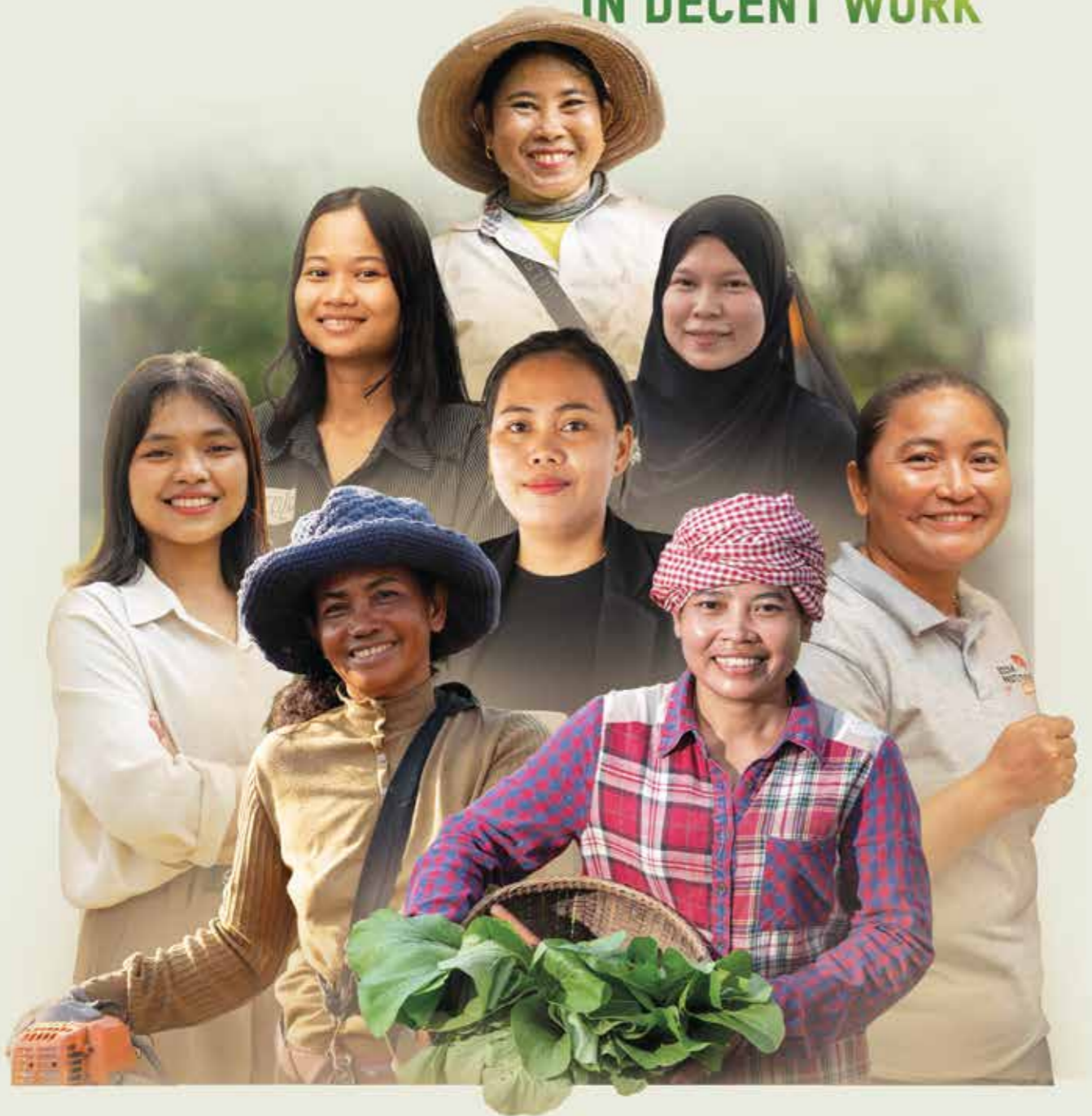


# FROM RIGHTS TO REALITY: WOMEN LEADERS IN DECENT WORK



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## FORWARD

Before the food reaches our tables, countless women have already spent long hours in fields, markets, kitchens, and small businesses to make it possible. They grow, prepare, sell, and serve the food that sustain families and nourish our communities. Yet much of this work remains unseen.

