4 dollars per day. When she can't get money, she goes to the Pagoda and asks the monks to give her some rice.**

**My mother died in a traffic accident and my father lives far away. I see him more or less, once every two months, and he will sometimes give me 50 cents.**

**My brother and I study a lot. Since he is first in his class in secondary school, he can apply for a scholarship so he can continue his studies.**

**I'm also the first one in my class. I push myself everyday to study harder so I can keep studying in the future without having to spend money.**



I get up at 6 am every morning and help my grandmother prepare breakfast and then we eat together. I then feed the chickens and wash the dishes and do some homework since I go to school in the afternoon.

I really love painting and drawing. I also enjoy reading with my friends in my free time.

Sometimes my friends will want me to play with them on the playground during break, but sometimes they also prefer to stay in the classroom and read.

I want to become a Khmer and English teacher because I want children to become smart. I will help them by explaining the lessons clearly and motivating them to study harder.

That is exactly what I do. I study hard because when I grow up I am going to have a lot of work to do.

When I grow up, I still want my grandmother to live with me, and if I have to move for my job she

will move with me. She is my hero. I will intend to save some money so I can buy a new house made of stone and not from iron planks. The house will be yellow and will have a lot of windows, well at least three or four!

My house now, has no electricity or running water and the roof is full of holes so when it rains I can't really sleep because I get wet.

I have been extremely happy since I received the Coconut Water scholarship 4 years ago because before it my grandmother had to pay for my school supplies. I only had 2 books and no uniform. Now I have everything: books, pens, a uniform, flip-flops, chalk, and even a towel and backpack.

The thing I like most is my uniform because now everyone can see that I am a student and I am dressed the same way as all of my classmates.

## **Housing in Cambodia**

Cambodia is one the poorest countries in Asia. Several people lack safe running water and therefore have to get water from ponds.

Boiling water before drinking is necessary, if you don't then you can get dangerous diseases such as cholera. The houses also lack toilets so they make latrines outside the house to be shared among the family.

Several people will use candles or flashlights since there is no electricity.

Houses are made of wood or corrugated iron planks and consists of one room, where the family shares a bed and keeps all of their things and there is no kitchen.





# The worm and the butterfly

by Theary

Once upon a time there was a worm that lived in the forest. The worm was happy with her life, going for a walk, playing with her friends, eating all the yummy flowers she wanted.

One day, she felt something was changing in inside her, so she climbed up a big green leaf and started building a silk cocoon where she falls sleep.

Two days later, the worm opened the cocoon and saw her body. She was not a worm anymore! She had beautiful colored wings and big mouth to lick flowers. And she was so hungry!

The butterfly decided to use for the first time her new mouth licking some flowers and saw a big sunflower who looked really yummy.

So she started to flight and landed on the sunflower. When she was about to start eating, she noticed a worm was having a feast there.

The butterfly, seeing the worm picking up the flower, said:

"Worm! You are such a bad guy! You should not pick up my flower. Look at you, you are ugly and you don't have beatiful colored wings, you can't flight either! You must respect me and not eat my sunflower! These are for butterflies like me! Go away and leave my flower right now!"

The worm looked into her eyes and calmly said: "My dear butterfly, Why are you yelling at me? Don't you know that we are all equal animals? Don't you remember that once upon a time you were an ugly worm with no wings just like me?"

The butterfly felt ashamed of her words and agreed with the worm "You're right," she said. Please come and share this flower with me."

**Moral:** You should never forget where you come from.

## Sensitization Activities

- 1.** After reading these stories, what impacted you the most? Why?
- 2.** Find 5 similarities and differences between your daily activities and Piset, Sovanna, or Veasna's daily activities.
- 3.** What chores do you do at home? Do you cook? Do you do the laundry? Who makes your bed? Do you think you should do more chores at home?
- 4.** Find 5 similarities and differences between Ly Sinh's and Theary's houses.
- 5.** Is your school similar to the ones shown in these pictures? What are your favourite subjects? What do you want to be when you grow up? Do you think you have the same wishes and needs as the children in Cambodia have?
- 6.** What things do you know about Cambodia? Do you know any words in Khmer? If you could travel to Cambodia what things would you like to do?
- 7.** If Socheata or Makara came to visit you, what things would you want to show them about your city and your life? Why?
- 8.** How do you commute to school everyday? Find 2 similarities and differences from how Sokheng does it.
- 9.** Imagine you are studying in a Cambodian school, What things would surprise you? How would you make new friends there?
- 10.** Do you know any tale similar to these? How would you summarize these stories?



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