

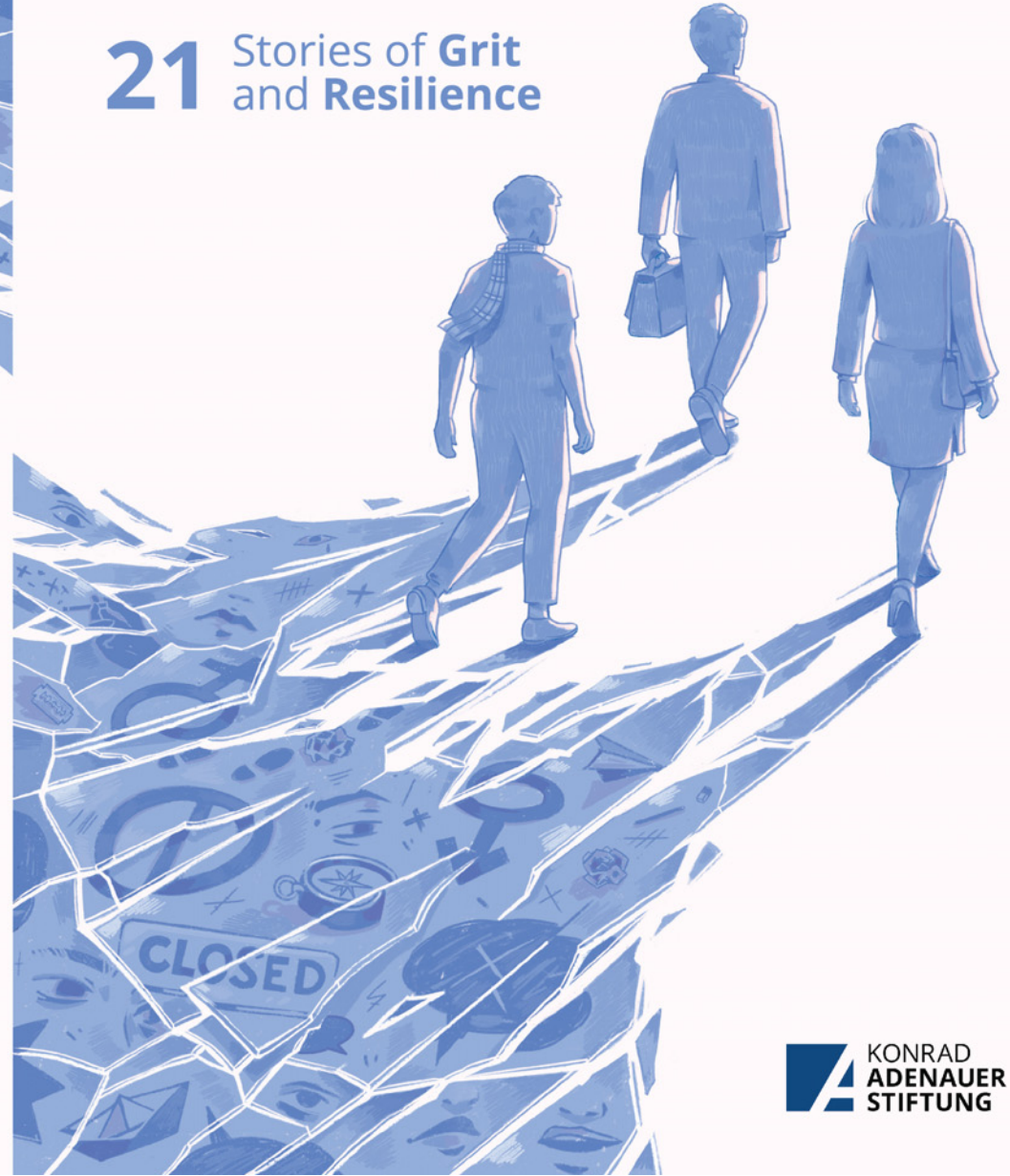


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CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS & INFLUENCERS

21 Stories of Grit
and Resilience



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

21 STORIES OF GRIT AND RESILIENCE

2021

Foreword

'The bamboo shoot grows up to be bamboo' is a well-known Khmer adage that reminds us all that young people will grow up to shape the future of Cambodia and the rest of the world. Despite holding such importance, millennials often face hurdles on a daily basis with their potentials still not being channeled into the right direction and being discounted in the decision making process. This challenge not only encompasses the youth but extends across large parts of Cambodian society.

Young leaders are not talked about nearly enough in Cambodia, yet there is a need to have good ones desperately. More often than not, the voices of young people have gone unheard. There have been countless opportunities which they have not been able to take because of a lack of self-esteem, resilience, or external motivation. Reaching the goal of inclusive and sustainable development requires substantial investment in the youth of a country.

The work to be done has to be beyond just creating more opportunities for the next generation but also about treating young people as agents of future growth and development especially in terms of innovative ideas, political and socio-economic participation rather than being just passive recipients of social assistance. To this end, empowerment is needed. Young people need to be motivated and reminded of their dormant potentials and capabilities in making their families, communities, nation, and the world a better place.

Against this background, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has gathered promising young and potential Cambodian individuals from different walks of life to share their stories and is very pleased to publish them in 'Cambodia's Young Leaders and Influencers'.

Through a series of practical, concise, easy-to-follow, and question-based lessons honed through real-life experience, this book is an inspiring read about how the young rise to meet new challenges and become leaders and influencers despite the odds against them. It reminds all of us of an ageless truth that serious challenges persist, but so do incredible opportunities.

Deeply impressed and touched by these stories, I wish that this publication morally empowers and inspires every reader especially young Cambodians to stand a little taller with a vision of hope and promise as they engraft these principles into their daily lives.

I also wish to thank all the 21 individuals in this book for their invaluable dedication in terms of time and effort in making this project possible.
Have a good read!

Phnom Penh, December 2020



Long Chanborney
Programme Manager
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Cambodia



Dr. Daniel Schmuecking
Country Representative
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Cambodia

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ABOUT KONRAD-ADENAUER-STIFTUNG

Freedom, justice and solidarity are the basic principles underlying the work of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). The KAS is a political foundation, closely associated with the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU).

As co-founder of the CDU and the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967) united Christian-social, conservative and liberal traditions. His name is synonymous with the democratic reconstruction of Germany, the firm alignment of foreign policy with the trans-Atlantic community of values, the vision of a unified Europe and an orientation towards the social market economy. His intellectual heritage continues to serve both as our aim as well as our obligation today. In our European and international cooperation efforts, we work for people to be able to live self-determined lives in freedom and dignity. We make a contribution underpinned by values to help Germany meet its growing responsibilities throughout the world.

KAS has been working in Cambodia since 1994, striving to support the Cambodian people in fostering dialogue, building networks and enhancing scientific projects. Thereby, the foundation works towards creating an environment conducive to social and economic development. All programs are conceived and implemented in close cooperation with the Cambodian partners on central and sub-national level.

Cambodia's Young Leaders and Influencers

21 Stories of Grit and Resilience

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By Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Cambodia

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Cambodia
House No 4, Street 462, Khan Chamkar Mon,
P.O.Box 944, Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia,
Telephone : +855 23 966 176
Email : Office.PhnomPenh@kas.de
Website : www.kas.de/cambodia
Facebook : www.facebook.com/kaskambodscha
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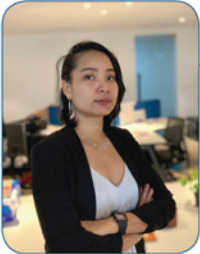


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Dr. Deth Sok Udom

Rector

Paragon International University



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

I was born in Phnom Penh in 1985 but grew up in Battambang Province and finished my primary education there. After my family moved to Phnom Penh in 1997, I attended Tuol Tompoung secondary school for a brief period, before I received a scholarship to study at Zaman International School (now rebranded as Paragon International School). After high school, I received a scholarship to study my bachelor's degree in sociology at Bogazici University in Turkey, and pursued a master's degree in Southeast Asian Studies at Ohio University in the U.S., and eventually received my PhD in Southeast Asian Studies from Humboldt University of Berlin in Germany. I'm now married with two children.

I have been working in various positions at Paragon International University (formerly Zaman University) since 2010, and have held the top position as Rector since late 2016. I'm proud to be the leader of this reputable university in Cambodia.

When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

When we established the university in 2010, we had to start everything from scratch, with only a few administrators and staff. So we had to wear different hats and learned to do different things in a relatively short period of time. My most challenging years were when I had to teach and work full time during the day, and had to do extensive research and write my doctoral dissertation at night. After four years of hard work and self-discipline, I managed to complete my doctoral dissertation and earned my PhD in 2014.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

Having a realistic vision, clearly written policies and procedures, and a supportive team that believes in the mission are very important for the sustainability and growth of an institution.



When we were a small institution, there was a tendency to be over-reliant on the top leader's decisions in almost every aspect of administration. This may be suitable or even desirable for a small institution that requires quick decisions for the effective completion of many tasks. But the bigger the institution grows, the more decisions need to be made. Accordingly, having clearly written policies, transparent mechanisms and well-defined committees allow for more efficient operation and less subjective decision-making.

But it is not useful to have policies and procedure if they are not implemented. It can only function if everyone, including the top leader, respects the whole process. Similarly, systematic

education and hard work – people who take their job seriously when it comes to guiding students to realize their potential. It is not a coincidence that our students, which currently number close to a thousand, have managed to win various national and regional competitions over the years.

We also support and encourage life-long learning and improvement of knowledge/skills among all our staff and students through in-house training or online platforms (e.g. taking classes on Coursera or EdX). On the other hand, we do not tolerate students' academic dishonesty (such as cheating or plagiarism) or any dishonest behavior by any of our staff, and have consistently taken actions in accordance with written policies in such instances.

“
If they pursue a life of hard work and live a life of integrity, they will have lived a meaningful and happy life, and they will not look back and regret it

record-keeping is imperative for every office. Staff members or office directors will not be in their position forever. Whenever there is a new person for the job, they need to be able to have a relatively clear idea about what their job entails, what has been done, and what was planned to be completed for their office.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

Our core values are: responsibility, integrity, discovery, and excellence (RIDE). To uphold these values as an institution, we recruit and promote people who truly believe in the value of

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Managers who like to micro-manage, constantly seek attention and flattery, and require subordination rather than consultation can only manage by authority but lack true respect in the institution. This kind of leadership does not

allow room for honest feedback, constructive comments, or a spirit of teamwork, which are needed for the growth of the institution. In such an environment, competent individuals are not able to demonstrate their ability, creativity, or take initiative, so eventually they either stop caring or they walk away. When that happens, it's a loss for the institution.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

In any projects that I lead, I try my best to lead by example, creating a model that my team members can look for as a reference. Likewise, I strive to have a good balance between providing guidance and leadership at the initial stage and allowing for creativity and decision-making by the team members at a later phase, even if I do not always agree with their approaches. This way, I can test other ideas and promote

a sense of responsibility among all the team members. When people have a sense of ownership and believe they can make a difference, things generally go in the right direction, and hopefully each member becomes a leader in their own aspect and appreciates the culture of teamwork when they become leaders in the future.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

The education sector is relatively less about risk-taking and more about ensuring that the quality of education we provide is on par with global standards and is in accordance with international best practices. That said, the biggest decision we have taken is the rebranding of our university. While "Paragon" is generally associated with the name of a supermarket in Phnom Penh and other shopping malls in Thailand or Singapore,

we decided to push through with this name because we believe that we can be the "paragon" (meaning model of excellence) of education in Cambodia. As expected, the initial reaction among the public and students was one of bewilderment. Eventually, however, the new name became gradually accepted, and this is reflected in the continued support and enrollment in all of our school branches because they trust the quality of education that we provide.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

Cambodians are known as friendly people with smiling faces, and given our national history – the glory, the tragedy, and the revival – we are known to be perseverant as well. If the youth of our country can reflect on this point and build on that, they can be motivated to strive for the best.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

Our youth should dare to dream, for themselves and for our country, and they should strive their best to achieve those dreams. In this digital era, virtually all knowledge is available at one's fingertips, so they should use their time wisely and embrace lifelong learning.

In the process of working to achieve any goals, however, they should try to maintain a high degree of integrity. Any achievements gained through serious compromises of one's core values and integrity are not true success. If they pursue a life of hard work and live a life of integrity, they will have lived a meaningful and happy life, and they will not look back and regret it.



Mrs. Seng Reasey

Executive Director SILAKA



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

My name is Seng Reasey, SILAKA Executive Director. In my family, I am the third of four daughters. At the age of 31, I am overjoyed to get married to the person I love. I graduated from Sisowat High School and received my bachelor and master degrees from Pannasastra University of Cambodia. My experiences in civil society started at the end of 2012, when I was assistant to the Executive Director. In 2015, I was promoted to Coordinator of the Committee to Promote Women in Politics (CPWP), for which SILAKA was the secretariat. At the end of 2018, I was selected as SILAKA's Executive Director through an application process with internal and external applicants. My definition of leadership was not defined by the position as an Executive Director. However, I believed that the word leadership arose to me when I could lead and manage my life. What makes me proud is when I can contribute to other individuals' growth in experience, skills, knowledge and self-esteem. With this, it has proven to me that individuals including youth, young women and others who I have been working with, can revolutionize breaking their silence from domination to project their voice in making decisions for their own lives.

When you first started out with your career, what were your most significant challenges?

It is generally known that management roles should be dominated by seniors and men mostly. Women are receiving more prejudice than men within management and at the decision-making level. Moreover, as a young woman I have been doubly discriminated against, directly and indirectly. From meetings to activity implementation or even networking within the country or abroad, the dominance tactics have been overwhelming. I found that even though my input or idea was decent, it still seemed to be unacceptable to some at the senior leadership table. In even worse cases, when my ideas and input was paraphrased by other senior leaders, it was later accepted and applauded. I always question why they never

value what I have done instead of discriminating against me because of my gender and age? Even though it has been said that youth and women are motivated, I and many women have faced the same story of being discriminated against.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

One of the most valuable lessons I learnt as a leader is team spirit. I believe team spirit is essential for an institution to concretely stand together. Good, capable leadership alone cannot make the organization successful without a strong team. Acknowledging and recognizing the value of everyone in

the team contributes to organizational success. The most important thing to remember is we are human beings, not machines, so a sense of care, emotional support, respect, and humanity is crucial. Never bluff as a BOSS is another most valuable lesson I have learnt. The definition of BOSS and LEADER has had a big impact on my life. The word itself has defined the usage of power over the team or so-called "subordinates." It is important to pay attention to the team's needs and provide support as much as possible rather than put yourself at the unreachable skyrocket level. There was a saying-- Article 1: the BOSS is never wrong, if the BOSS wrong go check article 1 again. Rather, as a LEADER, you have the capacity to facilitate among the team and yourself in order to

push forward toward your common goals and values.

“Facing your fear is never easy but living with fear is an eternity

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

My core value is being honest. I believe honesty will overcome obstacles and challenges in any conversation or negotiation. Being honest is not only speaking truth to yourself but also opening up about what you actually want and need to surrounding people. How to create common core values for your team? I considered establishing a space where individuals can openly speak starting from person to person and person to team. It is important to understand what the core values are at the individual, team and organizational levels to guarantee a common understanding and initiate common core values. Without the understanding of common core values, the team cannot be called a TEAM. Always look at your performance and reflect back at your core values. My core value of being honest leads from my individual self into the team which accelerates the path forward together. Responsibility is also necessary for a professional to have as a core value. I believe whatever actions we take; it will also affect surrounding people.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Three points can impact positively or negative on your leadership. First, "lead by example" -- you cannot just say it out without action as proof that you are a role model, not only to yourself but to many others. If you cannot keep your word,



people will lose trust in you. Your words, actions and behaviors count. Second, "self-interest rather than group/team interest" --this kind of leadership makes teams lose their motivation as whatever they contribute only serves your purposes, not them. If teams adopt this habit, the organization will be fragile. Third, "domination of power" -- using your power to abuse or violate, especially when you have more power than your team. Your team or your colleagues will live and work under pressure as they cannot exercise their power to project their voice in discussions, make decisions or initiate any idea. Respect others as you want others to respect you.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

I believe self-empowerment is a process of building inner power to boost the confidence that everyone has but social, economic, political and cultural factors act as supports or barriers in building your inner power. Mostly youth do not have much opportunity to exercise their power or sometimes they do not know that they have the power to act. Starting from our experience since we were young, we were not welcome to ask many questions, as older people often responded, "This is none of your business as you are young; you only need to do what adults ask you to do." I think this kind of practice does not allow platforms for young people to exercise their leadership by raising their voices, participating in decision-making processes and making choices.

Understanding power relations and dynamics is very important as a foundation in building your beliefs. I believe everyone can be a leader regardless of their gender, race, religion, family background or social status. It does not mean that to be a leader we need to have a hundred followers or people under your supervision. The question is can you lead your life to be who you want to be? Or has someone else decided for you? Creating space for youth to have the ability and chance to question and reflect at all processes is a good starting point.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

Being an activist advocating to make change, I think my biggest risk is limitation of support systems. What are the support systems? Family, community, society, government are included. Working in promoting women's rights in a patriarchal society is not easy as a majority see women as just subordinates, so when women stand up and claim their rights, people try to knock her out in different pictures. The backlash from social media, in news and in person continually hits us back and labels our work as wiping out culture and tradition. This misunderstanding comes back to us with curses and even actions sometimes.

In addition, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) workers were somehow not seen as significant actors for social development. I remember when my neighbors asked my mom about

my career; their first and only impression is "Oh your daughter might get a high salary?" There is no appreciation and it is just about the salary. How can people support you when they do not understand or try to understand the value of work? When you are in need or at risk will those people support or help you? The answer might be NO. Therefore, to overcome this risk, I started to identify who my allies are to recharge my batteries, who can actively listen to me without judgment, and who can hold my hand and walk through dark times. Thankfully my beloved family and SILAKA family (including the SILAKA Board of Directors and former Executive Director Mrs. Thida Khus) are by my side to cheer me up, give me a hand, and walk with me in difficult times. I built my own support system, which is sisterhood with many lovely sisters and brothers in the feminist movement who fight with me in common values and goals.

The last supporter whom I never forget is MYSELF because at the end it is only you who can never ever abandon or give up on yourself. People will walk in and out and cannot be with you forever so I hug myself when there is no one around. I keep asking myself "Am I happy with what I am doing right now?" If my heart still says YES, I follow it, but if it says NO, I reflect on why I am not happy. Remember you can take a break and stop for a while and move on but you cannot go back.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

Collective power and generational dialogue will make Cambodian culture unique. Learning from history with many sad stories during the war, nightmares and traumatization of war, which have passed from one generation to another. We were taught to be selfish, that we are fragile, not united. We do not trust, not starving is more important than rights, don't care about collective or common interest, only politicians can care about political and social affairs.

Without open dialogue to learn root causes and how we as a young generation can learn and reflect on older generations' experiences to make sure that bad history is not repeated, youth leadership will be difficult to achieve. Generational dialogue is a way to close the gap and reconnect younger and older generations to maximize everyone's talent. I am optimistic that youth can exercise their leadership if they can have more open space to question and reflect on the older generation's experience. No matter good or bad, all are lessons learnt. By doing so, unity will be built through discussion. Value as an active citizen is also important to drive youth leadership to make them recognize and acknowledge that they are a cell of society.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

My suggestion for the Cambodian younger generation is first be honest to yourself. When you are honest to your feelings, it will contribute to your decision-making as well. Accept how you

feel, who you are, what you like and why, and what kind of leader you want to be.

Second, always appreciate what has happened in your journey of life, the better or worse situations. Every occasion is like a chapter in a book, and not everyone has faced the same experiences as you. Every book has its unique character; every chapter defines you. Be ready to own the consequences of your decisions. It does not mean that every decision is right or wrong but embrace yourself to welcome the result of your actions.

Third, don't be afraid to be who you are. It is common to know that you are a daughter/son, mother/father, aunt/uncle, LGBTIQ person etc., but have you ever asked yourself to reflect

to understand yourself? Remember to be who you are. Most of the time, society tries to structure us to be who it wants us to be, even how to dress, hair style... be your own architect and you will be free from pressure and expectation.

Fourth, overcome your fear. It's true that it is hard to face your own fear; nevertheless, it will haunt you if you run away from it. You need to look for the root cause of your fear and dig it out. Facing your fear is never easy but living with fear is an eternity. Last but not least, speak up even if others tell you that your words are useless. No one can figure or fully understand if you are silent. Be grounded and believe in yourself, say out loud what you believe, even if it is only you who says it. Your Voice is Your Power.



Mr. Kok Tha

CEO

Friends help Friends saving group (FHF)



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

My name is Kok Tha. I was born in 1986 as the third of four siblings of a poor family in the flooded area of Phnom Penh. I enrolled at Boeung Trabek Primary School and also graduated from Boeung Trabek High School. I continued my higher education at the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) where I received a Bachelor of Arts in Tourism Management and a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature at Institute of Foreign Languages (IFL).

My parents encouraged me to learn English and Chinese in addition to Khmer. In my first year at university, I started volunteering and engaging in social works in order to seek additional knowledge and strengthen capacity beyond in-class learning. In 2011, I was awarded a one-year GIZ scholarship to study international leadership training and regional management in Germany. German was the language of my studies there.