Their work is often physically and emotionally demanding. It involves long hours, vulnerable and unsafe working conditions, unstable incomes, and the constant balancing of paid work with caring for children, elders, their households and communities. Many do this work in environments where their rights are not understood, inconsistently protected, or not respected at all.

Yet, beyond these challenges lies something profoundly powerful.

The images in this book reveal the determination, resilience and quiet leadership that women bring to their workplace and to the people around them. They show women who persevere, adapt, and continually strive to improve their lives. Their motivation is more than personal. It comes from pride, resilience, and deep care for their families and communities.

These women are not only workers. They are caregivers, leaders, organizers, and community builders. They lift one another up, share knowledge, and inspire each other. They guide fellow colleagues who are just beginning their journeys, create spaces where questions can be asked, and where others feel encouraged to speak up. Through these acts of solidarity, they are quietly transforming workplaces and communities around them making them safer, fairer, and more dignified.

Every image in this collection tells a story of strength, compassion, and the power of women standing together. This photobook is therefore both a recognition of their contributions and a tribute to all women working across the agri-food sector. It is a privilege for Oxfam to walk alongside them and support their efforts to build stronger and more informed communities.

As you turn these pages, we invite you to look closely. You may recognize someone familiar, a vendor in your neighbourhood market, a worker serving meals in a restaurant, a farmer in a nearby village, a mother balancing work and family responsibilities. May these stories help us see more clearly, appreciate more deeply, and stand more firmly with the women whose work sustains us all. We hope you find inspiration in these pages.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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This photobook has been made possible thanks to the generous support of the Belgium Development Cooperation (DGD) whose commitment to advancing decent work has enabled meaningful change for women workers across the agri-food sector in ASEAN.

This booklet marks the culmination of the project, *“Improved Social Protection and Labour Rights for Women Workers in ASEAN’s Agri-Food Sector (2022 – 2026)”*, as a testament to the strength, resilience, and leadership of the women whose lives have been touched by this initiative. It is a tribute not only to their contributions, but also to the collective effort of all those who have walked alongside them.

We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to the partners involved in this project, Banteay Srei (BS), Coalition of Cambodian Farmers Community Association (CCFC), Cambodian Food and Service Workers Federation (CFSWF), Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA), Cambodian Labour Confederation (CLC), Youth Resource Development Program (YRDP) whose dedication and collaboration have been vital in reaching women across communities, and workplaces. Your expertise, guidance, and unwavering support have helped create opportunities for women to access knowledge, protection, and solidarity.

We celebrate this journey and the partnerships that have made it possible, and we hope that these stories inspire continued action, recognition, and support for women workers everywhere.

# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

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The project *“Improved Social Protection and Labour Rights for Women Workers in ASEAN’s Agri-food Sector in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam”* aims to empower workers in the agri-food sector to exercise their right and have access to adequate labor rights and social protection through the promotion of three pillars of Decent Work: Labor Rights at Work, Social Protection and Social Dialogue for All. In Cambodia, the project is implemented by six local partners, Banteay Srei, Coalition of Cambodian Farmers Community Association, Cambodian Food and Service Workers’ Federation, Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association, Cambodia Labour Confederation, and Youth Resource and Development Program.

The agri-food sector represents an important share of the informal economy in the ASEAN region. The food system and agri-food sector are considered responsible for a great share of employment mostly in farming activities, processing, packaging, transporting, storing, distributing, and retailing of food products. Women workers, in particular, work in informal, insecure, dangerous and unprotected jobs. They belong to the poorest sections of the population and are often left behind regarding decent work and social protection.

## OUR STRATEGY FOR CHANGE

The program intends to highlight labor rights and social protection for workers in the agri-food sector as crucial issues to be addressed in achieving decent work for all, reducing social inequality, overcoming poverty, and promoting gender equality.