I was married in 2013 and now I have a four-year-old son. I was not a good or smart student in high school but from the first day I enrolled at the university, I was committed to changing and creating success in life from then on. I had attended various workshops and trainings organized by NGOs and I have applied those new ideas and concepts in life. When engaging in social work for the first time, I did not know anything but I just did everything and supported every task, starting with cleaning toilet for participants. In all the time that I supported organizing workshops, I always listened, learned and engaged in workshop activities. I reflected what I learned and shared it with friends via Youth Club Volunteers.

Later I had the opportunity to share and train youth in a series of seminars and I was elected as a youth group leader. After that, I held positions as general manager of a few social and business organizations.

I am very proud to have founded and managed an organization



that has since 2009 promoted youth education and business startups with young entrepreneurs. The main objective is to provide young people with financial literacy and knowledge to manage their finances, to continue their education and to enter business by enhancing their knowledge and financial aid.

When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

The biggest challenge I faced when starting my career was earning trust from people around me, including my family members, friends and team members. For a young man lacking

management and leadership experience, and with limited knowledge and work experience, it was very challenging for me to make my parents confident in what I was doing. For the Friends Help Friends Saving Group (FHF), it took time to get established and to showcase the transparency and reliability of what I was managing to people around me.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

Lesson one: Creating role models and coaching successors are factors that make an organization prosperous and forward-looking. Empowering and coaching colleagues and

team members is our model. It is necessary to coach successors in order to create new leaders for our organization to be more competent than it was before. By so doing, we can relax and have time to do other tasks.

Lesson two: Institutional development requires time, strategic leadership and a long-term perspective. The outcome will have a positive correlation with time and patience, which requires long-term goals, not looking only at short-term results.

Lesson three: Being proactive! As a leader, be proactive: Think ahead and inspire people to think. Be the first to do things for people to see them! Be a role model to others by being the first to invest, which will make others follow in investing more. Work harder than others and bring together them to work. To do something, have a starting point that goes from smaller to bigger steps with a clear strategy and a specific plan.

“Creating role models and coaching successors are factors that make an organization prosperous and forward-looking

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

My core values are honesty, mutual support, perseverance, positive mental attitudes and love for nature and the environment. To ensure that my team, staff, family and clients align to the core values I embrace: First, I align my core values to the people around me and back up my values with my actions.

Plus, we need to provide support by offering advice, guidance, or correction to those around us. The most important thing is to reflect on whether any of our actions have gone against the core values. If so, correct immediately.

Over the past 10 years, I have made a habit of consistently listening and seeking personal opinions of key people around me such as family members, colleagues, close friends, and senior staffers at work. They provide me with opinions that I am able to use to adjust or correct my opinions.

Later, I bring those points from people around me to reflect and make decision on my yearly personal development plan. To listen to different people's opinions and feedback without responding or defending is not easy, but it is the time to practice and embrace patience and an attitude of self-learning.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Assuming that you are better than others and not listening to them. Each person has different strengths, weaknesses, and unique characteristics. Being able to listen to and learn from the people around us opens opportunities for us to expand our knowledge, improve relationships, and work better.

Thinking of only our personal interests without considering the negative consequences for other people. Working for others and doing our own businesses, work, activities and decision-making always impacts relevant stakeholders. Therefore, if the positive impacts or benefits are not offered to our relevant stakeholders because we only think about our personal interests, our work or businesses will not improve or receive others' cooperation.

Being overjoyed without self-awareness and neglecting to build personal capacity and the capacities of people around us. Don't think that it is already enough, and don't always live in the comfort zone without thinking about learning something new to become more competitive. Otherwise, we will be marginalized in this globalization era.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

Sharing knowledge and experience with youth: I always spend time sharing my experiences with youth and students, in seminars or informal coffee sessions.

Providing opportunities for youth to learn to organize, manage, lead, and reflect: In my leadership role in the organization, I often teach younger people or colleagues about tasks and give them a chance to lead and master them.

Continuing to strengthen youth capacity through offering suggestions, feedback and coaching: For youth and colleagues

to accomplish bigger tasks, strengthening their capacity is a significant task. Therefore, youth need to learn more and work harder to be more competitive.

Encouraging and reflecting on problems and seeking solutions rather than blaming or focusing on the problem itself: When youth face with challenges or problems at work, in school, or in the family, I always encourage them to think more positively and to try to find solutions rather than thinking about problems and staying depressed or anxious.

Encouraging youth to share with and train their peers: I always encourage and inspire colleagues to share their knowledge and skills with other colleagues and to continue to build their capacity avoid working carelessly or being too proud of themselves.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

It is a big risk when:

- We work or do businesses without clear management or financial systems.

- Our team members and business shareholders do not have a shared vision.

- Our team members or business shareholders focus on individual interests rather than collective interests.

The solutions are:

- Developing a work flow system in compliance with organization policies and establishing financial policies and financial management systems.

- Developing visions when establishing a team or setting up a business and creating management roles and procedures in line with the defined visions.

- Carefully selecting team members and business shareholders and encouraging their engagement.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

Caring about others and providing mutual support in a friendly and amicable manner makes Cambodian culture unique.

Youth are pillars and the future leaders of Cambodia. With the large number of young people in Cambodia, they will create

both positive and negative impacts on Cambodia's economic, social, environmental and political sectors. Therefore, leadership is crucial in directing and supporting youth to impact society and the economy as positively as possible.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

- Youth should think long-term and be strategic in their work or business.

- Be positive as every problem has a solution, and there are opportunities in crisis situations.

- Be proactive. Taking the initiative to seek solutions is better than complaining and blaming others.

- Don't forget your self-improvement and the improvement of people around you.



Miss. Tan Kim Heng

Former President
Khmer Youth Association



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG
LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

I am Tan Kim Heng; I was a president of the Khmer Youth Association. Currently, I work for a private company. I'm still in school, doing a Master of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) at the Institute of Foreign Languages.

I was born and grew up in Kampot province in a working-class family with my three siblings, one older brother and twin younger sisters. We were raised by our single mother after our father passed away in 2006. I was a good and smart student in school; I was always in the top 5 from primary school to secondary school, and in particular I was good at languages. Yet after 2006, my studies dropped down since I had to share chores and did not have enough time for extra classes. Due to financial problems, and no motivation or inspiration from people around me and in the community, I was about to drop out of school in grade 11, but luckily I had a good instinct that pushed me over – I knew I wanted to work in an office with a big desk and chair. So, in 2011, I made it, successfully finishing high school.

Yet sadly I realized that I could not continue to study in Phnom Penh at all due to the financial problem. After waiting for a year in 2012, I came to study in Phnom Penh where I enrolled in a Bachelor of Art, Humanities, and Language, English Language at Human Resource University. This was a step to university, but there was a nightmare as to whether or not I would be able to find a job after graduation or would have to go back to stay at home like many folks did. I decided to fight that nightmare. My brother told me to earn work experience to deal with that issue. In year 2 at school, I started volunteering at NGOs, where I have learned about many things in society, such as poverty, social injustice, inequality, unemployment, etc. Seeing all of those things happening every day, I always wanted to be a part of the solution, but I did not know what I could do besides volunteering for various projects and teaching English for NGOs. With the \$50 allowance that my mother gave me every

month, I did not want to waste any moments in my study life because it was already hard for me to be able to pursue higher education. I volunteered teaching from 7:00-8:00am, went to school until 11:30am, volunteered in the afternoon, and taught part-time at private school from 5:30-7:45pm. As an active young person, studying hard, working hard, and full of commitment to fight the nightmare, certainly returned me what I wanted.

In my 3th year, I was offered a job as an assistant to the president of the Khmer Youth Association (KYA) and six months later I held another position as a project officer at the same time. My work schedule was repeated; I still taught from 7:00-8:00am,

worked full time at KYA, and taught part time in the evening.

In 2017 was a turning point for me. After two more years at KYA, I ran in an internal election for the president position. I had no confidence at all because someone in the position was supposed to have more knowledge, skills, experience and so on. I had just finished my year 4, so I was not quite qualified for the position. After one month of consideration and with encouragement from my mother, colleagues, and mentor, I took that risk. Win or lose, I could take it as a good lesson. Eventually, January 21, 2017 was the election day. On March 6, 2017, I officially became the fifth president for the Khmer Youth Association at the age of 24. The organization was one year

older than me; it was founded in 1992 and I was born in 1993.

During 2013, I was a very active young person; besides my volunteer work, I attended most of the demonstrations as a human rights observer and first aid responder. As part of a team, I went to a community to organize training and share experiences with young people in secondary school. I joined every workshop organized by every NGO and UN agency. From 2014 until I ended my work at KYA, I traveled to more than 10 countries for regional and international workshops, conferences, forums, exchange programs, and fellowships in ASEAN, South Asia, Europe, and North America. With these platforms, I gained a broader economic, social, and political perspective locally, regionally, and internationally. Also, I was so honored to represent Cambodian young people to bring our voices and concerns to share and discuss with others around the world.

When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

Initially, I did face challenges when I worked part-time as a teacher of English, assistant to the president, and project officer. But it was harder when working in the highest position at that young age. I have faced many challenges in terms of technical knowledge, project management, fundraising, strategic planning, strategic communication, discrimination, organizational development, staff management, etc.

The discrimination was deeply stored in my mind because it was the first scar I received as a young female leader. It happened in a Board of Directors meeting; there were six senior men as executive director, and me, the youngest person in the meeting. We discussed sensitive issues in society; I was sharing my point of view that as an NGO, we should be careful with the words used in the press releases, which would be easily manipulated by others into something that we did not mean.

Immediately I was interrupted by the loud voice of a senior executive director; he told the group that my view was wrong.



The way he spoke humiliated me at the meeting. Lastly, there was a conclusion in the meeting from an advisor who mentioned my point that we needed to double-check and send to each other for proofreading before publishing.

In the first year of work, I worked from 8:00am-8:00pm almost every single day. I devoted all my time to the work and research for self-learning because I did not have a high degree of that knowledge and skills.

To be honest, the overall situation in the organization such as funding, people and project management were not good enough before I jumped in; I had to deal with and improve it. It was too hard for me; it was beyond my knowledge and capacity to address. I had to ensure funding and staff sustainability for the organization, and the quality of project implementation. I had to learn if there were any issues that my colleagues were facing in the province, their working conditions, and so on. When a project ended, working with the management team on how to sustain our good staff. And in the next 10 years or so, we, the organization, would we be able to work with our amazing young people and be a part of developing and empowering them to be the best human capital for the nation. Another story of being a young leader, I could say that we did not have good strategic communication. We presented our nice project ideas for our young people, and we strongly believed these ideas were effectively workable – but then quite often they were rejected by the partner/donors.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

Look for the right people who are willing to support your journey – this is tremendously important for every young person fighting for leadership positions. To achieve and perform the work, along the way we will definitely face hardship, demotivation, hopefulness, worry, and so on and so forth. If we have someone willing to give us a hand for discussion, motivation, and to support our idea/journey to move forward, we all might feel comfortable and hopeful fighting with every journey.

Develop yourself every single minute. When I was in the position as the president, I realized that intellectual information, knowledge, and skills are really crucial as a leader. There are two reasons for this statement. Firstly, I meet, talk, present, and share my work to represent youth to people around the country and abroad to make their voices, challenges and needs heard. As young people, we lack experience and knowledge; at some points, we cannot do our job well. If so, this will be shameful to us. We have to remember this shame will be a negative legacy for the next generation that might make people think that young people have no capabilities to work as a leader and should not be considered for leadership positions. I always worry about this negative point that I do not want to leave this bad legacy to our next generation. I want to

“Nothing teaches better about leadership than experience and reflection

show that every young person is capable of doing any job; they are full of commitment, have a hard-working spirit, and are collaborative and cautious in all their work. Secondly, some people keenly want to know how far young people can go in their work. Those people sit and judge us whether or not we are qualified and capable enough for our big job.

For these two reasons, we, all the young leaders, have to develop ourselves every single minute for our job, legacy, and to show some people that we are capable enough to do what we are doing – please collaborate with us!

Communication – dealing with senior people: I'm quite confident that senior people often think it is hard to work with young people and vice versa. In particular, when I was president, I faced the same issue, but it was not that really hard to work with senior people. There is a gap to connect these both spirits together – understanding and communication.

As a young person, when we want to do something it has to be quick; working in a team with senior people will not be as quick as we expected. Then, a statement will come up: “It is so hard to work with old people.” Reflecting on my work, all my team members are older than me; some are already my father, uncle and brother. I had them question me, again and again, to slow down my work; this was a good point. All work has risks all the time; if we are not cautious enough, we will surely encounter problems. In this scenario, senior people have more experience than us; they question us for good reasons, and when facing problems, they may have more solutions than we do.

The best point is that senior and junior employees need to work together; together we have experience and strength. My view is that senior leaders have knowledge and experience that we young leaders can consult with and seek for help. Yet they cannot work longer hours like junior people. We, the junior staff, can work faster than them and stay late without any problems, but they might be too exhausted or have back pain.

As human beings, we need value, respect, and credit. So, if you deal with the senior people, please talk to them nicely, respect them, and give them the value and credit as much as you can. My work might not have ended successfully if there was no support from all my senior colleagues.

More than 30 years after the civil war, all the leadership

positions in NGOs, private companies, and governments are full of senior people. We meet them everywhere in workplaces. So, please try to work with a sense of peace and harmony. Give them the respect, value, and credit – do not increase age discrimination.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

My core value is just my firm commitment to the organization, to youth development, and to working with all young people in Cambodia. I have put all my commitment and heart to improve my organization and to make sure that in my three years of working everything goes smoothly and productively. Starting as a volunteer at KYA and having a full-time job here was my opportunity to learn, practice, and develop myself. Therefore, it should have been the time I returned back what I have gotten from KYA. I knew the situation was not the right time for me to help much. But I did hold a commitment to try my best to build everything as much as I could during my mandate. I do appreciate all my colleagues for always continuing in alignment with my values for the organization.

I have seen that KYA is one of the best places to develop and empower young people in rural areas. KYA is the place where they can learn things they didn't learn in school; they can meet new friends; they are a part of their communities; they can identify what are the issues and the solutions to develop themselves and communities; they can practice their knowledge to build more confidence to be full potential human resource.

I always keep up-to-date research and other publications about Cambodia from international organizations, and there are two sentences that I am personally not happy with. I hope that in 10 years those two sentences will no longer be in publications and those sentences will be reversed to something new and better.

“Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in the region. The majority of Cambodians are illiterate.” To delete these two sentences, I believe in youth education, development, and empowerment. From year to year, I'm extremely happy to see the low dropout rate in schools and see young people now are building their potential.

When our young people fight for their education, develop knowledge and skills and have a good environment to support and empower them to use their potential, sooner or later, we will be able to reverse the two sentences. “Cambodia is one of the most developed countries in the region. Cambodia is full of intellectuals, good morality, and experts.”

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

I always hear the word leadership and there are thousands of trainings conducted on this topic. Nothing teaches better about leadership than experience and reflection. Lacking the experience and reflection would create the negative impact on leadership; it comes both internally and externally from individual leaders and followers.



Internal: I refer to the emotional and intellectual. Most people always think they are superior as a leader, and that they are always right. They always blame their supervisees for not doing as good as he/she expected. Yet, they never ask or take care of the issues their supervisees faced. Some people do not have much knowledge to solve any problems as leaders should have, and they never open their minds to listen to any suggestions from their supervisees. Also, when most people get upset about something, they react immediately and negatively with their supervisees. They respond with a rough tone and an unfriendly environment which makes their supervisees feel uncomfortable as they did not make any mistakes.

External: is about judgment from followers and people in general. They view a leader as a person who has a higher degree of knowledge and graduated from abroad; a person who has massive leadership experience; and a person who has material and money and is considered to be rich. When most people use this perception, most leaders, especially young leaders, will regard them as a poor leader; those people might not respect them as a leader.

Because of the leader and young leaders, we use our knowledge, potential, and our hearts to work for the institution and work with everyone. We are not always from elite families; we do not have such material and money to show off publicly.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

I think we need to have knowledge and opportunity. The knowledge here means to develop your knowledge, information, skill and so on that make you an intellectual and outstanding person. These are tremendously vital to be a leader and to share knowledge with others. Additionally, it takes time to constantly learn and earn skills. It would have been very challenging if I did not have the knowledge and skill for my work when running and working as a leader in the organization. With knowledge, you earn trust from your colleagues to believe that you are capable enough to lead and guide them to achieve the vision.

Besides knowledge, opportunity is like a diamond that shines bright to show our potential. If we do not have an opportunity, we are still normal people and do simple work. For instance, if my workplace, Khmer Youth Association, did not present the opportunity for young people to run for leader at that time, I would not become one of the youngest leaders there.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

The only risk I have taken is running for president at my workplace, the Khmer Youth Association. At first, I did not have confidence at all and was not familiar with the procedure required to have a strategic direction for running the organization,

and then I had to present it to members to receive their votes. It was the same for our Cambodian election to elect the prime minister. I took one month for consideration, and I received support from my mother and my mentor, Ms. Sarah, who gave the same suggestions and encouragement.

"Let's try it, Kon. There is no win or loss at all. Though you do not get elected you still can work in the organization to continue what you love doing. So why not try it." "Heng, I encourage you to take that risk. This will be a good lesson. Risk rarely happens; therefore, grasp it when it occurs. Take it as a lesson and move forward. If you lose in the election, you will know what your weakness is and what to improve."

Two days before the deadline, I sent my application and the strategic direction for my campaign. The day came, and the result was very competitive: 47 to 46. I received 47 votes. When driving home, I just felt that it was too hard and challenging for me in the position. I really wanted to hand the position to my opponent; I did not want it anymore. That night should have been a celebration night; instead, I started worrying.

In three years, that risk has brought me so far to see real professional work. It has let me learn, to figure out how to make my campaign promise work, and to build my organization. In the role, I have the opportunity to meet young people in rural areas to learn about their issues such as education, migration, poverty, environment, and the role of young people in community work. They all have the potential to build their bright futures as what their peers in the city would do, but are in social classes and environments that are not supportive of their dreams. Besides this, the work allows me to deal and collaborate with NGOs, the government, and international partners to address the issues in Cambodia.

That risk gave me a huge task to make the voices of young people heard and see their issues addressed. I went to countless meetings to bring the issues on the table and seek solutions from all stakeholders with government officials, embassies, UN agencies, and international donors/partners of Cambodia.

That risk made me forget to enjoy adulthood. Every single breath was always about the work, proposals, reports, etc. Sometimes, I thought that at the age of 24 I should have enjoyed parties and traveling rather than carrying work on my back both day and night, even dreaming about the work. Yet, reflecting back, there are not many young people who can work in the same position as me, meet as many interesting people around the world, and attend national and international meetings in and outside of the country. I remembered there was one of the international meetings I attended at the Annual Meeting in Indonesia organized by a big international organization. I sat down for a meeting with fellow civil society organizations (CSOs) around continents to discuss and give the strategy for that organization to work with all CSOs.

Also, it was a privilege to be at the same event with high-profile and interesting people.

That risk has shown me the global issues; it allowed me to meet young leaders and activists from across the world. I went to an event in Austria; around 40 participants were in leadership positions like executive director, president, program director, program manager, union leader, and youth party leader. We met for four days to discuss youth issues in regions like South East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Latin America, South America, Africa, Central, and East Europe. After identifying the issues, we brought forward solutions for international institutions. I can confirm that we all are facing the same issues such as quality of education, corruption, youth in leadership, and participation in politics.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

I think Cambodia is already starting to transition to youth leadership. From 1979 until now, the majority of leadership positions in government, civil society, and private companies are all senior people over the age of 40. Based on my personal observations, the majority of ministers, CEOs, presidents, and executive directors are 40-, 50-, and 60-year-old men. We do not see many youths in leadership positions in Cambodia.

But the millennial generation is a large part of the Cambodian population already; sooner or later, our country will have a huge youth leadership transition. Right now, young people must develop their knowledge, languages, skill, morality, communication, and networks to be ready at the time when the opportunity comes.

There are many youth leadership positions out there in every sector. Those places are waiting for our young people if they are capable enough to fight for the position. If they are young and they want to be a leader, they must be strong both physically and mentally. Our country definitely needs young, intellectual leaders in every sector of government, civil society, and private companies to be the best human capital to build the country.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

From my experience and what I have learned, I have some advice for the young generation of Cambodians. From today on, we have to pursue education as much as we can. If we think of the barriers to pursuing education, I'm quite sure that there are thousands of obstacles to stop you. But we have to stand firm and fight for it. Education is not only beneficial for ourselves, but it is also for our community and the country as a whole. And education will be the identity of the Cambodia of the future to stand on the international stage. What we have to know is the 21st century is the craziest century. Everything moves faster than we expect, like AI, Industry 4.0, and 5G, as we

have seen. The way of learning for kids in the Alpha Generation is very different from us.

For young people from the provinces, please strongly focus on language too. As we all know, English is extremely crucial for almost everything. Yet, I have seen language is still a big barrier for young people. Excluded from the elite young people, the majority cannot yet use English in working, writing, and speaking professionally. Those people are in year 3 and 4 already. I am concerned about their language barrier. Please do not learn just for basic communication. We have to learn it and be able to earn money. What I mean is that to earn money, we have to learn English for professional communication, to study and to work. For example, my skill is teaching English, and I still can be a translator, interpreter, and product writer.

We have to learn to see outside the box. I used to be inside the box; for instance, most of people said that the government does a poor job and my country is not so good. Being inside the box has shaped our perception negatively. These days, I see it happens to young people as well. Also, it is not only about the government, but also about work, communication, and more. From working, discussing, meeting, and traveling, I have learned that there is nothing and nowhere better than anywhere else. Every country and government on this earth has its internal and external issues. The difference is only about PEOPLE. How qualified people in each country react and respond to the issue in wise ways.

We have to work with our heart, commitment, responsibility, and accountability. Please take every single task seriously though small or big. I have seen both negative and positive experiences of young people's commitment to work. The strong commitment will be our value and identity. Please work hard and try to delete this idea that "Cambodian people are lazy and careless in work." We all have to make a new version: "Cambodian people are studious, intelligent, and have a strong commitment to work."

We have to always develop ourselves and be ready for everything. Please learn, please read, and please go to meet outstanding people to learn from their experience. If you can work from A to Z, do not let limited knowledge stop you, please learn and read beyond this.

Learn to observe. See good people around you and try your best to do as they do. Everywhere in our workplace, school, and community, there are always outstanding and successful people. Please learn to observe how they study, work, and develop themselves to be outstanding and successful. Then, take those tips to practice for ourselves constantly to be better than those people. By doing this, we will gradually learn and develop ourselves every single day.

Mr. Oung Pingann

Founder

Social Media Platform "Think with PingAnn"



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

I strive to make positive differences through health education, health campaigns, and social marketing. I am currently working on non-communicable disease research on breast cancer and mental health. As a big believer in prevention and healthy living, I founded a personal social media platform called "Think With PingAnn" which aims to improve the physical and emotional health of Cambodian youth. My previous campaigns included promoting breast cancer check-ups, raising awareness on chained mentally disabled patients, supporting women wheelchair basketball teams as well as motivating youth through digital video series. I am currently pursuing a master degree in Health and Risk Communication at Michigan State University through the Fulbright Program.

Dorn Teav is the name of the village in which I grew up. In a small town where opportunities were scarce and the idea that "dreams come true" was merely a fairy tale, growing up hoping to become someone was a far-fetched dream. When I was younger, one of the most difficult parts about self-development was to find someone I could listen to, relate to, and who would understand my journey, but there was no way for me to find that person.

I wanted to be the person that I looked for when I was that young boy. So the backbone of "Think With PingAnn" was to be that person to other young Cambodians who might be looking for someone who they can listen to, relate to, and who can help them understand their journey. I have strived to develop a platform where Cambodian youth can hear thoughts or experiences that help them make better decisions, have a stronger mindset, and be able to motivate themselves through difficult times. "Think With PingAnn" has been one of the achievements that I am most proud of. For the past two years, this platform has delivered diverse content and engaged with Cambodian youth through various motivational stories, health education videos on topics including breast cancer, mental health, COVID-19 and other topics that I hope will encourage others to be their best selves.



When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

One of the major challenges that I faced when I first started out with this endeavor was self-doubt. Just like many other young people in Cambodia, I have insecurities. I always have this thought in the back of my mind that I do not have enough qualifications to give people advice or tell them how to live their lives. I feared a public backlash to something I said. It was clear to me how angry and mean people on social media can be because regardless of how good your intentions are, people can always pick on something you say or write and use that against you. So, it was extremely hard trying to convince myself

that I can do this.

I must say that this self-doubt continues to be a relevant challenge today. It never really goes away but I think I have developed a certain kind of mindset that there will always be people who disagree with what you say because we all go through life differently at a different pace. My reflection from this is that if you are confident that whatever you are doing is helping people, public criticism and negativity should not stop you but motivate you to do and be better.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

When you are put in a position where you have the power to

influence how people behave, and how they make their everyday decisions, you really need to be cautious about what information to share. A one-minute video can either save someone's life or push them over the edge. It is important for anyone in a position of power to be selective in what they share because life or death can be just one piece of information away. The right video content with the right knowledge can encourage a young woman to go for a breast cancer checkup, which can prevent her from losing her life to a disease that she may not have known was there. The right motivational video can help a young man reevaluate his life, pick himself up, and help him continue to pursue his goals. Equipping people with knowledge is equivalent to equipping them with power but we have to ensure that it is the right kind of knowledge.

“The ability to open our minds and accept the voices of others is one of the greatest leadership strategies out there

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

"No action is too small." That has been the life motto I live by every day, in both my personal and professional life. "Think with PingAnn" is no different. Through this platform, we strive to do everything we can to educate and inspire our audience in their everyday lives no matter how small it is. We live by a mindset that being able to help people, even just one single person, is all that matters to us. Although we set out to change the world, inspiring one person at a time is more realistic and

achievable which makes it easier for our team to believe in our work because they can see real results from the many small milestones we set for ourselves.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Leaders who don't listen. I think this is one of the most critical characteristics that leads to poor leadership. No matter how educated or intelligent you are; regardless of how much experience you have, your opinions are not always right. It is important to understand that great leaders are those who constantly and respectfully collect diverse opinions and use them to formulate strategies and well-informed decisions.

Moreover, leadership and communication come hand in hand. Through my work in youth leadership, what I recognized is missing is the art of language usage. I have seen so many young leaders on social media who have great ideas with good intentions fail at getting their message across because of the poorly formulated languages they use. Consequently, such language squandered all the research they did and discredited the personal experiences they shared because the audience had a hard time listening to their message.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

Listen more and talk less. We often think that successful leaders or influencers are those who are well-spoken but we fail to recognize their ability to be an intuitive listener. A great leader or influencer is someone who understands the importance of listening. Someone who gains their wisdom and knowledge by proactively seeking opinions, including those that may contradict what we are about to say. It is important that we constantly remind ourselves that we are not the only person with opinions; other people are also entitled to share their voices. The ability to open our minds and accept the voices of others is one of the greatest leadership strategies out there.

Another strategy is the ability to gracefully accept your fault out loud and learn from it. It is natural for us to feel vulnerable having to accept that we are wrong, especially when we are in the position of leadership. However, this kind of vulnerability is what allows our team to relate to us, empathize, and understand that we are also a human being who makes mistakes. This then makes it possible for them to believe in and trust us even more because they also see themselves in us.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

Using my personal savings and income to fund "Think with PingAnn" as well as running my own health campaigns were some of the biggest risks I personally have taken. It was never

an easy decision having to choose between saving for a stable future versus investing in my video content, as I too have to support my family. The scarcity of funding opportunities for the kind of video content that I produce made it even harder to push through with this work. However, despite the hardship of having to use my personal fundings for this work, I have always been filled with a sense of fulfillment every time someone sends me a message to say "thank you for making my life better through your videos." This is what I consider to be the success of my work with "Think with PingAnn" and it is what keeps me going because it makes all the investment all worth it even with zero returns. I must admit that without a stable job with a stable income, I would not have been able to pursue this personal passion project.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

Throughout my time working with Cambodian youth, one fascinating behavior that I noticed is their hunger to learn, grow and consume knowledge. This culture of wanting to be better has created an environment where youth are constantly out there seeking knowledge which means that we (including our government) have the responsibility to supply such knowledge

to ensure this hunger for knowledge within our young generation will continue to thrive.

Youth leadership can thrive if we create an environment that enables youth to creatively explore, experiment, and make mistakes so that they can learn from them. Such an environment can only become possible when we have the support from all stakeholders including schools, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and the government sector. It can be as simple as leading a small project like building a library in their village, leading an environmental youth group to teach people in their community about recycling, or having a youth team to promote the prevention of COVID-19 by going door-to-door to remind the elders in their village about the importance of regular hand washing. It can be that simple.

Once they get to taste the experience of leading a successful project, regardless of how small-scale it is, these young leaders will develop the desire to expand and work on bigger projects on their own. This is how we help our young people take ownership and become the effective leaders we want them to be because we can only learn and grow when we actually start putting ourselves to work. Therefore, we need to constantly remind our younger generation that every single one of them is

capable of being a leader, and that every single one of them is capable of making a difference.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

Create, create, create. I cannot stress enough the importance of encouraging the young Cambodian generation to continue to create. It doesn't matter what field you are in or what you are planning to create as long as it benefits our community. It can be video content, research studies, educational toys, fictional books, commercial products or even dance moves. The more we can create, the better Cambodia will be.

But what do you do after you have created something? My other advice is to go out there and tell the world about it. Don't feel ashamed of your ideas or feel insecure about your creations. Instead, stand tall and be proud of what you have made. Ask the world, what can I do to make my creation better? Continue to look for feedback and advice from the people you trust and the people who will be the end consumers of your creation, because that is how you actually become better.



Mrs. Chak Sopheap

Executive Director
Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)

CAMBODIA'S YOUNG
LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS



Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

I grew up in the rural area of Phum Deum Sdao, Koh Sotin District, Kompong Cham province. It is such a nice place, and there was a river, flowers, and trees behind my parents' wooden house for me to play in. At age 4, however, my life totally changed when my family moved to the city. I could not enjoy the nature views, the abundance of trees or playing with my childhood friends anymore. A new life chapter began for me, and I have been settled in the city since then.

Life was not easy in a poor family where my parents earned very little and had to feed three children, but I felt that we were so rich with their love and compassion. Although my parents could not study much due to civil wars and providing for our family, they taught me an important lesson in life: the value of investing in education for children, regardless of how poor we were or how much we had to sacrifice. Without their determination and inspiration, I would not be who I am today. I had the opportunity to travel to Japan for university and after two years, I graduated with a Master Degree in Peace Studies from the International University of Japan. I am honored that I could make my parents proud and for their investment in my education.

Currently, I am the Executive Director of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR), a human rights organization working for the promotion and protection of civil and political rights in Cambodia. As one of the country's most prominent human rights advocates, my work has been recognized by former US President Barack Obama. I am a recipient of the Indian-ASEAN Youth Award (Young Women Achiever Category) and the Franco-German Prize for Human Rights the Rule of Law. I am also a human rights blogger, blogging through <http://sopheap-focus.com/>. Prior to this, I ran the Cambodian Youth Network for Change, which mobilized young activists around the country for greater civic engagement. As a woman in leadership, I hope my success is empowering to younger generations of women and girls, illustrating that women can challenge the stereotypical gender-biased leadership dynamic.



I am married to an economist and I am glad that I had the opportunity to meet my life partner through my own choices, not through an arranged married—a common practice within many Cambodian families in my generation. I also feel thankful that my parents, who have been living in a highly traditional society, have opened their hearts widely to modernity.

When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

I started working immediately after my high school graduation in 2002 as an intern for a local think tank named the Cambodian Center for Cooperation and Peace. I gave up my dream career

as a medical doctor because my family could not afford the long-term study expenses although I had managed to pass the state scholarship's nursing subject examination. It was a hard choice but I have no regrets as I found my dream on another level—instead of treating people with illness, I am now helping to create a freer, more open and just Cambodia for our citizens.

I later joined CCHR in late 2005 at a difficult time for the organization when activists, including the former head of the organization, had been arrested. I joined CCHR and civil society as a whole in demanding the release of the activists. This experience solidified my commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights.

“It is important to know clearly our mandate and be ready to walk through fire for it and fight for it, regardless of the mainstream or those that may not align with our principled position

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

I have been the Executive Director of CCHR for six years now, maintaining operations in line with CCHR's mission and values but simultaneously keeping the organization up to date and relevant to ensure it can achieve its goal of promoting and protecting human rights in Cambodia. Although there have been challenges due to the narrowed civic space in Cambodia in past years, I continue to lead CCHR with strength and integrity, enabling the organization and its staff to remain principled and optimistic throughout challenging times including the investigation and threat of closure in 2017 and the Covid-19 pandemic.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

My core values are:

- Equality – I value that everyone is equal, and I especially value gender equality.

- Integrity – I value honesty, diligence and hard work.
- Transparency – I value openness and accountability

These values align with CCHR's organizational values, so these are encompassed in all of our policies, operations, and outreach activities.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

As reflected above, I cannot bear behaviors that further inequality, are dishonest, and when people are not accountable for their actions. I have found it challenging to engage with those whose actions do not respect people or my core values of equality, integrity and transparency, and often I try to avoid engaging with them if it is not necessary.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

I try to always remain principled and treat people with respect. It is important to be principled in our actions, both internally and externally. It is important to know clearly our mandate and be ready to walk through fire for it and fight for it, regardless of the mainstream or those that may not align with our principled position. It is dangerous to apply a populist approach; it is stronger in the long term to take a principled stand for what we believe in. It is also important to show respect by listening more to those who need us to hear, seeking to understand their issues, and having meaningful conversations with them so we can create just solutions.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

Difficult questions of gender and age came to play when I was promoted to the role of Executive Director at CCHR. I debated with myself as to whether I should accept the promotion to the leadership role or not. Two barriers were very apparent to me. Firstly, being a woman would present challenges in ensuring a smooth leadership transition and in receiving acceptance and respect within the male-dominated society we are living in and engaging with. Secondly, being young would make it even more challenging to engage many stakeholders, including many male and senior leaders, within civil society organizations and the government who we advocate with as a key human rights organization.

I understood why these questions came along – I was concerned and fearful that I would set bad example to others if I could not lead the organization effectively. I was worried I would fail the many other young women who society tells that because they are young or a woman they cannot lead. When these questions arose, I wondered if I were a man and/or if I were a senior leader, would these worries come to me? As an advocate, I had advocated for women and young people to

step into leadership roles for a long time. Internally, I asked who would accept this leadership role if I did not? If I could not prove as young woman that I could do this, who would and when?

I accepted the leadership challenges, and while at times it has been difficult, I am proud that I have worked hard in this organization to lead it well and set an example for other women and young advocates who aim to step into leadership positions in the future.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

As I pointed out earlier, Cambodia has remained a male-dominated society, although we have an enriched and evolving culture in modern times. From an intersectionality lens, emerging leaders are challenging the traditional hurdles to leadership. New leaders are not only challenging gender roles, but also prejudices stemming from social classes, age, orientations

and other marginalized statuses. The youth in the digital age expand their reach beyond these hurdles so well by demonstrating that they are dynamic, innovative and collaborative.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

Be who you are and pursue your dreams. Bend for them if you need to. Being a part of the young generation, you are at an advantage because you are so dynamic and full of potential.



Mr. Tim Malay

President
Cambodia's Independent Civil-Servant Association (CICA)



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

My name is Tim Malay, and I was born in Barm village, Kouk Prech commune, Kirivong district, Takeo province. I was raised in a middle-class farming family with six brothers and sisters, and I am the youngest in the family. My wife, Ms. Leab Leakhena, runs her own small business at home. My father Tim Nan and mother Khuon Se received secondary education, but they used to tell me that they did not want to work far from home because they wanted to live with their family in their hometown.

Even though they gave up the opportunity to get a good job outside their hometown, they worked hard, growing vegetables, raising animals, running horse-drawn carriages, working as a carpenter and working in many other small occupations to support their family.

They used to give a lot of good advice to us as children. They said "you see! Farming is very difficult, so try to learn not to be as difficult as parents" and "be a person who thinks long term," and so on. (This does not mean that farming and other occupations are bad and make people poor, but in the economic situation of the country in the late 1980s and 1990s, it was very tough for people to earn a living to support their family, because at that time Cambodia was a poor country that had just recovered from the wars and the leaders of the country did not know how to lead and distribute wealth well enough to the people.) My parents understand that knowledge is invaluable, so they encouraged and provided all their children with the opportunity to get an education; most of us received secondary and higher education.

For me, I graduated with a bachelor degree in law and a master degree in public administration from the Royal University of Law and Economics (RULE). Through my previous experience working as a young unionist at an independent trade union movement in Cambodia from 2005 to 2009, I took initiative to establish and lead a youth union movement called the Cambodian Youth Network (CYN) from 2009 to 2019.



Since late 2019, I have been the President of the Cambodian Association of Independent Civil-Servant Association (CICA) and the Secretary-General of the Solidarity House Confederation, where all members work in various sectors in Cambodia including CICA, the Independent Democracy of Informal Economies Association (IDEA), the Cambodian Food and Service Worker Federation (CFSWF), the Cambodian Youth Network (CYN), the Coalition of Cambodia Farmer Community Association (CCFC), and other organizations.

The objectives of Solidarity House are to promote the trade union movement to address human rights, social justice, natural resources and working conditions, labor rights and

wages for members and citizens living with dignity, decent work and prosperous lives.

I am most proud of three important points:

- First, I have shared my patriotic views with the youth, workers, and communities I worked with both directly and indirectly.
- Second, I have contributed to the promotion of human rights, and the improvement of working conditions and wages for workers.
- Third, I have been involved in preserving and protecting the natural resources of the country and the world.

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You were born on this wonderful earth, and you have to be a part of its solutions

When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

Each person has different challenges depending on the geography, environment, resources and governance of a country. But for me, the biggest challenges when I started a career were the lack of motivation, lack of resources (people, materials, technology and budget), and psychological and life-threatening threats.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

A valuable lesson of my leadership is that I share my compassion with people around me, and it is the greatest need of all people in the world, regardless of who you are. On the other hand, we need to continue life-long learning and everyone should obtain moral and ethical qualifications because all countries always need more scholars, philosophers, economists and scientists to provide good ideas and recommendations for countries and the world to continue progressing.

In addition, we see that successful people never give up on the problems that arise around them because problems are part of the cycle of life. There are many good examples of success for us to follow and initiate innovation. If you are really a good leader, you must be at the forefront of solving the problems in society and the nation because it is your duty and the duty of other citizens

not to hesitate to serve or lead this country. Finally, we must share goodness, compassion, and loyalty to those around us.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

The three core values that I have taken as my principles are perseverance, honesty and national conscience. I continue to vigorously pursue these values to set an example for all people and our society in the future.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Attitudes or traits that negatively affect leadership are a lack of perseverance, dishonesty, disrespect for people, and an inability to manage and work with people. By having learned how to

manage and lead many people in other countries as well as in Cambodia, I have seen how the more people exhibit these negative traits, the more they will lose support.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

To empower young people to become successful and influential leaders, we have a number of strategies such as organizing or mobilizing groups of people who are like-minded and willing to help society. We also encourage, inspire, and provide opportunities to cultivate knowledge, share patriotic ideas, and set out some important strategies to together solve the problems of Cambodian society and the world.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

To deal with the risks, we need to learn how to protect ourselves, do good via social work activities, design a detailed strategy and plan, and report or provide information to national and international partners. If anything goes wrong, we need to explain our intention, role, duty and legality to the public through social media and meetings.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

Our country has unique geography and history, culture, civilization and natural resources. The global fame of the Angkorian era has made the Cambodian youth very proud. It is also a compass or a valuable lesson for the younger generation to learn to become the leader of this country in order to attain the wealth and prosperity that everyone aspires to.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

For more than 10 years, our words and advice have been uttered and it is a message to remind young people, citizens and leaders of the country to join in the development of the nation. In all nations in the world, it is an undeniable hope that doing good deeds is the key.

Therefore, this young generation is at the forefront of cultivating good works for themselves, community, and society in order to realize their true vision. You were born on this wonderful earth, and you have to be a part of its solutions. Plus, striving to build goodness alone is not enough, so it is necessary to work together to build our society, and then the result will be great.



Miss. Pich Charadine

Deputy Executive Director

Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP)



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

I am the eldest daughter in a family of four siblings. My father is an entrepreneur and my mother is a housewife. I grew up watching my dad working head-to-heel with responsibilities, commitments, and dedication in his professions; the traits passed on and inspired me to be one. My mom's devotion is priceless; that too has taught me the act of compassion and the sense of duty to the surroundings, to one's obligations, and to the extended society at large.

My parents put a strong emphasis on the value of education and knowledge. I am fortunate to have received a good education. I received my high school diploma from Western International School in 2011, and then went on to pursue my undergraduate degree and obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and International Relations from Zaman University (currently known as Paragon International University) in 2015. I then received a grant to pursue my postgraduate (Master) degree in the United Kingdom at Keele University, majoring in International Politics with a concentration on political dialogue, and returned to Cambodia in 2016.

Since college, I realized the world out there is huge and I knew I needed to explore it more so I involved myself a lot in various extracurricular activities and social works. Back in the early 2010s, I was part of a wider global youth network called AIESEC when it was first introduced to Cambodia; those projects were mostly in private sector engagement and soft skills development. That, I would say, was the starting point to unlock my potential in many ways, particularly the communication skill which I always struggled with as an introvert by nature.

My career journey has gradually shifted into work on social issues when I started my short-term internship at the Cambodia Center for Human Rights (CCHR) in 2013, during the fifth legislative national election. On top of that, I initiated and managed different IR projects, both within the university and beyond, some of which are still in operation today. One of the

eye-opening experiences was when I was accepted to present my paper at the 5th International Conference on Southeast Asia (ICONSEA) in 2013 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. As a sophomore, to publish a conference paper that met publication standards was at first a big challenge, yet a rewarding one. After that, I felt as though critical analysis and expressing constructive arguments with concise data and comprehensive research practice was going to be 'my thing' for the next few years to come – i.e. in academia!