The program also engages the private sector to align with international labor and social protection standards ensuring equitable and gender specific provisions. In addition, it works with ASEAN regional bodies to advance gender-transformative and shock-responsive agenda for labor rights and social protection in the agri-food sector.

Through these efforts, the program has organized 408 local groups and unions, empowered 1,471 women leaders, and delivered direct benefits to 41,564 community members and workers, including 26,035 women. These achievements have strengthened voice, representation, and multi-stakeholder engagement, building momentum toward more inclusive, equitable, and resilient labor systems across the agri-food sector.



# **RIGHTS AND SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR FARMERS**



## SOPHAT CHHOEM

At 61, Sophat embodies resilient leadership at the heart of her community. While caring for her seven grandchildren, managing her cashew farm, and raising cows, she still travels hundreds of kilometers across seven communes in Kratie province to stand alongside women farmers. She listens deeply to their concerns and equips them with knowledge about their rights, self-protection, and access to essential social protection.

Through her work with Coalition of Cambodian Farmer Community (CCFC), Sophat has become a strong advocate for social protection and farmers' rights. She promotes the use of Health Equity Cards, especially for pregnant women, so they can access essential healthcare services. She not only raises awareness but also helps women understand how to claim the support they deserve.

Rooted in compassion and strengthened by experience, Sophat inspires women to speak up and take charge of their wellbeing. She believes that when women find their voice, they can shape decisions and transform their communities, creating a future that is stronger, healthier, and more equitable for all.



Today, I share this knowledge with my community, encouraging women to speak up about land issues and other concerns in public discussions.

When women raise their voices, they influence decisions and bring solutions that benefit everyone.

Although I care for my cashew farm, raise my cows, and look after my seven grandchildren, I have realized my role extends beyond family. I discovered the strength within me to serve my community.

What fulfills me most is nurturing both my family and my community. While guiding my grandchildren to value education and build their future, I also support women across seven communities to understand their rights and claim the social protection they deserve. Through this experience, I have learned that leadership begins with courage, and when women dare to lead, communities grow stronger and more sustainable.



My volunteer work as a farmer leader with CCFC transformed how I see my role. Through workshops and forums, I stepped outside my comfort zone and gained new perspectives on social protection, farmers' rights, and learned how to raise awareness about National Social Security Fund and Health Equity Cards.



A woman wearing a black hijab and a black long-sleeved top is shown in profile, looking down at her work. She has a small, decorative silver brooch on her chest. The background is a blurred outdoor setting at dusk or night, featuring palm trees and strings of warm white lights. A green banner is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.


# A MOTHER'S HOPE FOR VENDOR RIGHTS

## ROMZAN SER

Romzan, 33, is a mother of three who works tirelessly to support her family. On weekdays, she sells cookies at the market, and on weekends, she prepares and sells fast food at Phnom Penh's Walk Street. Her greatest commitment is ensuring that her children have access to education and the opportunity to pursue their dreams.

When she first began selling food, Romzan struggled to adapt to the busy street market and navigate issues with local authorities. However, after joining the Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association and attending training sessions on labor rights and social protection, in the last two years, her perspectives and approach to her rights as a vendor began to transform.

Today, Romzan not only supports her family with confidence and awareness, but she has also become a role model in the vendor community. Many street vendors turn to her for guidance, recognizing her as a trusted and inspiring woman.



“ Every day, I wake up before dawn because I want to build a stronger future for my children. My work may look small to others, but to me, it carries my family with strength and dignity.

On weekdays, I send my children to school before heading to the Chroy Changva market to sell cookies. On weekends, my husband and I prepare pickles, meatballs, and chicken wings to sell on Walk Street. It's busy and unpredictable, but it's where our livelihood grows.

When I first started, I didn't know street vendors had rights or access to social protection. IDEA's training taught me I could register for a National Social Security Fund (NSSF) card and operate without paying extra informal fees. These training sessions opened my eyes and gave me the confidence to stand up for myself.

After registering for my NSSF card, I made it my mission to support other vendors. Sharing what I've learned helps us walk together with confidence, stronger protection, and a sense of unity as a community. Empowering others has become as important to me as earning a living.