That thought later turned into reality when I joined the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP), a reputable foreign policy think tank based in Phnom Penh with a wide

network in the region and beyond. I joined in early 2017 as an Assistant Director and handled various portfolios and project coordination. That role has exposed me to the real IR world in the Track 2 diplomacy basis (i.e. the non-governmental, informal, and unofficial channel or activities with sideline emphasis or to add further impetus to the thematic issues of Track 1 – the official diplomatic line). The role of Track 2 is to provide assessment, key inputs, recommendations, and innovative solutions that ought to give new light to the confronting challenges we are facing. I was able to be more involved in research and publications when I was promoted to be a Senior Research Fellow of the Institute in 2018, where the area of my research included Sino-Cambodian relations

(particularly on the political economy dilemma, foreign aid policy and economic statecraft), the ASEAN regional framework and the ASEAN-China partnership, Cambodia's politics and foreign relations, and Mekong sub-regional cooperation, especially on Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC).

My work on the latter became more in-depth when I was appointed as the Coordinator of the Global Center for Mekong Studies (GCMS-Cambodia Center) and is tasked/mandated to conduct academic research and to provide policy recommendations to Track 1. I have also been representing CICP as the Cambodia counterpart in various regional networks and dialogue platforms. In late 2019, I was then promoted as Deputy Executive Director of CICP in charge of research, publications, and training.

2020 took me by surprise in many ways. I was entrusted by the Royal Government of Cambodia and got appointed as the Advisor of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MFAIC) in March 2020, throughout years of engagement and work recognition. I am deeply honored and feel obliged to be able to serve our nation with pride and dedication with that role.

When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

My work experience started when I was in college with various projects and social works. But the first full-time job kicked off after my return from the UK in an education sector where I was in charge of student coordination and private sector engagement. The challenge was being perceived as young and deemed not to have the experience necessary to take over such a managerial post. I struggled to delegate tasks and to assign the right person to handle the work.

I always tried to come up with new initiatives and ideas to address the ongoing challenges but these initiatives were only reluctantly accepted, let alone carried forward. And because of the uncooperative efforts from my subordinates and supporting



team, I had to do almost every single thing from A-Z by myself. It was a huge challenge but on the other hand, I have learned to master some essential skills, even graphic design, and to see how everything falls piece by piece into the whole system.

With my gradual shift into the IR field, I found myself vulnerable at first. Being a woman and being relatively young was not (or, I should say, is not) an easy 'co-existence'. I, in fact, have to do a lot of extra work to prove my capability in handling tasks effectively. I feel as though I have to work double in comparison to my male counterparts, both in terms of workload and as well to earn the confidence I shall too deserve.

There are still a lot of resentments at these points where, to put it simply, your voice is not always being heard and paid full attention to, but when your male peers say precisely the same thing as you have just said, they gain the recognition and the ideas/proposals are taken up for further consideration. I should also specifically mention that we were at the same table, the same meeting, at the same time!

“The right leader knows how to lead by example, bringing along the core strategy and connecting it well with the team

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

Confidence. Be confident and believe in yourself, because if you do not, no one else will. I still remember when I felt so down that my efforts were not recognized or appreciated but one word to myself is that I have to move FORWARD regardless.

Perseverance. Always be consistent in your career goals and aspirations. I am rather fortunate to know myself pretty well – what I want most out of life, what are my key priorities, what are my weaknesses, what are my plans and goals, what I want to achieve and so on. It is indeed important to map out and again be consistent! Some people jump in and out from one career to another and that's okay if they have not found themselves yet. But perseverance is the key because nothing can happen overnight and you have to train your mindset to have hope and work harder toward achieving the dream to which you have always aspired.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

Effort and Professionalism. Always ensure that you have delivered your best regardless of the circumstance. Regardless of time constraints, regardless of peer pressure, regardless of limited resources, I have never ever given it only half of my effort. I would give it ALL or I would give it NONE. I urge my team to pay attention to details and strive toward perfection. To me, everything is structural and systematic – one way or another – even the foundation of team-building and people-coordination and that brings us to the second point.

Alignment. Putting the right person in the right place is so important and I cannot emphasize that enough. I believe in people's competitive advantage or unique specialization or distinct expertise. And that is why getting to know your team's characteristics is just as important as the organizational nature itself. Placing your team right enhances their productivity and boosts overall growth.

Trust and Integrity. Serving with integrity is embedded deep down in my DNA. I firmly believe that without it, the team would not be well aligned, let alone effectively progress. If you intend to play along with office politics, trust and recognition would not be granted.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Fixed mindset. When the leaders are not open to new perspectives against the lingering problems, that is when things ought to fall apart. The right leadership knows when to take on reform and adjustments. They know when and how to listen correctly. They know how to effectively set a clear bureaucratic structure such that tasks are efficiently assigned and carried forward.

Unconstructive structure/bureaucracy. You cannot really avoid bureaucracy in any workplace but the right leader knows how to dance along and conform to the team accordingly. Unaligned appointments would also lead to disaster and work ineffectiveness.

Lack of team engagement. Likewise, when the structure is unconstructive, team productivity also falls along due to unconcise engagement and work coordination.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

Responsibility, Commitment, and Dedication. The right leader knows how to lead by example, bringing along the core strategy and connecting it well with the team. My approach to motivation is to set the right example – through structural responsibility, profound commitment, and sincere dedication. Success cannot happen overnight, and your sincerity is of the essence when it comes to setting forth your aspirations and long-term goals.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

I have been offered a few special scholarships to pursue a doctoral degree but I end up turning them down from time to time. It has always been a hard choice between pursuing further education and standing firm on the career staircase. It is indeed a hard calculation; on the one hand, you hear from your academic circle to pursue education further, on the other, your gut instinct says that you might not have to!

Another risk, I think, was turning down a few offers, just because it did not align well with my background, i.e. IR. That time was when I just joined CICP and I was so passionate about this field that I did not want to give up trying yet. I was not sure if I had made the right decision back then but I just did not want to risk losing it either; risk vs. risk. More than three years later, I think that hedging strategy certainly played out well. I got to be aligned with my career passion without having to burn the bridge!

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

I think contemporary Cambodian society is unique in many ways, but most important is the robust number of youth (over 65% of the population), their dynamic background, and their

fresh innovative mindset. Cambodia's culture of integrity, gentleness, and patriotism are an added advantage to this demographic. Various youth initiatives indeed signify their leadership potential, their energetic thrive for progress, and most of all, the future hope for this country that they have always envisioned.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

Craft a dream, Have a goal, Set a plan...

I cannot emphasize enough to envisage a dream you always think of, something that is always stuck in your mind. There is no such thing as too big or too ambitious. Never be afraid to dare to dream but do remember to dream when you are awakened. From that, have a clear goal of how best to achieve your dream by setting forth a constructive roadmap with precise plans.

I should also mention that failure, disappointment, and resentment cannot be avoided along the way but you have to prepare. There may be many other things that could potentially pull you down but so long as you are determined enough and fight for it, nothing could knock down the willpower you have. The journey is not going to be easy but everything will be worthwhile at the end. The view at the top is amazing and worth every effort!



Miss. Kann Vicheika

Journalist and Media trainer



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

I am the youngest daughter of eight children. My dad is retired and my mom is a housewife. I have a bachelor degree in law and have been working as a journalist for over six years. I am a vice president of the board of directors of the Cambodian Journalists Alliance (CamboJA). I am a trainer of Media Literacy at Media 101, organized by the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM) and the DW Academie. I am also currently a journalism trainer for the DanChurchAid project in collaboration with the Club of Foreign Journalists in Cambodia and CCIM.

And I am also a core member of Politikoffee, a group of young volunteers who hold weekly discussions on politics and society. What I am most proud of is that I have provided people, especially youth, with accurate information and reasoned thinking, and I have also cultivated professional journalists.

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Self-leadership is the first step toward successful decision making

When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

My biggest challenge when I first started my career was that my family members did not support me because being a journalist is risky, and some believed that journalism is less valuable and does not provide a sufficient income.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

Over the years, working directly with people in the community,

especially youth, has made me realize that Cambodian youth need motivators in order to start their careers in society and that working in cooperation to solve issues is crucial to achieving success.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

Being a woman who has followed what the heart tells for doing good for social work, to devote the physical strength, financial resources and time does not matter.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

When the leader dictates decision making without caring about team members, this is the most fragile type of leadership style, and it is doomed to fail.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

Adhering to truth and adopting a forward-looking attitude, without any hesitation or retreats when facing challenges, and motivating team members are the most significant things I believe in and regularly do.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

Every time I report sensitive news, I am worried about being charged or arrested, and I receive various forms of violence. I have often been harassed and insulted by government officials and their supporters.

Before, during and after I encounter these problems, I always become more vigilant and increase proper verification of each news report. When I go to different areas to get information and to meet people, I am always prepared to face any problems that may arise. And I always tell myself that my work is important; I cannot be discouraged or give up in the face of harassment. I always avoid this harassment by ignoring it and continuing to work hard.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

Cambodia is a developing country and has gone through decades of civil wars that have resulted in the loss of resources, especially human resources which are the most vital for development.

Today, the old politicians seem to want to win over each other all the time and they are unable to shake hands in order to find common ground. The leadership culture of the old leaders has imitated the old style time and again, and it does not trust the decision making to young people.

Taking a look at young people, they have new ideas, creativity, learning and new life experiences, so if young people become leaders, they will for sure have new ideas for sound development and joint cooperation to find solutions for the country.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

Choosing a major and doing the job you like is leadership of the self, which is the starting point of leadership. Self-leadership is the first step toward successful decision making.



Mrs. Sdeung Phearong

Programme Manager Transparency International Cambodia and Chairwoman for Wedu Cambodia



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

I grew up with a big family in one of the remote areas in Kampong Cham province. I fought for my higher education and am called a youth and women's rights advocate, change-maker, mentor, inspiration. At 27 years old, I am having an impact and living a life that is beyond my dreams. And at the center of my story is an unwavering pursuit of education in the face of financial and gender barriers that all too often are insurmountable for young women in Cambodia.

Facing financial problems and being female and the youngest child, together, my parents did not want me to continue my higher education in Phnom Penh. I persevered, willing to do whatever it took to begin my bachelor degree and complete my education. I recall my situation when working a part-time job, selling SIM cards and toilets in remote areas, to support my high school studies; I was verbally harassed by gangsters and villagers gossiped about me, saying that I was not a good woman because they never saw me staying at home. My anger rises with a great disappointment in my life and I always questioned myself, why am I poor and why am I a woman, why am I being blamed for what I am doing for my dreams. I started to believe that only education could change this. I convinced my parents to allow me to go to university and was awarded financial support for university by an organization called Wedu. I eventually graduated and dreamed of advocating for women's education and striving to eliminate the saying "women cannot dive deep, nor go far." I was proud to find myself as a young leader of a youth group called Joint of Youth Cambodia during university time, which was an advocacy group for women's rights.

I am now Programme Manager for Citizen and Youth Empowerment at Transparency International Cambodia. I am also the chairwoman for Wedu Cambodia. I have completed my coursework for a master degree in International Human Rights Law and am in the process of completing my thesis. I am proud of achieving all of this at the age of 27, which is beyond my dreams.

When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

In my first professional full-time job, I was a personal assistant to the ambassador and program manager for the Chevening Internship Programme for the British Embassy in Phnom Penh. The job was a significant challenge for me. It required me to arrange meetings between the ambassador and high-level officials, and I was also responsible for doing outreach for the internship program in rural areas and at universities across Cambodia. In this role, I felt so much age discrimination, especially when I visited universities alone. Some university representatives did not think that I was representing the program.

They barely showed any respect. Again I thought, "why should young leaders not be treated with respect?"

Being a young leader was quite a challenge as I performed my role. Women face discrimination, and being a young female leader is even harder, receiving both discrimination and less respect than men. I believe it is not only me who has experienced these issues; many young Cambodian female leaders are facing the same or even worse. Therefore, I keep believing in myself to pursue my dream. I try to overcome the challenges and still keep up my good work.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

My career journey has taught me many lessons. As a student, I could never imagine what it is like being employed. Before, I thought that working could be less stressful than studying. But that is not true. When I got my first internship, I learned that there are many things to learn, explore, and experience; for example, understanding the working environment, the ability to deliver the task, the ability to communicate, and the ability to work with people from different backgrounds. It was just the beginning of my career journey. I was so nervous but I always reminded myself to be confident. It took time to overcome my fears. Finally, I was able to understand the nature of work and felt a bit more confident. I would not be able to overcome those fears if not for the support from my friends, family, and mentor.

My second job was being a program manager and personal assistant to an ambassador at a European Embassy. That was counted as my first full-time professional working experience at the age of 22. Again, I felt so nervous because being a young woman and managing the entire internship programme for the embassy was not easy. It required me to strengthen networks with people from different sectors and with high-level officials.

Being a female is a challenge in Cambodia because of the social norms and the pressure placed on women. Being young is another issue because young people are treated with less respect. I, therefore, did not feel so confident when meeting with high-level people or doing presentations at university or school. I managed many tasks to deliver the program's results and manage the day-to-day correspondence for the ambassador. This assignment taught me to be a very independent person. Being independent and learning from more senior staff on how to handle the work and deliver results is needed, especially when you are at the early stage of a professional career. You have to work harder than other people to prove to your co-workers that you can do it and do it better. That was my valuable lesson during this career journey.

My third job and also my current journey is as a program manager for an international organization in Cambodia. For more than a year and a half, I have been tasked to lead the



team and manage numerous projects. The important lesson I have learned is that good teamwork is a key to success; either as a team leader or a team member, you work not just for yourself or your team, but for the entire organization. Good teamwork involves clear communication and avoiding misunderstanding among each other. I have also learned that being a leader is like being a driver and having many passengers with you. You are responsible to visualize a safe way and drive them to reach the destination safely. You must also have a broad knowledge on each individual's scope of work to be able to assign the right task to the right person. Leaders must not only take on bigger responsibilities to ensure the delivery of the work on time and with good quality, but must also be ready to be responsible for any mistakes made by team members. But if I provide my team with clear instructions on what to do, pay attention to details, and follow up with the team more often, the chances of mistakes are quite limited. Besides, I should be patient because different people have different working styles. I learned to put myself into my team members' shoes, which helps me to understand my team better and be able to assign tasks to the right person at the right time.

“Not everyone is born rich and with leadership skills. Therefore, as youth we have to work hard, be smart, and be kind

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

My core values are being just, honest, treated fairly, and treating everyone equally. My biggest belief is honesty. I would rather not make any empty promises to gain support from others. My second biggest belief is in being supportive. Not everyone is on the same page as you. I have to always check on each of my team members and ask if they understand everything and if they need any support from me. Third, people's skills are important. I need to improve my people skills to understand the weaknesses and strengths of my team members; then I am able to help them as needed.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

At a leadership level, people should be more careful in their behavior as their actions are not the only important thing; they are also role models for others. Behaving properly and following leadership principles can have a positive impact on the

organization by providing a happy working environment where colleagues are inspired, respected and open-minded.

Some behaviors and traits that I personally think are unacceptable for leaders are:

1. Providing no opportunities for the team to grow: either interns or officers, they are here to earn professional experiences—hard skills learned from the tasks assigned by their manager, and soft skills learned from the working environment, their team and their supervisors. Leaders should not believe that people who are under their leadership do not have enough skills to deliver the work and avoid delegating or giving ownership to others. This kind of leader mostly tends to complain about their team instead of providing support for the team to grow.

2. Not open for ideas or feedback: Some leaders avoid feedback from colleagues and tend to believe the decisions they make are final. Feedback or opinion won't have any impact on the decisions that they've made. This kind of behavior demotivates

the team and provides an unhealthy working environment.

3. Not listening to the team carefully: Some leaders do not prioritize the concerns raised by their teams and don't listen to what has happened and why it upset the team. This kind of behavior isn't acceptable. This kind of leader tends to avoid the problem, which leads to staff members disrespecting the leader, eventually.

4. Demotivating the team: Some leaders have no integrity. They tend to take advantage of team members. For example, a team member will do work that the leader wasn't there to support—yet this leader will take the credit for the results. This kind of behavior strongly demotivates teams and isn't respected.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

Inspired leadership requires good personal and professional skills; having both sets of skills is very important. I experienced

growing up in a poor family, tried to get higher education, and am currently earning professional working experience as a leader. I have inspired my nieces, my students, and other women because of my past, of who I wanted to be and how I strived my best to get it. I inspire my team because I care and put myself in their shoes most of the time.

In general, I believe to give is more important than to gain. The knowledge I gained, I am always happy to give and to share with others, especially young women. It is not often that people like giving in this modern society, yet they often see the benefits when they do. I inspire my mentee because I never claim credit for their achievements. I love sharing because it is the only way to help this become society better. The three important strategies I always practice are: working hard, learning smart, and caring more.



What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

Working at the embassy is a dream for many students, especially those majoring in international relations like me. I was recruited by the embassy, which was fortunate for me. However, I also discovered my other career interests. I always wanted to empower women and to bring gender equality to society. I was, therefore, interested in a position at a non-governmental organization.

However, the decision to apply for a new job as a program manager on "Women and Youth in Leadership" program was difficult because, first, I already had a stable job with decent pay; second, the new job would be quite unstable as the program was only funded for three years; and third, the project aimed to empower young people to take leadership positions, increase civic engagement and political participation, which is sensitive in the current political context. As I was very interested in pursuing a career that could directly engage with women and youth to improve gender equality and increase youth in leadership, I made my decision to join the organization.

I reflected on the risk and challenges before joining, and I do not

regret my decision. I have gained more experience in leadership positions and proved to my parents, friends, and others that I can lead no matter the circumstances.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

Compared to other countries, Cambodia has a young population. It also has a good tradition of politeness and caring for each other, which makes the country unique. Yet in Cambodia, young leaders still face age discrimination from elders; discouragement from taking risks from their parents; limited space to express themselves freely; nepotism; and a lack of the necessary soft skills to be the leaders.

The following are some of the recommendations for Cambodia to make youth leadership thrive.

1. Cambodia should develop a strategic plan driven by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) to apply in every relevant institution, such as government ministries, private sector companies, civil society and exchange programs abroad to allow students who are under 30 to gain professional experience

as interns and service consultants. And MoEYS should engage NGOs or companies to provide soft skills training or mentorship programs to those students in order to give them the opportunity to develop both hard and soft skills. Then before the age of 35, they would be allowed to take a leadership role in those assigned institutions.

2. Cambodia should open more space for youth to express their opinion freely in order to be able to improve their confidence in public speaking and to prove to their parents that they can take risks. Youth should also be trained in leadership skills to perform as leaders and convince the public to not discriminate on the basis of age.

3. Cambodia should also prioritize parents' education in order to provide early education for children to be brave and behave with discipline so that children can build their leadership from an early age.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

Not everyone is born rich and with leadership skills. Therefore, as youth we have to work hard, be smart, and be kind. I was

actually a shy woman who didn't even dare to speak with people or the public. I lacked communication skills and had very limited knowledge of society. However, I moved away from the countryside in 2012 and lived with people who weren't my relatives. From one year to another, I learned to get out of my comfort zone, socialize, and understand my living environment.

Apart from learning at university, I volunteered and interned at organizations to learn more and discover what I want to do. I worked hard at school and at work in order to achieve my dream as a leader. I often invested my time in volunteering in the area of my interest; if there was no opportunity in that area, I created one for myself. I wanted to be a leader – yet who would give me that opportunity when I was young. At the beginning of university, I initiated a volunteer group with my university friends, leading a project to educate children in rural areas. I was elected as a leader. I was so nervous but I worked hard and tried not to disappoint everyone.

I have built my leadership since the age of 23. Within my busy schedule when I started my career, I tried to allocate some of my time to mentor my juniors about life, school, and work. As a youth, there is nothing that we cannot achieve as long as we have a commitment to keep working hard, learning and being kind. Accomplish these things, and you become an inspiring young person.



Miss. Ly Sreysrors

Leader

*Young Analyst Group (YAG)
and Political Commentator, Researcher and Lecturer*



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

I was born in a remote village in Mesang District, Prey Veng province. I have seven siblings and I am the youngest in the family. My parents are farmers and also run a small business because farming alone was not enough for us to survive.

Although my father could only know how to read, he is always curious about social issues. He turns on the radio and listens to local and international news and political discussions almost every day. This habit has inspired me to listen to and read the news, especially related to national and international politics.

In 2013, I left my hometown to pursue my bachelor's degree in Phnom Penh. I was selected for a scholarship by an organization in Phnom Penh which provides free accommodation and English courses. Since I was interested in science and also was an outstanding student in physics, I decided to pursue my bachelor's degree in physics at the Royal University of Phnom Penh. One year later, I passed an entrance exam to study International Relations at the Department of International Studies of the Institute of Foreign Languages. I also received a scholarship to study law at the University of Cambodia. I graduated with two degrees—a law degree and a degree in international relations.

I have been interested in political discussions since I was young. This habit has never changed.

While I was living in the training center in Phnom Penh, I always chose topics related to political development and political systems for CD class discussion. This foundation helped me build more in-depth knowledge on those issues added to my existing knowledge from school.

In addition, I often did presentations on Khmer history at both the organization and school. This helped me have a basic knowledge of history. In short, I always paid attention to my studies, both inside and outside the school. Sometimes I did not want to go to work or do an internship in any organization



because I was afraid that I may not have enough time to do my own research on what I want to know.

Although I have answered a lot of my own questions and uncovered my doubt, I still had so many more questions and doubts which required me to keep continuing my research and to find out what I want to know. I will never stop being curious, searching and teaching myself. In 2016, I joined the young analyst group (YAG), and in 2018 I was selected to be president of YAG. I joined the analytical team after the death of Dr. Kem Ley. Everyone was remorseful when Dr. Kem Ley was shot dead, and I often asked myself, as a scholar, what I could do apart from crying and being remorseful.

I thought that continuing Dr. Ley's activities would maintain his values and spirit. Everyone thought that being a political analyst or commentator was risky, but being silent and afraid cannot help the nation and sometimes can even make a situation worse. It does not mean that I am not afraid of death, but my courage, conscience, and commitment are far greater than those fears. I believe that Dr. Ley also wanted to see Khmer youth be brave and participate actively in politics to develop our nation.

When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

When I love a job, I want to do it and I don't even think of any challenges I may face. I just keep moving forward and never give up. The phrase "nothing is impossible" was rooted in my mind and became my motivation for work.

Being a political analyst or commentator sounds good, but it is not really good. Analysts need to provide interviews to local and international journalists related to politics, economics, and social issues. In addition, analysts are invited to attend group discussions with other guest speakers. When I started my career as an analyst, I faced three big challenges—limited knowledge, the time-consuming nature of the work, and safety. In some discussions, there were guest speakers who were more knowledgeable than me. Some of them held master's degrees and PhDs.

I also worried while I was analyzing because I have only a bachelor's degree. However, I have never been careless and I always do more research before attending any discussions. Since my English proficiency is acceptable, doing research is not a big challenge. I studied at two universities, and as an analyst, I have to be informed of all political news, which makes it hard for me to manage my time. I did not have time to volunteer for other organizations. I also did not have time to enjoy life like other youths. Furthermore, I could not go to work to make money, and being an analyst was fully a volunteer job.

Another important thing is safety. Dr. Ley was an analyst who was shot by an unknown gunman in broad daylight in the middle of the city. This seemed to traumatize other youth who were involved in politics, especially when criticizing the government for nepotism and corruption, or other shortcomings regarding policy implementations. It is difficult for me as a female student and analyst. Most of the time, I have to think about my safety. Another existing problem is discrimination from the public and some CSOs.

Some people do not want to connect with analysts and some NGOs do not want analysts or activists to work for their organizations because they are afraid of getting their organizations

into trouble. However, I still think that these challenges are small and cannot win me over. Challenges do not have commitment like humans. With high commitment, we can overcome challenges.

“ The future of our nation depends on youths who are firm, clean, clear, and competent

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

Most people say that leaders must be competent, healthy, ethical and moral. I also value these points. However, based on my four years of experience in political analysis, I think there are other three valuable lessons for leaders. First, the habit of listening to other people's opinions. Even if leaders are competent enough, if they do not have the ability to listen to opposing ideas, their leadership skills will face troubles.

Being analysts, we need to spend time listening to other people's ideas, including opposing ideas so that we can evaluate whether those ideas are reasonable and logical.

In the current political arena, some groups are dead because of nice words, compliments and ignoring the rest, while other groups live in opposition to others. These two conditions are both bad, but living for nice words or eulogies is worse. I remember the Khmer phrase stating that ants never see death in a salt dish, but only in a sugar dish. Most people are pleased to talk about their achievements or strengths, but they are not happy to talk about their weaknesses. Every leader should remember that it is not that difficult to notice or evaluate strengths and successes; the difficult thing is to find our own gaps. Sometimes, we cannot find them. Criticism is a mirror for us to look for our gaps.

Although the current government does not really pay much attention to criticism, we should not stop monitoring its policy implementation and critiquing abnormalities of the development. As a leader at every level, it is crucially important to seek and accept criticism to achieve goals.

Another important aspect—a leader should not see the glass as half empty, but half full. Being addicted to what we have built or achieved, and not focusing on the next tasks is very silly for a leader. Leaders need to have a long-term vision and a dream and then plan to achieve that dream. Doing this will help fill the water at the top half of the glass.

Finally, it is important that leaders are aware of their responsibilities. Leaders can have more work, be busier and have more responsibility than other group members in organizations or groups. We have to remember that this is our role as leaders. We should not feel too proud of ourselves because this can make us forget other people's efforts, which may lead to a split in the team or nation.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

As a youth, I have always valued four things—courage, knowledge, social interest and discussion. I always remember that only the brave can change the world. I always encourage and advise my team members and colleagues to be brave enough to speak their thoughts. Being brave is one of the other tools that can improve human capacity and develop society. Some people are highly educated and could contribute a lot to society but if they are not brave enough, they may have fewer opportunities to help society.

Every development needs knowledgeable and competent people. Strengthening the capacity of youth is essential. I have always encouraged youth and activists to find ways to pursue higher education. It is pivotal to train youth and citizens to be patriotic and socially minded.

Last but not least, it is about maintaining a culture of discussion or debate. In meetings, I always give members the chance to speak. Despite our different opinions, we keep the discussion moving forward and make decisions based on reason. This can improve our critical thinking and the quality of our reasoning. Debating does not mean that we fight anyone; instead, we debate because we want a better decision.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Leaders do not always have to be highly educated. They just need to have more ears and brains (this means that leaders need to listen a lot and think critically) to realize their goals. However,

a disease of actor-ism, me-ism and nepotism, and being careless or thoughtless, have negative impacts on leadership at all levels, especially when it comes to implementation and quality of decision making. At a national level, these diseases have been a barrier for country development, leading to corruption and affecting public interests and disadvantaged groups.

Khmer society was fragmented and had many civil wars for decades because of people attacking each other and accusing this political party or that political party of being a puppet. That accusation is considered as thoughtless. Another negative mindset is that people always think their group is right and others are always wrong. The practice of favoritism is a big mistake for Cambodian youth because this culture does not help to promote collaboration or solidarity in a society; with this attitude, there cannot be fraternity among Khmer people. If youth still have this mindset, we do not know how we can preserve our Khmer nation. Therefore, avoiding these behaviors is important for youth if we want our nation to move forward and compete with other countries.



What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

I have never thought that I am a successful or influential person. What I do comes from my will and interests in response to the needs of society. I participate in analysis to share my perspective as a youth or scholar who cares about national affairs, and what the government should or should not do.

In addition, I wish to change negative mindsets which have become rooted in our society by offering analysis to media outlets. There are various strategies for making people succeed, depending on the sector. What I am doing may disappoint you because it will not help you materially. However, if you want the nation to be successful, this career is important. When people keep themselves updated about politics and dare to express their opinions, positive change will happen. Youth should be competent and find ways to build their own capacity. Capacity building refers to continuing studies in academic sectors, catching up with political development, listening to others' analysis, and participating in discussion and doing research about society.

Courage is the main tool for expressing our opinions to society, which leads to positive change. In this work environment, I just remind youth to stand firm and remain unchanged. If you hate corruption, do not be corrupt in any situation.

My final advice to youth is that politics is not a business to get involved in to be famous or to use your popularity to do anything that does not benefit society. When you do something, please be clear and stand firm.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

In a country where freedom of expression is restricted, people who dare to express their opinions risk their safety. In Cambodia, some political analysts and political commentators have been arrested, or have lived in exile, or have been killed. These are the risks.

I always think that I can manage standing firm, expanding knowledge, and maintaining ethical practices, and this can also help reduce some risks. I am an analyst, and I am not an enemy of anyone. My enemies are corruption, human rights abuses and other barriers to the country's development.

Fighting against these issues does not mean that we are against anyone, and we have no reason to be afraid of saying this. Doing this means that we care about our society and the future of the next generations. Being Cambodian citizens, we have a responsibility to organize society for the next generations.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

Cambodian leaders, as well as youth, have been influenced by the bad political culture from older generations. This has made Cambodian society less progressive than its neighboring countries. Those negative cultures can be seen in expressions like, "when the water rises, the fish eats the ant; when the water recedes, the ant eats the fish," as well as selfishness— "only me, not you"—labelling, nepotism and so on.

Youth who have studied history are aware of the divisions in Cambodian society. This happened because of labelling and accusing each other, and these habits still exist today. Have we ever thought about when the Khmer can get rid of all these irrational thoughts? It is time for a new generation to work together to eliminate this thinking through capacity building and critical thinking. Youth should develop their critical thinking. All assumptions need to be based on reason.

In addition, we need to be open-minded to other people without nepotism, political tendencies, religion, gender discrimination and racism. Being a critical thinker is essential to building a democratic society. Changing those bad habits will encourage citizens and other relevant stakeholders to participate in politics in a safer and more collaborative manner.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

There are three points for youth to remember to be valuable for the nation:

- Do not forget to build up your capacity both in schools and out of schools. Please keep yourself updated about political developments and the issues Cambodia faces.

- Be brave to participate in social activities because only doing this can enable us to use our knowledge to develop our country.
- The future of our nation depends on youths who are firm, clean, clear, and competent. Only people who are not corrupt can help develop the nation. 'To clean grease from dishes, we need to use dish soap'; if we want to get rid of corrupt people, we need to engage genuinely honest people. Grease cannot be used to clean grease, and corrupt people cannot work to get rid of corruption either.

The process of national development requires dedication. Everyone, especially youth, plays an important role in developing our society.



Mr. Yean Reaksmey

Art Curator, Writer and Researcher



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

My name is Reaksmey Yean: I am an art curator, writer, and researcher. At present, I am a Phnom Penh resident, but I was born in Battambang, raised on Ouchar commune's outskirts, in a neighborhood surrounded by rice fields called Banteay Suonsat. Until around 2005, this area was designated as a military base. Today, the headquarters and its immediate milieu are transformed into a satellite city, better known as a Borei project. I grew up in a family of six: Myself, my three sisters, our mother, who is a grocery storekeeper, and our father, who is a retired military officer. I received my early and high school education from a non-governmental organization (NGO)-school named Phare Ponleu Selpak. This multicultural center provides training in art alongside other academic and informal education. The center was undeniably a time and space in which I cultivated and found my passion and lifelong love affairs – art, culture, art history, and linguistic studies. As a child of a low-ranking soldier, the chance of going to a fancy and well-equipped classroom was beyond my reach. Thus, Phare was amongst the only few options we could afford to do.

It was at Phare Ponleu Selpak that I was introduced to professional settings. Immediately after my high school graduation, and thanks to my English language fluency, the school offered me a job as a media and a public relations officer. This field was unknown and unfamiliar to me at the time. Upon my appointment, the management ensured (though this turned out not to be accurate, and I was so disappointed) that I would receive some training and guidance on how to perform my role and execute my duties. I was the only employee in the Department of Communications. At once, I was a boss and a follower, trying to figure out, through a process of trial and error, the way to execute the assignments. As a spokesperson of the institution, I was inexperienced. Still, I should at least give myself some credit for bravery in accepting the job. As Richard Branson would say: "if someone offers you an amazing opportunity, and you're not sure you can do it, say Yes – then learn how to do it later." That is indeed what I have done!

The public relations job introduced me to other domains. This is where I cultivated (or was being injected with) some passion and the purposes in life. As I was trying to figure out how to do my job, it forced me to do some reading, and in turn, this introduced me to the world of academic writing, research, and critical interpretation. All of these have brought me to this terrain of art history, philosophy, theory, curatorial practices, and Khmerologies – the labyrinth in which I am still exploring and immersing myself, trying to comprehend and to make sense of it.

What I am most proud of is the fact that I have obtained at least three of my goals: pursuing higher education in art historical

studies, continuing a praxis in writing and curatorship, and learning the Thai language. I should add that I entered postgraduate studies without a bachelor's degree. I decided not to partake in any undergraduate programs at Cambodian universities on the ground that I am not too fond of the teaching style, namely, the hierarchy of student and teacher. The university seems to be a place that represses individual autonomy. It produces a lot of followers rather than leaders or thinkers. However, it is essential to point out also that I could not find a course or a degree that I wanted to study: art history and art philosophy. Thus, I undertook a personal learning journey by finding written materials online, and to move to Phnom Penh in 2012 to have proximity to knowledge and

scholarship (experts and practitioners). On this personal journey, I found other terrains of interest: Southeast Asia and Buddhism. In 2014, I was convinced that I had enough knowledge and practical experience to qualify for a postgraduate program in the United Kingdom at SOAS, University of London. It was the experience at SOAS, and later, at the Institute of Southeast Asian Affairs at Chiang Mai University, which landed me in an MA program at LaSalle College of the Arts in Singapore (2018-2019).

“We must inform ourselves through reliable information, not by propaganda or illusional narratives. Thus, we can enrich our knowledge and improve our leadership

When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

If I had been asked this question about seven years ago, I would state without hesitation that “money” was the main challenge in my pursuit of the curatorial praxis. This journey has its point of departure in 2011 when my former classmates and I formed a now-defunct art collective called Trotchaek Preik, “cool eyes.” As time went on, however, my perspective on and my discernment of the situation has changed. Suppose there is anything at all that I can draw out of my personal experiences in the last five years. In that case, it is that money



has never been the central issue in my career development (I believe my attitude and perception towards it was).

As I ponder the question now, I conclude that the most significant challenge I encountered at the very start of my career was an underdeveloped art-infrastructure and the shortage of scholarship in this field. The latter is more problematic. From 1991 until now, there have not been any training or degree available at local schools and universities on museology, curatorial studies, and modern or contemporary art history. This is not to mention that there is no local expert in the field; I mean someone you can go to for guidance. To learn about the praxis, I have to rely mostly on what I dubbed as 'external sources,' both foreign friends who are familiar with the terrain and English written scholarship. This presented another quandary, if not more: my limited knowledge of English and the few resources available in town. Thanks to the internet, however, I can download some eBooks and online courses. But I needed to improve my English proficiency. It was the main how-to that I unconventionally and improperly trained and invited myself into the field. In that sense, we can say, in a sensational manner, that I was a victim and prisoner of both the Cambodian educational system and of my own choice of profession.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

To my way of thinking, core values always equate to what I consider as self-constitution. In other words, it is a personal guiding philosophy. I like the metaphor of the supreme law denoted by the word constitution. What I would state, then, as my constitutional preamble is that "I have come to describe myself as an agent of change and an advocate of beauty." Also enshrined in this self-constitution are freedom of speech, diversity, egalitarianism, education and knowledge production, and integrity. Freedom of expression is essential in our daily life, not only because it is a fundamental human right but also because it guarantees a democratic space. Free speech has many forms, and artistic expression is one of those. Thus, it is crucial to defend and protect this fundamental right. If I were to run and lead an institution, probably a museum or a gallery is most likely. I would ensure that anyone or any artist can articulate their opinions, in any form, without the fear of retaliation, censure, or sanction, unless those are extreme and proven to harm others. In a political sense, I would consider myself a democrat. In a philosophical sense, I would strongly associate myself with the domain of deconstruction and feminism (not that I am well-versed on these subjects either). This may be why I promote the importance of diversity and egalitarianism, by which I mean no racial, ethnographic, sexual, or political discrimination.

Furthermore, I believe that education is essential to human, social, economic, and environmental development. Here, I do not refer merely to obtaining degrees or joining a university

network. I speak of intellectual, practical, and survival skills. Modern education in Cambodia, particularly in the public arena, must be revolutionized. The application of STEM is insufficient, if not discriminatory. I strongly advocate that letter "A," representing programs in the arts and humanities, be added to the curriculum.

On a personal level (in my case, creating art exhibitions), I always ensure that there are materials or resources documented for future research. In a broader sense of knowledge production, I will produce writing to contribute to the field. Finally, it is vital to be consistent and honest, and to be conscious of an ethical framework. This is the rule that I live by, or at least attempt to do. In a sense, it may be because I am deeply influenced by the philosophical and conceptual characteristics found in my exploration of Buddhism: right speech, right action, and right thinking.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

I have certainly learned plenty of invaluable lessons since the inception of my career. However, it is not easy to ascertain whether I know anything since exploring this field is yet to cease. Hence, what I consider valuable might take weeks to cite, if not a dissertation-length. However, within this space, this is impossible. For these reasons, three things might be of interest to share here. The first and the obvious one, as have hinted earlier, is that there is always a way to find the money. I have learned throughout my journey that there is always an issue that involves money. This is unavoidable unless you are super-rich. And if we were to allow ourselves to be trapped in this ever-present conundrum, we are not giving ourselves a chance to reach our goal and experience our intended destination. Let us not allow money to be a cause of failure, imprisonment of the mind, and the curtailment of our actions. Second, what I have learned from my career is that knowledge is always reinvigorating and limitless. If we keep our hearts and minds open, we will discover and learn something new, even something within our field. I always invite myself to be a learner rather than an expert, which I am not. In this way, I allow my interest, curiosity, and child-like mind to reintroduce and rematerialize themselves. We must position ourselves in proximity to the sphere of knowledge through reading, listening, and research.

And finally, friendship is essential. I am not talking about networking. Sure, this is crucial, as we in the communications world know. But that is not what I mean. I am talking about friendship that nurtures trust, honesty, and understanding.

One that allows you to express yourself freely. One that you can go to in a time of need or crisis. It is not only emotional or psychological support that I am referring to here but rather a safe environment for exchanging ideas, even the most ridiculous ones. We live in a world of busyness and worries: We sometimes worry that our thoughts will receive hostile criticism,

and our actions will be scrutinized. We may think that we are strong, confident, and resilient, but we may feel vulnerable at some point, and that is when friendship steps in. And vulnerability, if we deploy and recognize it well, can be also our strength.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

I would place dishonesty and inconsistency on top of the list as the traits that negatively impact leadership. Not only because they foster ambiguity and lack of clarity, but also because I hold honesty and consistency in such high esteem. To be sure, I am not saying there is no room for flexibility in the process; in fact, I think flexibility is a nutritional quality for dealing with a problem and seeking solutions. It only becomes a problem when the leader disguises his inability under the camouflage of flexibility. Besides, I would include egocentrism on the list. I am not espousing the idea that leaders should not think about themselves – this is because many of us Cambodians misinterpret the Khmer term of Anhniyum (egoism) in Buddhism. At least for me, egocentrism is when a leader places his ideas and agenda at the center of everything, disregarding the value of others and their opinions and even their surroundings. Egocentrism can lead to acrimony, nepotism, and impaired judgment. I personally like a leader who talks the talk and walks the walk. For me, commendable and charismatic leaders do not allow themselves to be taken in by populist beliefs and rhetoric. It is not their job to appeal to the lowest common denominator. It is their job to raise it.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

To be clear, I neither perform the role of an influencer nor consider myself as such. To me, an influencer is a person I call the "avatar-ization of the self," one who makes a fictive image of himself to influence the masses and reach uncertain goals – a sort of social media superstar. It is not the negative connotation of the term that I dissociate from; instead, it lacks specificity. "Influencer" is too general. If I were to label myself with an equivalent word (it is immediately more than a word), I would go for "articurizer." This is a term I coined to mean someone who is an art advocate, a bridge or an intermediary between art and the people/viewer, and an articulator or speaker who addresses art, culture, and their (hi)stories.

What I am attempting to establish and demonstrate here -- connected to my previous response -- is clarity. My last discussion on clarity concerned the vision or translation of an idea to reality. Here I expand this concept to unify the role assumed and the language that portrayed it. Thus, we need a term that functions as a mnemonic device to define one's position and place within a society clearly. I would add that clarity also applies to the creation of a public image. I refer here not to the choice of fashion nor how to carry oneself. This is important. But instead, I refer to the falsified image of the self that misleads and perceives others – creating the impression that you are a saint when, in fact, you are not. Here, "being true to yourself," and honesty are evoked.



I think passion is another axiom that I would call to mind. I learned that when one is passionate about something, even a job or a discussion, one feels energy that reflects and projects the person's way of thinking. Passion allows the expression of love, desire, and positive energies. Generally, I do not express opinions I do not share or do not understand. Nor do I perpetuate falsehoods, but rather the ideals I share.