As I am preparing to welcome my fourth child in just five months, this small card means something big: a **safe delivery at zero cost.** ”

# MISSION TO EMPOWER COMMUNITIES



## MEY TEP

Helping others, especially women and children in her community, has become the defining purpose of Mey's life. While she is a devoted mother of two and manages the responsibilities of her farm and the household, she has also dedicated the past eleven years to serving her community.

Through her active involvement with Banteay Srei Organization, Mey has played a key role in mobilizing women across 13 villages in Puok District, Siem Reap province. She has brought together farmers, and local women to establish collective savings groups, creating safe and supportive spaces where members can build financial security, share experiences, and strengthen solidarity.

Beyond financial resilience, Mey has facilitated discussions and learning sessions on women's rights and access to social protection. By helping women understand their legal rights and available social support systems, she has empowered them to advocate for National Social Security Fund (NSSF) cards and its benefits. Through her steady leadership and deep compassion, Mey continues to nurture stronger, more informed, and more connected communities.

“ Every day begins with a reminder to myself: doing something positive for myself, my family, and my community. I grow different kinds of vegetables with great care because I want to ensure that the people in my community can consume safe and healthy food.

As a community based organization leader, I have gained knowledge through training on leadership and social protection. These lessons helped me realize the importance of my role and inspired me to initiate savings groups and organize knowledge sharing sessions on sexual harassment, the challenges of early marriage and the importance of education that would benefit women and children across 13 villages in the commune.



Seeing women understand the value of collective saving and how to register for NSSF cards brings me great fulfillment. At least 15 women in my community now hold their card, which I think is a small step toward lasting change.

When women gain knowledge and confidence, they transform not only their own lives but also families, communities and the next generation. My commitment is to keep supporting them, one step at a time.



# BALANCING BOOK AND ADVOCACY



Working alongside others in the agri-food sector, I see how many workers lack awareness of their rights or where to seek help when facing harassment or unsafe conditions. This reality motivates me to respond to the needs of my community.

## SREYPICH YAN

Sreypich, 23, is a fourth-year Social Work student at the Royal University of Phnom Penh. Alongside her studies, she works as a waitress at a Korean restaurant in Phnom Penh.

Driven by her curiosity and a deep commitment to supporting marginalized communities, Sreypich actively seeks ways to contribute to meaningful social change. In 2023, she began volunteering with the Youth Resource Development Program (YRDP). Through this experience, she initiated a youth group of 12 members dedicated to supporting individuals in the agri-food sector, particularly young women.

Her work focuses on raising awareness of workers' rights, helping women understand relevant policies, and guiding them toward support mechanisms when facing challenges such as sexual harassment or unfair wages. Through both her academic path and community engagement, Sreypich continues to advocate for dignity, equity, and empowerment emerging as a young leader determined to create a safer, fairer workplace.

Despite balancing long hours at the restaurant and my studies, I continue leading youth initiatives because I believe workers, especially women, in the agri-food sector, deserve knowledge, dignity, and protection. This commitment drives me to step forward and create change for myself and my community.

Through the youth group I formed at YRDP, we design and conduct creative workshops on social protection, workers' rights, and safety. Then we invite the restaurant workers to join, engage and reflect on their working conditions. Through these workshops, I hope to help women workers feel safer, more informed, and better supported, creating long-term benefits not only for themselves, but also for their families and the wider community they care for.

By sharing policy knowledge and engaging both young people and employers, I work to build a collaborative environment where everyone understands their role in protecting workers. Empowerment starts when we learn together and lift each other up.

”





# STANDING FOR FAIR WORK

## SIER YIM

Sier, 21, is a fourth-year Computer Science student at Angkor University in Siem Reap province. Alongside her studies, she works as a waitress and a designer for a local restaurant for their promotional materials balancing creativity, responsibility, and a demanding academic schedule.

Despite her busy routine, Sier actively seeks opportunities to grow beyond the classroom. In 2024, she began participating in workshops on social protection, labor rights, and workplace safety organized by Youth Resource Development Program (YRDP). The knowledge and insights she gained resonated deeply with her personal experiences. Having faced unfair treatment herself at her previous workplace, Sier transformed those challenges into determination.