Thus far, what I have mentioned is perhaps not a strategic model per se. Maybe, that is because I do not have one. However, in addition to these, my ongoing approach to affect change and raise awareness is to write and speak out. I have used several platforms to voice my opinions on art and culture, and sometimes on cultural policy and freedom of speech. My voice has been broadcast across multiple platforms, including but not limited to the roundtable discussion, public forum, exhibition making, social media, or news media. I sometimes resort to writing, especially in Khmer, to formulate and express myself. In this process, I sometimes coin or rehash Khmer terms to convey ideas and to represent/recreate what is missing in the Khmer language proper. All of these have the aim of raising the level of public debate. This both enriches a democratic space and guarantees democracy.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

I do not think I have taken many risks in my career path as an art curator thus far. As said earlier, I am not an expert, and I still have much to explore in this field. Indeed, there are a few risk takings involved, but not prominent ones: I mostly concerns the way in which I curate an exhibition, that is, to decide what and what not to present, language used, and spatial division. However, as a writer (notably when penning in the Khmer language), I have taken a lot of risks: that of speaking my mind, and to my way of thinking, decolonizing the Khmer language by creating, repurposing, and rehashing terms to give new meanings, to give voice to the repressed, and to represent what is missing. This is especially true for terminologies used in the field of cultural and art studies. I have received much criticism in the past: some asked what authority have I to perform such actions (to coin terms, mostly), and some have accused me of being an intellectual elitist. I ignore most of the criticisms. It is already a success if someone engages with what I am doing. I see no need to respond to someone who questions my authority. I am an author. That is my authority. Thus I see no need to seek permission from the Royal Academy of Cambodia, who in and of itself should not be the only body that has any authority to say what term to use and not to use. Finally, artcurizer involves articulating ideas.

As hinted earlier, I sometimes critique or speak of something that occupies a tricky terrain (if only considered risk-taking). Still, again, to keep clarity in mind, those formulations are mostly related to the domain of culture, art, art histories, and freedom of speech. Thus far, it may be because I am not a

public figure and a well-known person; there is no repercussion yet. Some friends even expressed their concerns over my safety, and some also ask what kind of protection I have or why I am so brave to say what I wanted to say. My responses always are "freedom of speech is guaranteed and sanctioned by our constitution, the supreme law of the land, it does not only make room for free speech, but also it protects us from fear of retaliation, and I am simply practicing my constitutional rights."

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

"Cambodian culture" is, from my perspective as an explorer of art and cultural histories, a very complex terrain to define and demarcate. Here, it is of note to highlight that the morphology of "Cambodian culture" is but a presupposition that this very structure has homogenized into an irreducible singularity, Khmerness or Khmer culture. Suppose we were to consider this from a conceptual framework of inclusive development and democratization. In that case, it is crucial to recognize that Cambodian culture is multifaceted and diversified, more than and beyond Khmer(ness). Having said that however, it seems that our national consciousness, though not sure if it reflects the whole, acknowledges the essentialization of Khmer, be it culture, language, or race, as a representational and symbolic singularity. This harmony seems to resonate quite well with ASEAN's motto, "unity in diversity." This is already my comment on the uniqueness of Cambodian culture that is unity and harmony. Compared to neighboring countries, Cambodians do not have racial and religious issues – at least, amongst our nation. This has saved us a lot of time to spend on other things.

As a post-conflict society, it is undeniable that the war and its aftermath have influenced our cultural lives. For about thirty years now, we have been working to remedy our problems. Perhaps this is not enough, but we have already taken three generations to restore peace and stability. It is time for us to reimagine our society, narrative, identity, and political space. And since our country has reemerged from civil war, we can safely say that Cambodia is a young country, from the standpoint of its politics and its population. At least sixty percent of Cambodians are less than forty years old. This is the reality of our modern culture. And it means that we are the future and the engine of this country. Arguably, we are the legitimate decision-makers who can envision what this country will be. In Cambodia, if we observe and listen carefully, we notice that our young population wishes to see positive changes (reimagine and redefine the new way of life). They want to take part in that change-making. If we form an alliance and do it correctly, we may be able to support each other and affect change in our societal, political, cultural, and economic arena. It is where and when the visionary and revolutionary vanguards can unleash their potentiality and critical minds, and creativity. Whatever our hopes and dreams for our country and its culture/future may be, we should attempt to define it now. Every one of us

has a role to play. I urge that we all find our place in Cambodia's ecosystem and help each other improve and define it.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

Maybe not advice, but rather, requests. I notice that modern-day Cambodia witnesses a strong sense of nationalism. Some say this could be a great thing. Still, I personally think it should be reexamined, especially since we have a history of nationalism that ended up in an atrocity of war and genocide. It is time to redefine our love for the country, and I believe the word ជាតិ គិយម or ភ្នែកជាតិ are no longer neutral and positive. I suggest, then, to use the phrase ភាពជាតិ (ភាពជាតិ + មាតិកា) to mean patriotism, rather than nationalism. Besides, Cambodia's sense of nationalism seems to be grounded either in baseless and colonial historical narratives or mythology. Thus, I encourage the young generation and my generation to relearn and unlearn our (hi)stories to be familiar with our identity, genesis, and past. In turn, we know where we want to go next and what identity we wish to assume.

I want to add here also that many things in our country require resolutions, ranging from gender to racial issues, legal justice to political discrimination, societal and environmental issues,

and from economic to urbanization issues. These problems are inevitable in an underdeveloped country: Especially one with weak governance and political institutions and unminimizable corruption. As a younger generation and the one that will determine this nation's fate, we should pay more attention to these issues and things that concern and affect us. We must inform ourselves through reliable information, not by propaganda or illusionary narratives. Thus, we can enrich our knowledge and improve our leadership. This is vital if we want to lift our country out of poverty, in every sense of the word. Finally, please spend and find the time to read and look at the past and present through the vista of painting, sculpture, architecture, music, or performances. We may not have the best museums in the world, but we still, at least, have a few, and we even have some art galleries in town, too. Please indulge yourself!

Either as an object of contemplation, desire, or beauty, art holds power to connect us and has the potency to transform, illuminate, inspire, and educate us. It also helps us answer some existential questions such as what the meaning of life is, allowing us to know what it means to be alive and what it means to be human. And also, for us, what it means to be Cambodian or Khmer.



Miss. Oum Sam Tharoth

The First Cambodian Female Mixed Martial Art Fighter and Actress



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

My name is Oum Sam Tharoth, a national Bokator fighter (a traditional Khmer fighting style), the first mixed martial art, an actress and a student of the Police Academy of Cambodia. I am the youngest of four members in a middle-class family and my father was a violinist in the 1960s. I have completed grade 12. I have about eight years of experience as a Bokator fighter. What makes me most proud of this fighting sport is that I got the chance to join martial arts competitions and act in film productions which can help widely promote national images of Cambodia and Khmer culture.

When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

When I first started my career, my biggest challenge was related to family matters. I had pressure and received criticism from people surrounding me as they did not really support what I was doing. Another challenge was financial issues because I was not financially independent at that time, and I mainly received support from my mother although she was not happy with my fighting sport career. My mother and all my relatives tried to convince me to quit this job, but I tried to overcome this and continued this career path confidently and rightly.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

Over the years, a valuable lesson I have learned is to live on my own and stand on my own. I am committed to following my dream and working hard to achieve good results and accomplishments for myself, my family and my nation, and I am also committed to sharing knowledge and practical experiences with successors. This has taught me about friendship, making more friends and relationships, and mutual respect related to the outside world. It has also taught me about life, thinking positive and being patient. Don't be aggressive and never give up in life.



What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

My core value is that I maintain the value of a strong daughter, a Khmer child who wants to learn about Khmer martial arts and help preserve this combat sport for future generations. I want to make a stand so that everyone can see my persistence which paid off for me. I also positively and calmly explained to my mother, family members, friends, and others that what I do is not to screw up society or incite people to commit violence. In contrast, it helps people when they learn this sport and get the knowledge for self-defense and show the nation our ancient Cambodian martial art of bokator, which used to be on

communication and do not respect others. Furthermore, those people like to complain about others, put blame on others, and they do not know how to appreciate or admire people for their efforts. They also do not know how to find inner peace. Furthermore, these people are too extreme and do not accept change. Another important factor is the lack of friendliness and smiles, and many other negative factors I have not mentioned all.

“My core value is that I maintain the value of a strong daughter, a Khmer child who wants to learn about Khmer martial arts and help preserve this combat sport for future generations

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

To empower other youth, my strategy is to encourage them to study hard and learn from all walks of life, not just only in school. One or two languages should be learned. Another strategy also includes encouraging youth to play at least one or two sports because it benefits a lot for both mental and physical health -- being more active and confident.

Doing sports or martial arts can help a quiet person become a friendly one and build more connections. Please encourage

the brink of extinction. I always explained to them in this way and also showed them my achievements, which made them agree, support and understand my commitment and the value of my hard work.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

I think behaviors that have negative effects on leadership are lacking honesty and clarity. In addition to that, people who do not listen or pay attention to other people's opinions and always think that their opinions are better than others. They are too proud of themselves, lack understanding, are poor at

youth to build internal strength, commitment, nationalism and be respectful to family, nation and other people. Do not feel depressed easily.

Do not get upset for too long and try to overcome that sadness. Be open-minded, understanding and adaptable to all walks of life. Youth should know how to use polite words such as "Thanks" and "My apologies" and practice a culture of sharing and helping each other. In all the types of work we do, we should think about the image of our family and nation as a whole.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

Some of the risks that I faced in my career were that I experienced sports-related physical strains and injuries such as shoulder pain, bruises on my shoulder or blood during competition

or acting. I remember that in 2015 after I finished the competition in an event entitled "One Championship," I was selected to perform in a big film titled "First They Killed My Father" directed by Angelina Jolie. At that time, my face was still swollen and bruised even though it had been four to five days since the competition. It had a big impact on my acting as the role required me to look good.

Despite those challenges, I was always positive and persistent to solve problems step by step. I overcame these issues and kept acting and received treatment as advised. It could be seen that I was active, strong, and capable of doing this job.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

I think the uniqueness of Cambodia is that we have our own Khmer civilization, arts, sculpture, dancing and martial arts

which are very old and special. I think that Cambodia can be developed by young leaders because they are the successors for the country. Youth in this era are intelligent, skillful, creative, and open-minded to accept change. They share knowledge and motivate each other to stay active and move forward smoothly. Their international relations are better.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

My advice for Cambodian younger generations is that I would encourage them to study hard and grab knowledge from all people around. Me, I did not study much like others. I just finished grade 12. Everywhere is a school because I always see and understand something new -- new events and new problems. When we meet new people, we learn about their good points. I also encourage the new generations to be more persistent in living. I believe that whether born into a rich or

poor family, everyone faces different challenges and hardship. Therefore, please live in doing good, building good and being grateful as a result from the help and support received from or provided for others.

Please encourage them to promote solidarity, be open-minded, do not make quick assumptions or criticize people, but try to make more friends. Please encourage them not to give up their dreams, and stay strong. It can be seen that they can do it. And please encourage them to think of everyone, including themselves, their family and their nation. For my final comment, I have already mentioned it earlier, we should learn martial arts or do sports for physical and mental benefits. This does not only help me stay healthy, but also helps me become a better professional staff than before.



Mr. Heng Sokvisal

Content Creator and Influencer



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

My real name is Heng Sokvisal and I am 25 years old this year. For me, I think I have not yet obtained sufficient qualifications to be called a young leader because I think I am not there yet.

Now let me introduce my life story. First of all, in relation to my family, I have a widowed mother. My father expired when I was eight years old. My family has four children (two sisters and two brothers) and I am the youngest. My family's situation was also difficult because when Dad passed away, my mother was just a housewife with no job or business to support the family.

The children had to go out to work and we also earned a little income from renting real estate. In terms of education, I graduated from the Japan-funded Kirirom Institute of Technology located in the Kirirom hillside in Kampong Speu province. When I was studying, my family had a difficult life because only my mother was in charge of the whole family and all my siblings.

When I was young, my brothers and sisters used to go to work to earn money to pay for school fees and to help my mother's work. Therefore, the family situation was really tough, but now it is better. I have a lot to be proud of. First, related to family, because I have a good family, living in a good environment, and although we do not have much money, we are happy because my siblings and mom always encourage and support my ideas.

Not only does my mother act as a mother, but she acts as a counselor and a close friend, and this is a source of great pride. Another source of pride is related to work, as I have inspired many young people to do what they love, and not to give up because of the words of others.

I have encouraged young people to start doing what they love, such as making videos, vlogs, songs or music. This is also a source of pride because I have changed the lives of many young people for the better, especially those who are discouraged to study, by creating various videos to advise and educate.



When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

When I first started my career, the biggest challenge was that no one valued our work. Because I was one of the first video makers in Cambodia, people did not value this work, because no one did so at that time and nobody thought it could be a career. I was the first person to embrace video clip making as a career.

I quit my job as a code writer in Japan and started working as a professional video maker so the first challenge was how to connect with society as well as the people around us because they did not value our work and they laughed at us. They said

many good jobs were available, but because we chose to work as video maker for social media we had no support from society or our friends. And because some of our people did not know or have much information about video making, they misunderstood the reasons to do it, what it is and its biggest challenges.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

I have learned that humans are really marvelous. When we think of something to do, as long as we put our heart into it and we begin to act, we will get positive results.

As long as we work from the heart and love our work, we will always get good results. This is the best lesson that I have learned. And if we talk about a leader in this situation, he or she does not give up easily, and does not change ideas because of other people's thoughts. A leader needs to have a clear goal.

If we decide to do something, it means that we already have a plan and strategy to make it happen. Sometimes, even though it does not happen or meet all the standards we wanted, we still try to adapt, we do not give up and we continue to do it.

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A good strategy is to behave like a pot half full of water in the sense of being able to get advice from other people. We need to accept positive comments and sometimes negative ones that can be constructive for us

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

Now I have three companies, but I use Company Talent Agency as an example, as it has many teams and members. The first team is the concept organizers; the second team is post production, which edits the videos; the third is the creative

team who comes up with the concept; and the fourth team is the talent character who does what the team says. Normally, when we set up a team, there are disagreements due to having many ideas to discuss and sometimes we disagree because everyone has his or her own ideas, so to make the team aligned we need to divide the roles of each team clearly.

For example, when it comes to the concept, we have to value the concept team the most when they speak; everyone has to listen and try to accommodate, and everyone can express their opinion, but the final decision is up to them. This means that we divide the roles so that each person does not have two or three overlapping roles. We put the right person in the right place, such as the editor, who decides on the editing. So others can just provide some comments on editing. Dividing the roles as well as the rules in the company is important.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

I think attitudes that have negative impacts on leadership is when we do nothing and keep blaming other people. As the boss, we have to be in front and as a role model for others. If we set a bad example, they will not listen to us. For example, we tell our team members that we have to finish our work today. However, the task is left undone and we ask why the task remains unfinished like that? However, we ourselves just sit and play on the phone and do not finish our work either.

During the meeting, we ask the members why not they are not taking notes, but we do not take notes either. It is a bad thing for the staff members to see. We will not earn respect from them with such behavior.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

For me, I think I am not yet an influential leader. My capacity is still limited and I need to learn more. But if you ask me for advice, I think a good strategy is to behave like a pot half full of water in the sense of being able to get advice from other people. We need to accept positive comments and sometimes negative ones that can be constructive for us.

It means that sometimes others talk about our bad points, but their intention is to make us better because they see the shortcomings. We always try to listen a lot and learn from what they say. If there is a very negative opinion, for example, mocking us, forbidding us to do what we love, then I think we should not take all those opinions because it is confusing and complicates our decisions.

Therefore, the strategy to behave like a pot half full of water by listening to many people, considering and using our brain to critically analyze whether this feedback is right, whether we are good or not, and then to try to think more positively. And the important thing is not to give up; we must do it.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

The risks can be very huge because I am a public figure. When we take risks, we do it in the right way, but it can turn out well or it can make some people unhappy because most of our words are heard by people who both like and dislike us. Sometimes they take our words to create something that means something different. This is a real risk. When we do something, we have to think about the consequences of what we post on social media, and what we say can discourage young people not to go to school and do something else they are not supposed to.

Therefore, we have to think about this matter seriously because the use and impact of social media is very broad. I have about one million followers on Facebook. Hence, the words written and posted on social media, whether we want it or not, definitely affects people's daily lives. So, we have to prepare meticulously to ensure the good quality of what we share, and that it inspires them to do good things in society or makes them struggle to do things they want to accomplish.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

For me, this is just a small idea of mine, I do not know if it is right or wrong. This is just what I think--that Cambodian culture values the old more than the young. This is what I saw and experienced firsthand when I started as an intern. This means that even though young people have good ideas, most of the older people do not value them because they think that young people lack experience, so they should listen to their elders who express whatever opinions. But I think young people sometimes express good ideas and do good works, but in our culture, young people do not have as much power to influence through words (toek mot sap). Plus, our culture values elders and nepotism. I believe that if we wish to make Cambodia prosperous, we must be open-minded and nondiscriminatory, regardless of being young or old. We should try to be a pot half full of water by listening to other people's expressions and take those words into consideration. If useful, we accept the advice and apply it.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

My advice for the younger generation of Cambodia? I think it is not really a piece of advice but let's consider it chitchatting with young people, because I am also young. What I want to say to them is, first of all, to find out who you are, what you like,

and what you want to do in the future. If we do not find out about ourselves, we just work here and there; it is a waste of time.

For example, there are two people, one who knows himself well and where he stands and knows where he wants to go. For instance, a guy wants to go to the Olympic Market. He knows how to walk, which way to go, how to prepare, and what obstacles he will face on the way. Those who do not know themselves well do not know where they want to go, and so they just walk back and forth. It is really a big waste of time.

Another piece of advice is to try to think more positively since whenever we think positive our results will be positive as well. Moreover, learning to say thank you to people around us as each and every individual involved with our daily life provides us with life lessons, and regardless of whether good or bad, those lessons are valuable. Therefore, please try to think positively often and start doing it now. Another crucial point is to understand oneself clearly by understanding what you like and start doing it.



Miss. Neak Sophal

Photographer and Graphic Designer



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

I was born the youngest of seven siblings in Kirivong district in Takeo province. Passed a Bachelor Degree in 2007 and went on to earn a Bachelor's Degree at the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA) in Visual Communication Design. Owing to my passion for photography, I studied Photography skill part-time at the French Institute.

My parents and siblings supported me to complete my university education, which made me proud. Later on I was able to get a job that I like and live independently. Today I am a professional freelance photographer and graphic designer and I like both of these jobs because they require different ideas to create unique work.

One of my most recognizable works is the conceptual portrait depicting the daily life of Cambodian people, especially their hard labour and the heavy load they bear. These photo series were selected as the first winner of the 2013 Angkor Photo Workshop Festival among 30 candidates from countries in South East Asia. Later on, I attended workshops, exhibitions and photo festivals locally and abroad, which gave me the opportunity to travel and learn more from other artists.

When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

Since I worked in international agency, the language barrier was, unavoidably, something that I had to improve. After all, the skills we learned at school were not enough for work, so I had to do difficult self-learning and learn from others in order to fix my weaknesses.

In the field of photography, where I am often considered an artist, it was very difficult as I could not make money out of it. I tried until I developed somewhat of a reputation and then my works were exhibited in various gallery halls locally and abroad. What I am trying to solidify is research and learning-



Workshop during NORMADIX Art Tour in Trouy Koh, Kampot province

the pursuit of meaningful work by discussing and learning from more experienced artists, and getting more involved in workshops and exhibitions.

As a woman it's not always easy to travel to take photos in a quiet place. I always have to be careful and watchful. I depend on friends and relatives to help.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

Since I have been working for eight years, I have developed from a designer to an Artistic Director in the last two years. For

for listeners to perceive and accept, they are always worthwhile. When people around us believe in our words and actions, they will not hesitate to cooperate and trust. They only cooperate with those they trust.

From personal experience, I have applied the principle of honesty in daily interactions and I absolutely respect my promises. To achieve this, we need time and strong relationships to align values with others around us, but I could not align values with people that I do not know well.

“If you are now a youth, please spend your time wisely and usefully for your compatriots by using your intelligence and capacity to serve for common benefits

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Irresponsibility and dishonesty! Irresponsibility, to me, is to avoid responsibility and the challenges with excuses, and failing to learn from problems but pushing somebody else, especially subordinates, to confront with the problem. This is not good behavior and it doesn't deserve any respect from people around us. Dishonesty, to me, is to lie in everything and to everyone including oneself, friends, family and society. Dishonesty

me, the position is not important; what is important is to work hard and earnestly. If we are satisfied with our work, then the customer is satisfied with our services and so is the boss. Learning to work in a team is vital to success and when we work in organizations, we need to learn to accept new things and transfer knowledge to other members of the Agency. By doing so, the organization will be more prosperous and members will share common interests.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

My core value is honesty. Although the honest words are hard

brings bad consequences for people and society and no one enjoys listening to those who do not follow their own words. Therefore, people who are not honest cannot be good leaders.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

I am not sure I am a good leader or successful person yet. To me, in order to socialize with people in society, we need try to understand other people and their problems, listen to them and reason in order to find appropriate solutions. We should share our knowledge with younger generations and, as much as we can, engage in social work for the common interests.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

Communication is a challenge for me because I am a quiet person, so I am less engaged or sociable. I forget people I have

met and I am not interested in the events attended by many people talking about businesses. This social networking makes me less engaged in society.

I have not yet addressed these challenges completely but I try to participate in events where I feel more confident and that I find more enjoyable, such as exhibitions, workshops, arts performances and so on. Through these activities, I am able to meet people with various backgrounds to whom I can talk about different topics.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

Of course, no country in the world has the same culture. In the region, Cambodia is a country of great civilizations, but we have also faced countless problems, especially the civil war, colonialism, and genocide. Because of these problems, people do not have much opportunity to learn and gain knowledge as

they are always busy seeking peace and finding food to eat.