Motivated by both experience and new knowledge, she co-founded a youth group of 11 members dedicated to raising awareness of workers' rights. After attending the training on rights of employees and employers and organizing youth forums on promoting employees' rights and occupational safety at the workplace, her team creates spaces where workers can share their voices and concerns, while also engaging employers and government representatives in meaningful dialogue. Her work aims to build understanding across all sides, fostering accountability and change.

Sier envisions a future where workers, especially women, fully understand and confidently claim their rights. At the same time, she hopes employers will take these rights seriously and that the government will strengthen enforcement, ensuring all companies uphold fair and lawful practices.



At my previous workplace, I was expected to take on multiple roles without proper leave.

I faced harassment and unfair treatment, yet I felt unable to speak out. That silence taught me why change matters so much.

In 2023, I began engaging in social activities, which broadened my perspective. I was introduced by a friend to YRDP, where I gained a deeper understanding of my rights and what I deserve as a restaurant worker through training on social protection, labor rights and safety at the workplace. I realize how powerful awareness and knowledge can be, especially for young women workers.



For me, meaningful and lasting change can only happen when workers understand their rights, employers uphold their responsibilities, and the government enforces fair practices. Balance is the foundation of justice.

”

In 2024, I co-founded a youth group called *'Youth's Voices for Labor Rights'* with ten like-minded peers. Together, we organized forums that bring students, restaurant workers, employers and government representatives into the same space, because we believe that real change begins when everyone listens to one another, and takes responsibility.

# OUR STRENGTH, OUR DIGNITY



A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a black uniform, is shown in profile from the waist up. She is holding a black plate with food, including green vegetables and a brown protein. She is looking towards the right. The background is a blurred restaurant interior with red chairs and metal railings.

## CHENDA POV

Chenda, 38, works as a supervisor at a restaurant in Kandal province, where she has become a trusted source of guidance and reassurance for many of the waitresses. Whenever they face mistreatment from customers, she is the first person they turn to for emotional support and practical solutions.

Having worked as a waitress herself for six years, Chenda understands their hardships deeply and personally. She knows the pressure, the exhaustion, and the quiet resilience the job demands. This lived experience shapes her leadership. For Chenda, offering comfort is not enough, she believes in empowering the women she works with to find their voices and stand up for themselves, even when it requires great courage.

Her goal is to ensure that female workers fully understand their rights and the protections they are entitled to, while also equipping them with effective and respectful strategies to address challenges with customers when they arise. Through her compassion and strength, Chenda is helping to foster a safer, more confident, and more supportive workplace for the women around her.

“ My journey taught me that resilience and transformation begin the moment you refuse to accept harm. Today, I supervise my team with the courage I once struggled to find, proving that every woman can move past fear.

Working as a beer promoter for almost six years taught me how to best serve others, but the training and workshops from Cambodian Food and Service Workers Federation (CFSWF) on labor rights, sexual harassment and social protection taught me how to stand up for myself. These experiences shaped me into a supervisor who values not only the women's work, but also their worth.

Speaking up didn't just change my life, it changed the environment around me. By raising our voice against mistreatment, we created a workplace where safety, respect, and dignity are part of the service we provide and receive.