Forty years after the Pol Pot regime, Cambodia has begun to recover in almost every sector. Due to the complicated internal affairs in the 1980s, ongoing civil wars left many people living in poverty. Therefore, very few families at that time could afford to send their children to school and the quality of education was very poor.

Currently, the country is stable and most people, especially the younger generation, have access to quality of education that enables them to contribute to social development. We have the strength and intelligence to take a leadership role in family and society toward a clear and successful goal.

To fully participate in national development, youth must participate in social activities, try to understand the economic and political situation of the country, participate in solving the community challenges and help other people in the society.

We start this excellent action from ourselves.

As the Khmer proverb says, "the bamboo shoot succeeds the bamboo." This proverb emphasizes the fact that Khmer people truly value and depend on youth. It can be estimated whether the country is prosperous by observing the quality of youth in the present day; if they are committed, knowledgeable and patriotic, they can succeed and lead the country to accomplish excellent goals.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

If you are now a youth, please spend your time wisely and usefully for your compatriots by using your intelligence and capacity to serve for common benefits. Never wait until you are old or for the right time because we cannot predict tomorrow. Instead, we must start something now that could bring about positive change.



Miss. Thaung Thyda

Director Thaung Enterprise



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

I was born into a farming family of divorced parents in Kampot province. It has been a bit of a struggle for me to fight for a better life but I was fortunate enough to pursue a master degree in public management. I have been involved in different sectors, such as education, real estate, and food & beverage. I am most proud of bringing Kampot salt to be recognized on both the national and international stage. For the first time in this industry to bring the name of Kampot salt to the international stage.

When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

I started my business project in early 2017. The challenges for us were:

- Capital and cash flow: we started with a very small budget from savings and a high-interest loan from the bank. Our expenses were more than our income; we had to push our sales more to survive.
- Emotional support: turning a family business into an enterprise with not-so-big structure was a challenge, but we tried to be a professional and standardized business. No one supported what I was doing as they believed that the traditional way of supplying salt (supplying raw material from the farm to consumer) was better than our way (focus on details from the raw material to cleaning, sorting, grading, and packaging the product).
- Market support: even though the salt industry has existed in Cambodia for more than a decade in modern times, and indeed since ancient times, the local people still have a mindset that is not yet so supportive of the local product. Plus they value the product less and offer it at a lower price.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

The best lesson I could share is passion and commitment.



Without passion and commitment, I could not be here today to stand for this business. I work with what I believe is right for the farmers/producers, consumers and the policymakers better value the local products. Love and commitment will bring you to where you want to be and help you achieve what you have planned.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

Our passion is to nurture health at all times. We take great pride in our natural resources. We strive for better community and a safer world.

Vision: We envision a future where policymakers, distributors and consumers understand and value the benefits of Kampot's natural salt.

Mission: Our primary purpose is to provide consumers with high-quality natural salts and derived products, and thereby contribute to their wellbeing.

Commitments: We contribute to the local community more than we take from them, and we commit to preserve the agro ecological equilibrium.

We are a local company which tries our best to apply our standards. We can't make sure everything is perfect at the

beginning; however, seeing our team is trying to adopt new ways of working and commit to what we have set in our values, which we always wish to keep consistently.

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What makes us different from other cultures is that we are poor but rich in heart to help each other

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

We are a social enterprise that works together with other farmers. For the team work, we work together as one family and respect each other's work and commitment. I believe leader selfishness has a negative impact on leadership. Some leaders try to manipulate people, try to control everything, and they believe they are perfect. Yet, this is not the reality. Leadership is more respectful when we are trying to understand and share with each other.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

There are no strategies to be a leader or influencer. I believe people all have the same equality in this world. Other people deserve something better in their life as what we have for our life as well; we all will always remember that the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

The biggest risk we have taken is jumping into the entrepreneur life. We committed to handling a lot of responsibility, regardless of whether this journey would become positive or negative in the future. Despite all of the challenges, anxiety, and stress, we could see it is worth fighting for what we believe is right.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

We have come out of civil war which made us start from zero

point. However, with a new perspective as a young generation, we see a lot of things in our country: a rich culture and history, natural resources, tourism, agriculture. What makes us different from other cultures is that we are poor but rich in heart to help each other. To learn from empty hands to make things better day by day.

Each generation (generation x, y, z) has a different perspective on being a leader. Being young leaders, we shall learn from previous generations' leadership styles. Young leaders are

more creative and equal to each other where they believe that world is the same and we are living in this world like in the same family and home.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

I believe the future of the country is in the young generation of Cambodians. We all need to strive hard to make things better as a quality human resource. The young generation is more

talented but they also need some motivation. However, being a Cambodian citizen, I hope to see this young generation do better than we are doing now, with their ethical ways and insightful passion. Be a quality human resource for this country, no matter which sector you are in. Make this country proud of you!



Mrs. Heang Omuoy

Founder CamSolution Technology



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

I am the President of Japanese Technology Institute, CEO of the digital and software company CamSolution Technology and also a Regional Advisor for Technovation Cambodia where I was the regional ambassador from 2016 to 2019.

I am the first of four children in my family. My father is a teacher and my mother is a housewife. As the oldest daughter in the family, I took on a lot of responsibility to support my parents and siblings. I went through so many hardships and struggles to live and pursue my education. Looking back at these challenges and experiences in life, they not only helped me to build who I am today, but also to see the value of compassion.

Education:

In 2010, I was selected as an underprivileged student to continue an associate degree at Passerelles Numériques Cambodia (PNC), majoring in web programming. After working for several years, I earned my master degree in Computer Science at the University of Puthisastra. I also joined many local and international professional programs such as Women's Economic Empowerment, organized by the Government of Korea, and Asia Leadership in Japan, and the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) in the United States on Entrepreneurs Bring Prosperity and Sustainability, where I was connected to and learned from many women leaders from around the world. Through these programs, I had a chance to learn about education at the University of Tokyo, and technology and business innovation at The University of Pittsburgh in the U.S.

Work

I started my career at ANZ Royal, now acquired by J Trust Royal Bank, where I learned about organizational skills, technical skills, and how international companies operate.

After that, I worked at an international life insurance company

where I had a chance to practice project coordination and working with co-workers around the globe at the company's subsidiaries and headquarters. I also traveled and attended many international business conferences. Working there gave me vast experience on how international businesses operate, and I started to learn how people in different departments work together, as I supported sales, marketing, HR, legal and compliance, operations, finance and other departments. I cannot fully describe what I learned there, in both technical and soft skills. When I was working there, I was still in the third year of my bachelor degree under a scholarship program from D.K. KIM, a Korean foundation for education.

I am grateful to those who have supported me and given me such a great chance. I am truly blessed and feel happy and at peace to be surrounded by my team, partners, mentors, advisors, supporters, friends, and family. With almost 10 years of experience in tech, I have been involved a lot in community work. Moreover, together with the team, we created history in empowering women in tech entrepreneurship through many programs, both local and international, such as Technovation- the global technology entrepreneurs for girls around the world.

For three years, we trained more than 2000 girls in the country about technology and entrepreneurship and equipped them with 21st century skills, technology skills, building the spirit of

being a real entrepreneur and adopting a better community mindset. These girls became problem solvers through the Technovation program in Cambodia. They have been featured by international and local media and impressed the global community, and they have shown that Cambodian girls are capable and as competitive in problem solving and innovation as other students in the developed world. We had a lot of remarkable achievements not only within organizations, but also directly and indirectly to our country as a whole by holding Cambodia's flag as the second world champion in the U.S.

At CamSolution Technology, I lead the company from having only one employee to 21 employees at the moment, securing partnerships with various international partners; this is also one of our company achievements. As a president at the Japanese Technology Institute, I work with a team to create more human resources in technology in Cambodia through cooperation between Japanese and Cambodia. I have received local and international awards and recognitions, such as the Global Regional Ambassador Award from Technovation in 2018, the Women ITC award from the Ministry of Telecom and Post of Cambodia, and the Excellent Leadership Award of Asia.

I am always satisfied with the results from the team I work with, and even more satisfied and amazed when my team becomes my successor to sustain and grow what we have built as an organization. For example, the successful delegation to the next National Ambassador of Technovation Cambodia, where the new team can lead and manage it independently. All the achievements and credit belong to my teams, partners, supporters and family. I am grateful to these people. I could not be myself today without them.

When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

I started my first career in 2012 at ANZ Royal when I was in my second year of university. I was the only undergraduate who was selected to join a project in the automation department. As part of this project, I consulted with senior department



leaders to listen to their challenges when working through manual processes in order to provide them with a technological solution. As a junior staff member who only had soft and technology skills with no business experience, I went through a very difficult time trying to earn trust from senior people. I wasn't able to work smoothly for the first three months.

As a fast learner with strong commitment, I was determined to bring great results, believing that actions always speak louder than words. I decided not to give up. By being humble and always learning and improving with support from people around me, I built good relationships with the people I worked with.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

I have gained many significant life lessons from working in various organizations, both private and community. And I would like to express some important points as follows:

- Whatever we do, we need to focus on impact on people and country. This will make us enjoy the journey and never give up, and we will automatically see positive results.
- Cooperation is better than competition. People should collaborate and build up others as every individual has their own uniqueness which we can complement.
- As a human being, you need to not only take care of your beauty at the first look but also your interior and kindness.
- I have always done my best in everything I do, and I am happy with the results. Also, I keep learning and improving. Beside work, I have also learned to regularly reflect to better myself.
- Another important thing is empowering people to get the best out of the team. Plus, provide a safe environment for people to share their opinions; this will produce the best results.
- We cannot find work-life balance, but work-life harmony.
- People are considered strong when they have the ability to forgive and are full of compassion, wisdom, empathy, and resilience. A strong person does not have aggressive attributes and behavior.
- A good person always starts by being good to families, people, their team and the public.
- Always be a better version of myself from day to day.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

I was born with the values of being honest, treating people equally, and having integrity and virtue. Being grateful to people and giving back, and seeing the positive in people and thinking positively; these allow me to smile a lot. Additionally, expressing the right idea at only the right time and to the right person. Be good not only in thoughts but also in words and actions.

Be humble, keep learning and improving, and forgiving people are with me from the beginning. Instead of competing, I love

collaborating and cooperating to execute and accomplish excellent results.

Focus on the real value of our work and the true impact rather than how people look at it.

When I get one opportunity, I will give back to a thousand people. Ensure that the team is aligned to lead by example and practice.

Leading by example is one of my principles. It became a significant key to make my team align their values, feel the truth, and put their commitment and dedication towards the journey together.

Sharing and inspiring people does not work by only speaking, but by showing consistency and persistence through actions.

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Cooperation is better than competition. People should collaborate and build up others as every individual has their own uniqueness which we can complement

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

As a leader and as people, we should not be selfish, which will never get people together to achieve the main goal. Moreover, there are some attitudes and behaviors that leaders shouldn't exhibit:

- Impatience
- Lack of discipline
- Not being punctual
- Making judgment with negative thinking
- Ungrateful
- Not having integrity
- Lack of commitment
- Uncertain planning, vision and mission
- Nepotism



- Blaming others first
- Leading by power not by humanity
- Lacking empathy and compassion
- Lack of bravery
- Bad attitude

It is great if you are born in a good environment, so you have a positive mindset. However, for those who have a different state of mind and experience, please keep learning and improving. As long as you never give up, you will get what you wish for.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

Being an influential leader, you need to lead by heart and true team spirit. You can start from leading yourself to be a good individual and being good to your family and friends. As a leader, you obviously need people to work together, so you need to like people and integrate with them well. A good leader is one who has the capacity to maximize people's potential to work together to achieve a group's objective. You obviously need good team members.

Achieving a lot of remarkable results with different organizations that I have worked with is not by chance but proper planning and strategies with great people. Being a leader by nature I have sacrificed a lot and we need to be with the team, especially in their hard times.

Making the team feel that they belong to and have ownership of the journey we are on together is very important. I provide my full support for my team's needs and particularly encourage them to take initiative and start leading in small ways. Everything I do is for everyone's benefit and the team can feel it when I practice what I say.

The team is always clear on our vision, mission and values, and this is also one of our keys to success. We do not have a blaming culture, but always learn and improve together. I always present all the achievements to my teams and they deserve them. I never want to be the boss or superstar. I have been practicing enabling a growth environment for people to experience challenging things. Teams will experience great things that I went through; they will fly to wherever I have been, is the mindset I have.

Working as an individual is sometimes hard; however, leading people to work well is even harder. However, it is a must for good leaders to create other leaders to sustain our organizations to grow well and last long.

In conclusion, I have been doing these kinds of things because I lead my teams by heart and spirit and coach everyone to be a good leader. I am always grateful for all their cooperation for the benefit of our people and country.

There are some principles from our team achievement.

Here is a key to remember: K.N.O.W.L.E.D.G.E.

- Know yourself
- Never give up
- Open mind
- Willingness
- Lifetime journey
- Exercise (stay healthy, both body & mind)
- Do your best
- Growth
- Enable a growing environment

These are some characteristics of leaders which everyone can display:

- Pessimist – all difficulties; Optimist – all opportunities
- Approachable
- High emotional intelligence lets people feel at ease
- Highly productive with relaxed mindset
- Sense of humor
- Very caring; knows other's difficulties and is proactive in helping
- A visionary, a teacher, a networker, a person who inspires everyone
- Has integrity and is trustworthy; no favoritism or nepotism
- A strategist, a decision maker, an enabler and motivator; can best use people's strength
- A people person, always says "thank you" when done
- A team builder
- A consultant, a conflict mediator and "de-stressor"
- Always ready to give recognition to people
- "Can do" attitude
- Confident, fearless

A pessimist sees everything as difficulties; an optimist sees everything as opportunities.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

Leaving a secure and well-paid job in an international company to run my own company without getting any investment was the biggest risk of my career, but I believe if I am strong and good enough I should be able to make profit for my team and my own salary. I am committed and always look for the positive side.

After learning from my past working experiences, I started as a salesperson to secure projects and get a team on board to execute work. We faced a lot of challenges and went through critical situations. With attribute of never giving up and always learn and improve from day to day, we can presently see ourselves become more financially sustainable and being recognized more and more in high quality of software solutions with real value of customers including good relationship.

Today, our Camsolution Technology provides jobs to 21

people, and we plan to hire 50 people in 2020. We have also invested in other tech companies and partnered with international companies to empower people in Cambodia and help small and medium-sized businesses to sustain and scale up their operations through our digital technology. I am grateful to all Camsolution teammates, customers, partners and advisors for their support and trust.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

Cambodia is open to international collaboration which benefits citizens. Both men and women are encouraged and supported in the same ways and have equal opportunities for education and public policy involvement. Most Cambodians are friendly, caring, humble, honest, respectful and hardworking, which enables a successful journey and cooperation.

Cambodia could benefit a lot from its young population. Youth will become a powerful resource for improving the country if they are well educated, equipped with 21st century skills, and have a growth mindset. To make youth leadership thrive, we should share best practices to all youth equally, and mentor and coach them in the right

way. Being a model is very important. We should give opportunities to youth in different sectors and let them explore their talents and follow their passions with our support.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

- To achieve big things, we need to collaborate with various people with different mindsets and experiences. To get a lot of people working together well requires a good leader.
- A great leader begins by being a great supporter of people.
- People get distracted by social media. I strongly suggest people stay focused on what you are doing. Keep learning to improve yourself and your results from day to day.
- Please remember you are not only a child of your family and Cambodia, but also the globe. Keep reflecting on why your presence in an organization is valuable, why your present on earth counts. Once you feel it, you will be able to do something different for positive change.
- Please commit to doing the best and bring great results no matter how big or small the job is, and making things great will become a habit.



Miss. Keo Kounila

Managing Partner
Mekhala Radiant Communications



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

My name is Kounila Keo, and my readers call me @Kounila. And the online world knows me as #blueladyblog. I hold a master degree in public policy from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore.

From 2006 to 2010, I studied media and communication with minors in news writing, multimedia production (video, audio, and photography), mass communication, public relations, and advertising. When I was 18 years old, I became a freelance reporter for Agence France Presse and a freelance writer for the Phnom Penh Post, one of the most-read English news publications in Phnom Penh. Simultaneously, I also freelanced for other foreign publications. Between 2008 and 2014, I worked as a stringer and freelance reporter for various foreign news publications such as Agence France Presse, Los Angeles Times, IRIN UN News Agency, the Independent UK, CSMonitor, the Phnom Penh Post, Asia360s (Magazine), Global Voices Online, and more.

I have trained on social media and given speeches to university students, artists, and professionals inside and outside Cambodia since 2008. In October 2011, I was one of the 10 UNESCO bloggers selected from a pool of nearly 600 applicants to cover the Paris UNESCO Youth Forum. I was invited to be a social media trainer for Seliger Youth Forum in Russia in 2012 and later worked again for the same conference in 2013. I sent a team, three people from India, one from Mexico, one from Vietnam, and one from Nepal, to cover the conference.

In 2009, I helped a team co-found a film youth collective, Kon Khmer Koun Khmer or Khmer Films Khmer Generations that produces short films and organizes widely reported film events and exhibitions, plus an annual film camp and film contest (Chaktomouk Film Contest).

I like organizing digital community events. I was the lead organizer for BlogFestAsia 2012, attended by 200 participants,



Photo by Chuop Sereyroth

80 of whom were from 10 other countries. As one of the first speakers of the first-ever TEDxPhnomPenh 2011, I later helped organize the event.

My passions are social media, youth empowerment, writing, travelling, and now policy analysis. I have travelled to South America, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia to cover events as a blogger and a journalist since 2009. I try to make time to write about my musings, to travel to places, and to review restaurants, hotels, and interesting destinations in my free time on the When in Phnom Penh blog.

Back in 2017, I was named one of the Forbes 30 Under 30 in the

category of media, communications and advertising from Cambodia. Currently I'm running a communications agency called Mekhala Radiant Communications, which was set up in early 2020 in order to provide public relations and communications services to private companies, non-governmental organizations and government agencies.

When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

When I first started my career, I faced several challenges related to gender and social stereotypes, as I was one of the very few female journalists and one of the youngest people in

the male-dominated field. Later on, I tried to overcome obstacles at workplaces as well as in society by speaking out via my blog on issues that I believe would benefit others. Changing society's mindset towards women who value professional careers is a life-long journey, and to me, leading by example was my starting point and exactly what has let me to this place where I can use my voice to help myself and others in the process.

Another challenge was the perception about journalism as a career because back then it was considered a risky and low-paid job. Many, including me, were in it for love of the job and believed that we could do our part by reporting to the public who could then use the information and news to make the best decisions for themselves.

My career in journalism has led me to running a communications company and helping young people here. As I never planned to set up a business, my journey to running a business was not easy at the beginning. I had to force myself to read up on a lot of new things and speak to a lot of people to understand how my own business should be run. Facing enormous competition is a daily challenge, but my strong belief in myself and in my team has helped me come this far.

“As a leader anywhere, it is important to keep one's mind open to ideas and criticism because you will only learn about any topic or idea deeply when you listen well

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

Some of the most valuable lessons that I've learned in my career are that when you do not tell your own stories, others will, and you want your authentic voice to be heard by people. Therefore, it is essential for you to grab the opportunity when you can to speak about what matters. Furthermore, leadership can truly be learned and taught to others, though it might take time. No one was born perfect and equipped to run a business or lead people; therefore, live and learn.

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

Some of my core values include integrity, agility and empathy. These three things need to come together because when my team and I share these same core values, we can move forward together and ensure that nobody will be left behind. And, whenever I find new team members to join me, I always look for these qualities in them.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

In my opinion, there are roughly four types of behaviors or traits that I think are negatively impacting leadership. One of them is the false thought that you're always better than or superior to others. Another is not listening enough. As a trained journalist, I found how useful it was to listen more than just speak at all times. I tend to have a good grasp of issues or situations when I listen more and come up with solutions. Another trait which I think negatively impacts leadership in general is the lack of integrity, which is the most valuable and respected quality of leadership. When we do business, we need to always strive to keep our word. Matters become worse when we lack moral integrity. Our employees and people look to leaders for examples of what exactly is acceptable behavior. So, when a leader is engaging in any sort of unethical behavior, staff too will learn to engage in such behaviors, causing a lack of moral integrity in the entire institution.

Last but not least, lack of accountability negatively affects leadership. I reckon that the best leaders I have seen are those that take responsibility when things go wrong and give credit to others (such as employees and subordinates) when things go right. I too was an employee, and I wanted to be given due credit when I achieved something or did well in something, and obviously did not want to be thrown under the bus when things went wrong. I have also seen a few leaders that are unwilling to shoulder the responsibility and instead deflect blame on others. This type of behavior will not motivate any workforce to succeed.

As a leader anywhere, it is important to keep one's mind open to ideas and criticism because you will only learn about any topic or idea deeply when you listen well.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

Indeed, there are plenty of resources out there that will help you become a successful leader or influencer, but the first question that comes to my mind is: am I a successful leader? Am I a successful influencer?

I think I am one of those people that think that the size of our success cannot be measured by the strength of our desires and dreams, with our ability to handle heartbreak and disappointment along the way. Success cannot totally be measured by money, power or social rank; it should be measured by our discipline and inner peace. If leaders continue to facilitate open communication, encourage employees' and followers' growth and success and set team goals, this, too, will create many successful leaders and influencers in business or any other spheres.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

I started with a male-dominated career (journalism), and as tough as it may have been, it has taught me to appreciate the learning process and patience I developed as one of the few female journalists in the field. I might not call them risks, but I have had opportunities to serve in difficult moments while covering stories in pretty unsafe places and under immense pressure.

While I was taught to be like everyone else in society, I decided to take a different path. Some of the biggest risks I have taken in my career include: not accepting the status quo, believing my gut, and believing that I can be different and that it is okay to be unlike everyone else.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

What makes the Cambodian culture unique is that we love to give support in building up our next generations and sharing with them practical experiences. The young value wisdom from elders. Despite many challenges, when we have a type of nurturing culture, we generally can overcome those challenges

and our youth leadership will slowly grow from there. Moreover, Cambodians' general traits from our religion (Theravada Buddhism) encourage practices of compassion, gentleness and respect among people.

Also, if in today's world, we do not give a chance to our young people, who will?

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

My advice for Cambodia's young generation is below:

- First and foremost, do not accept the status quo
- Do not be afraid to seek help when you do not know
- There is no shortcut to success and happiness, and as we are all living in this world together, it is better that we continue to share
- Live and learn
- Listen more and train your mind to be solution-oriented



Mr. Sok Sopheakmonkol

Co-founder and CEO
Codingate Technology



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG
LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

I am a co-founder and the CEO of Codingate Technology. I am also the recipient of the Cambodian Young Entrepreneur Smart Technology Award 2016, Forbes 30 under 30 Asia 2017, ASEAN Best Founder of the Year 2017, ASEAN-India Young Leader of the Year 2018, and recently the Global Startup Founder Award 2019.

I am the youngest child in a small family in Angkor City, Siem Reap, Cambodia. My dream is to modernize Cambodia's educational system by developing new methods of learning through hands-on experience where youth develop passion and find inspiration to become tech leaders. My personal mission is to put good educational principles into practice so that Cambodian youth will find greater happiness and a higher quality of life. This dream has led me to an in-depth understanding that being rooted in truth, knowledge, and happiness are the foundation to my philosophy.

The achievement I am most proud of is Codingate. It is the first business that I established in my twenties, and it's been operating for 7 years now. Codingate is the 2017 ASEAN ICT Award Winner and a leading technology development company in Cambodia. It has made significant change in the technology field in Cambodia. This company has led and helped businesses with over 200 projects and created jobs for more than 250 people. In addition, I have provided technology, entrepreneurship and leadership lectures on behalf of Codingate to millions of people both online and at public events.

Codingate has received recognition both inside and outside of Cambodia, and awards and prizes from different regions of the globe. It is delightful to witness businesses in Cambodia transformed from traditional to digital through the e-commerce platform that we created.

When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

When we first started in 2013, the most significant challenge was human resources (skills and ability) in technology fields in Cambodia, followed by the market, as most Cambodians did not have a broad understanding of technology; thus, they resisted adopting new business practices in favor of traditional ones. The third biggest challenge was trust. Cambodians had no faith in technology back then, yet Codingate overcame all the mentioned challenges nonetheless. We're grateful to have encountered these obstacles because they made us stronger, richer with experience, and interesting.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

The greatest, most valuable lesson I have learned in my career is leadership and people skills.

As a leader I have to have high expectations. I have to be visible so my team will feel that I care for them. Simple things such as walking around to ask how things are and what I can do to make their day better.

As a leader, I delegate based on skill and time. I delegate all the time and not just when I need to. It has become our practice now; it is a practice for myself and a practice for my team.

As a leader, I focus on all stakeholders, on anything that is beneficial

to our customers, to society, to the growth of my team, and to our partners.

As a leader, I empower my team in the field of technology so they'll have the ability to help businesses utilize tech to grow and make an impact. This is very challenging because our teams must learn everything about our clients' businesses, every department and function. Basically, we have transformed our IT team into a business-plus-tech team. From the perspective of a business owner, we have to have almost as much business-related knowledge as knowledge of technology in order to deliver a high-quality and relevant tech solution for their businesses. We have completed over 200 projects in various business categories. This experience has taught us so much that it makes us one of the leading tech companies. With a deep understanding of a particular business, the solutions that we create for customers definitely supports their companies' missions and visions.

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As a leader, I empower my team in the field of technology so they'll have the ability to help businesses utilize tech to grow and make an impact

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

Value alignment is highly crucial for the company's success. We follow our four core values: Goal, Agility, Technology, and Excellence (GATE).



Goal: when it comes to goals, we typically look to SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely) goals to help us focus our effort and thus, increase the chances of achieving the goal.

Agility: as a tech company in today's uncertain and ambiguous markets, we need to move fast. We need speed, responsiveness, and nimbleness. Adapt quickly and drive benefits from the change.

Technology: we innovate and use cutting-edge technology that enables us and our partners to stay relevant in the market.

Excellence: we aim to be a leading pro-client company and to deliver the best solutions and best products with unquestionable quality.

These core values are the criteria for us to recruit and work together with clients.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Some of the traits that I think have negative influences on leadership are:

1. Micromanagement: this is bad because it makes the employees feel useless. As I mentioned earlier, I delegate a lot, which has become our culture. I would never micromanage my employees.
2. Miscommunication: this is a tricky task. Too much communication is a waste of everyone's time and it causes people stress. Too little communication leads to uncertainty about issues, problems, and the solutions. Therefore, it takes a little creativity as a leader to know the right amount of communication for everyone's efficiency and comfort.
3. Trust issues: with a doubtful mind, a team will face loads of conflicts and struggle. At Codingate, once we decide to have a person on our team, we treat them like our family. We give them every reason to believe wholeheartedly. At Codingate, everyone is self-directed; everyone is a leader of themselves. Hence, everyone is equal. This is how we overcome trust issues among the team.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

The strategies applied at Codingate that I think other leaders can adopt are:

1. Empowerment: we empower our team with the necessary knowledge and skills so that they have the confidence to execute the tasks planned and assigned. We approach this in the way a magnetized metal works. If a metal is magnetized, it

will lift other metals several times its weight. But if you demagnetize it, it won't lift even a metal as light as a feather. It's the same thing here.

2. We honor, respect, care for, protect, and reward our employees regardless of title or position. In turn, they will treat each other and their external customers in a warm and caring way.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

The biggest risk was that I chose not to diversify my business. I dedicated 100% of my time and effort into one business, Codingate. This was challenging. And Codingate has had many downturns and many risks, but it seemed to pay off, because it made Codingate stand where it is presently. The outcome would have been different had we not invested 100% into it in the first place.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

The primary thing that makes Cambodia unique is its demography. Cambodia has had a big shift in its social structure from

era to era. We had the French colonization era, the Khmer Rouge, and post-Khmer Rouge, and more. Based on my observation, because so many things have happened, and there have been so many changes in politics and social structure in a short period of time, we are now living in a society where people born in different eras have different personalities, education, and mindsets. This is what is extremely unique about our country, and it's a great opportunity for young people who were born in the 1990s and 2000s to observe and learn how the past—the war, the colonization, and the reformation—have shaped people. The younger generations can then learn to be flexible in communication, learn to read people and read quickly too in order to know what persona to adopt during conversations, to make the most out of the communication, and to avoid conflict.

Another unique aspect of our culture is the fact that people can adapt to market changes at an impressively fast pace. Although Cambodians do not have good livelihoods, modern social structures or possessions, they work so hard and they strive to learn and teach themselves new things through digital and social media, in order to catch up with the world.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

I would love to advise Cambodia's new generations of the following things:

Know yourself and know your passion. Whatever it is that you're doing, do it with your passion. Also, it's important that you do not approach business just for the sake of money. You should understand the value of what you're doing, and how your business can contribute to building and helping our society.

Learn technology and master it if possible. If tech is not your cup of tea, then you do not have to be a master at it. Just learn about it enough to be able to use it in your work, because digitalization is becoming more efficient, more trendy, and more important.

Believe in the art of sharing. Share your story to empower people around you to become better and better in their day-to-day life, to communicate well, and to be leaders of themselves; in other words, to be self-directed.



Miss. Lim Kimsor

Land and Environmental Rights Defender



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

My name is Lim Kimsor. I am a land and environmental rights defender. In 2009, my community was forced to leave our land and relocate, and I decided not to continue my university because of the city development plans. I began engaging in activism and in 2013 I started coordinating a women's network in several communities affected by destructive development, first independently and then as a member of the activist network Mother Nature Cambodia, to advocate and fight against land-grabbing and to defend environmental rights.

When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

The first challenge I have faced a lot is with my family because they don't want me to do this work. Finances are also a big problem for me, but I never give up, and in 2013, 2014 and 2015 I successfully supported the communities in the Areng Valley to stop a dam that threatened their environment. The dam's reservoir would have flooded more than ten thousand hectares of land and forests belonging to the indigenous Chong people.

In the past two years, I have also advocated against sand mining in fishing communities, and made videos demanding that relevant government agencies explain irregularities behind ongoing exports of sand out of Cambodia. I have organized meetings with local people affected by this industry and together with them develop strategies to stop sand mining.

In July 2017, the Cambodian government banned sand exports, primarily because of the effective advocacy of groups like Mother Nature Cambodia, who first exposed the huge gap in export versus import figures of sand between Cambodia and importing countries in the region. However, I and other activists have reported that sand continues to be dragged despite the ban. I also support local women in communities affected by sand mining, by inviting them to talk in radio



shows, press conferences, etc. Their presence in the media is an opportunity to complain about the government's lack of attention to their basic needs, such as education and welfare, as well as the loss of livelihood because of sand mining.

I have also worked with women from other places in the coastal region of Koh Kong and other parts of Cambodia, organizing exchange trips to share experiences and ideas. Following these exchange trips, I am now creating a network of women activists within Cambodia.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

In my life I have seen the drastic changes my country has gone through. I have seen my country subjugate itself to foreign companies that take our natural resources and land. With plentiful minerals, a large supply of water—my country has conceded to outsiders and enforced unjust land evictions upon many Cambodians. I myself was one of them. With no power to fight against this, I was forced to leave my university. Three years after my eviction, I dropped out of university, and I was jobless and without a home.

However, I found purpose. I decided to do societal work to educate people about their rights, why justice should be sought, and why the land of Cambodia is important. Natural

resources and land are life to Cambodians! This is why I decided to work for the community. It is very hard work, but I never give up. I learned how to organize workshops and how to campaign and protest. I learned how to live as an indigenous person. I learned how to lead meetings with young people and communicate with all people and NGOs related to the issue that I am working for. I also learned how to work without violence, and how to keep calm and smile after long sadness about land-grabbing issues. I traveled to many countries and learned a lot from many leaders from different countries and sectors.

“Dare to speak the truth

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

I really appreciate all the environmental and human rights activists who work for poor people and victims. My team and I work from our heart, we hold our loyalty, value each other and everyone's life. Everyone has the same rights. We are clear with our reports and we never lie.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

Communication is very important for me so I always keep in touch with all the people. I never say no when villagers or people ask me to help, I try my best to help them. Sometimes I'm not happy with the authorities and people from companies but I must smile at them. I try to talk to them even if they don't want to talk to me. I say hello to all the people and answer all the questions from journalists, and also share my experiences with young people when I have time. As a woman, it is difficult to be a leader because some of the men do not accept women's ideas.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

As I mentioned, I attend workshops and conferences to share my experiences with the young generation. I try to find a way to support them if they want to be an environmental or human rights activist, and I provide training on how to be a good leader every three months. I show my face on video talking about issues and corruption in Cambodia, which gives them confidence that they can do this too. They must work from their heart with honesty and transparency, clear work, and never give up.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

I am a woman who always drives my moto alone to the village, which is not safe, but I have no choice; I must go to the village to organize meetings and workshops. I have had traffic accidents so many times.

Because of my work, I have received threats from private companies and state authorities. I have also been detained for several hours, when I was advocating for the release of environmental activists in Koh Kong Province. I have been repeatedly harassed by government figures, and am still under considerable threat of immediate arrest as a result of my work.

As a woman I still feel threatened and affected by traditional beliefs that women cannot travel far away from home. My family is worried about my safety, so they always try to force

me to stop my work. So in addition to fighting with powerful people or companies, I have to advocate to get freedom from my family too. All these issues sometimes make me stressed, so I have to relax sometimes. When I take a break, the job will crash.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

Cambodia can change if the government changes policies, stops corruption, and gives young people opportunities to share their ideas and skills. Education in the country is weak and not modern so the education policy should be changed. However young people must study hard themselves, not only follow the education policy.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

Education is very important. The young generation must learn about the story of their country and what is new, and they should not only learn in school but also outside of it. They should know about the situation happening in their country and how to analyze what is right and wrong. They should monitor government activities and not be scared to share their ideas to the government. Dare to speak the truth.



Mr. Sar Mory

Co-founder and Former Vice-President
Cambodian Youth Network and
Human Rights and Environmental Defender



CAMBODIA'S YOUNG LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Give a short introduction about your life (family, education, marital status). What achievements are you most proud of?

My name is Sar Mory. I am 30 years old and I was born in a farming family in Prey Chhor district, Kampong Cham province. I am a human rights and environmental defender. I hold a bachelor degree in law from Royal University of Law and Economics and a master degree in International Human Rights law from Pannasastra University of Cambodia.

One of my proudest achievements was co-founding the Cambodian Youth Network, which plays a critical role in promoting youth participation and community engagement in human rights and environment rights in Cambodia. In my leadership role, I have coordinated a number of high-profile youth campaigns and public forums on environmental issues where youth can raise their voices to influence decision makers and development agendas. I have also trained hundreds of university students, youth activists and community members on environmental rights, human rights and activism skills to improve their skills and confidence in advocating for human rights, the environment and social justice. Moreover, I also frequently comment in the media about human rights violations and environmental issues such as deforestation and hydropower dam development.

When you first started your career, what were your most significant challenges?

I started to engage in social activism in 2009 when I met the other co-founders of the Cambodian Youth Network (CYN). After that, I decided to join my friends who are passionate about youth engagement and social change to establish Cambodian Youth Network in October 2009. In the decade I have worked at the Cambodian Youth Network, I have encountered both internal and external challenges.

For the internal challenges, as a founding member, it was difficult to establish a functional organization. All the co-founders worked as volunteers without income or support for almost four year.



In early 2013, some co-founders left the organization for other opportunities, and we almost decided to dissolve Cambodian Youth Network at that time. In that difficult situation, the other two remaining founders and I despaired before the Cambodian Youth Network received support for its operations beginning in mid-2013. Because I became a leader at such a young age; hence when I first started the organization, we lacked both knowledge/skills and experience in organizational leadership development, so we faced difficulties in building trust, receiving recognition and mobilizing support from stakeholders.

For external challenges, like other human rights activists and

environmental defenders, I frequently face intimidation and restriction from the authorities when organizing training and advocacy events related to human rights and forest issues, particularly public campaigns and rallies in Phnom Penh. This sometimes affects our spirits and discourages activism.

Over the years, what valuable lessons have you learned in your career?

Throughout my career, I have learned some valuable lessons which have significantly contributed to my professional and personal development. The first lesson I have learned is to prioritize communication and networking with others in both

personal and organizational relations. Whether it is youth, professional colleagues, journalists, development partners, or friends, etc. In each relationship, you can earn trust, recognition and support for your work.

The second lesson I have learned is self-discipline and professionalism, and this lesson is critical in contributing to the success and productiveness of my work. Moreover, it also demonstrates our value and responsibility to our work as well.

The third lesson is there is no substitution for hard work, and I believe that no success or achievement can be made without effort and dedication. Personally, for the work that I am responsible for, I focus on the outcome, regardless of how much time and energy I spend on a particular thing. Frankly, I value the details of work. No matter how small or big the task, I try to be as accurate as possible. This is what I value in my professional work, and I am satisfied with what I have achieved.

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Cambodian youth should set a clear vision for themselves and their society because vision is vital for them to reach their dreams and create the Cambodian society they want

What are your core values and how do you ensure your team is aligned with your values?

Through self-awareness, I have realized I have four main core values: Trustworthiness, social contribution, environmentalism, and learning and sharing.

First, I believe that I am a trustworthy person who demonstrates reliability, confidentiality, virtue and responsibility. I understand that trust is not something people can earn rapidly; it is gained over a period of time by our actions. Second, social contribution is the catalyst of sustainable growth and development, and it has inspired me to be an active citizen who is passionate for youth engagement, volunteering and community development. Third, environmentalism is a core value associated with my environmental activism, which seeks to influence policy reform and speak out about the sustainable management of natural resources. The environment is a core part of people's lives, and the wellbeing of humans cannot be separated from the right to a clean and healthy environment. Lastly, learning and sharing are important for me because to learn is to grow and develop our knowledge and skills. The more we gain knowledge and skills the more we can help ourselves, our community and society. Sharing knowledge is also critical and something I always enjoy because it contributes to growth at both individual and organizational levels.

As a Vice-President of Cambodian Youth Network, to ensure my colleagues are aligned with my values, I need to understand my values and model them to the team members through actions and practices. In addition, we have to communicate with team members in order to understand the correlation and alignment between individual and organization core values.

What are some of the behaviors or traits that you think are negatively impacting leadership?

I think that some of the behaviors that negatively impact leadership are impatience, defensiveness, an inability to compromise, and a lack of motivation. I believe that all these behaviors have a negative impact on leadership. For instance, a leader should be a good listener and open to both negative and positive criticism from team members, because it helps the leader address the problems and challenges. Moreover, team members always have different views, so compromising is crucial to addressing the problem and reaching a collective decision.

What are your strategies to inspire/motivate others to become successful leaders and influencers like you?

I think that youth should set their own vision of tomorrow for their community and society. Having a clear vision is very important to show them a pathway for the future, as it inspires youth toward their dream to make Cambodian society what they want it to be. We should acknowledge that being a leader takes hard work and dedication to the cause, because the

leader has to play a key role in serving and supporting the team members to achieve both personal and common goals.

In addition, building trust and creating core values among team members is important and necessary. A competent leader has sufficient information and people skills because all these skills can help them to work more effectively with team members, and it can be used to address the challenges that a leader encounters.

What are some of the biggest risks you have taken in your career and how did they turn out?

The harassment and threats towards environmental defenders and youth environmental activists is the greatest challenge I have encountered. For instance, when I joined the forest patrol and forest crime investigation, the community members and I faced the loggers or people who were involved in the timber trade at the local level.

Further, I also represent my organization, Cambodian Youth Network, which plays a key role in coordinating and supporting youth campaigns such as World Environment Day and other environment-related events. We often choose to celebrate those events in public rallies or by marching to the relevant state institutions, such as the National Assembly and the Ministry of Environment, to deliver statements or petitions and call for intervention from those institutions. We believe that public campaigns or events can influence decision makers to address the problem. However, all these events were restricted and under scrutiny by the authorities.

Recently, I also faced cyber harassment from fake Facebook accounts when I expressed my views regarding environmental issues. I always speak up about the human rights abuses and natural resources exploitation in the media, and sometimes I feel that I take risks by giving critical comments on these issues.

Nevertheless, because I have a clear understanding of what I am doing and the rights guaranteed by the laws, I have never thought of quitting my activism work. Instead, I always bear in mind that if we do not contribute to the protection of our natural resources and the great remaining rainforests in the country, they will continue to be destroyed without transparency and sustainability.

What makes the Cambodian culture unique and how do you think Cambodian youth leadership can thrive?

Cambodian people have a history and culture of struggling and enduring difficult times for many generations, during both the colonial and civil war periods. This reflects that Cambodians have the enduring culture of both political and livelihood struggle in a hardship and the young generation can take as a lesson learnt for the present and the future.

Further, the culture of sharing and helping each other in the rural communities and areas is also unique to Cambodian culture. Even though the recent history of the Khmer Rouge regime and civil wars nearly wiped out these cultures, it is still strong in rural areas. For instance, local people still participate in traditional and cultural ceremonies (village ceremony or Pkasamaki ceremony), and the ceremony as such linked people to care about the collective interest in their community. As another example, rural people still assist each other in farming and livelihood activities.

If Cambodian youth believe that it is a good culture for their society, they can unite to give new life to and expand the culture of sharing and helping each other into a sense of moral responsibility through social contribution to national development as a whole.

What advice do you have for the young generation of Cambodians?

Based on my experiences, I have some advice to share with young Cambodians. As I have mentioned above, I think that Cambodian youth should set a clear vision for themselves and their society because vision is vital for them to reach their dreams and create the Cambodia society they want. When they work, whether on small or big tasks, and as volunteers or in paid positions, they should perform their job with love and responsibility.

The world keeps changing; therefore, youth should continue learning and developing their skills and capacity in order to adapt. The more we learn, the more we can contribute to developing society.

Last but not least, I believe that social contributions are crucial in every society; therefore, the contribution of knowledge to other and younger generations should be a duty that Khmer youth do together for a better Cambodia.