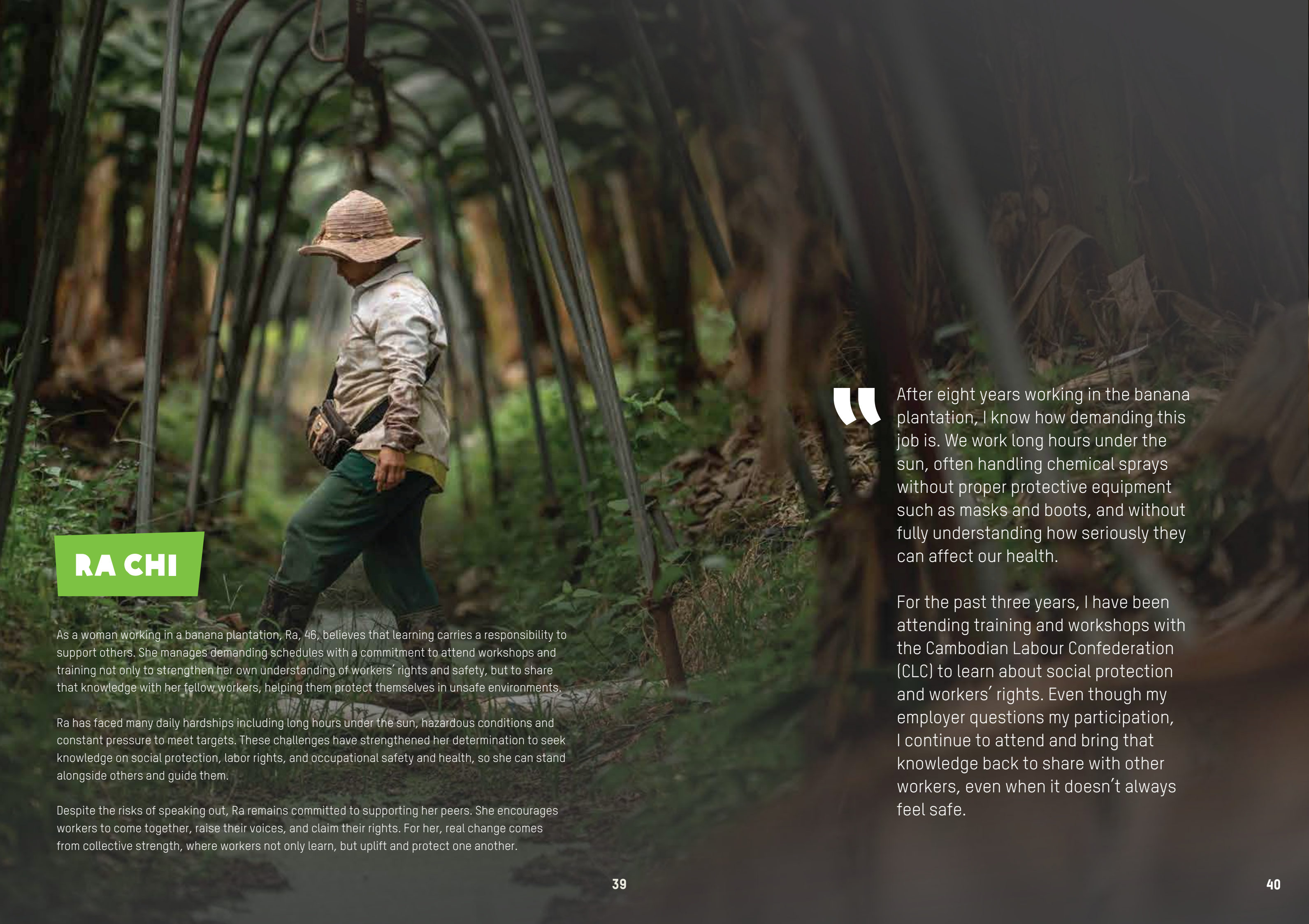
When I stood up for my rights, I wasn't just protecting myself, I was creating a safer space for every woman in our restaurant and beyond. Change begins with one voice, but its impact reaches families, communities, and the next generation of girls who deserve better.

”



# BANANA WORKER STRUGGLES FOR HER RIGHTS





## RA CHI

As a woman working in a banana plantation, Ra, 46, believes that learning carries a responsibility to support others. She manages demanding schedules with a commitment to attend workshops and training not only to strengthen her own understanding of workers' rights and safety, but to share that knowledge with her fellow workers, helping them protect themselves in unsafe environments.

Ra has faced many daily hardships including long hours under the sun, hazardous conditions and constant pressure to meet targets. These challenges have strengthened her determination to seek knowledge on social protection, labor rights, and occupational safety and health, so she can stand alongside others and guide them.

Despite the risks of speaking out, Ra remains committed to supporting her peers. She encourages workers to come together, raise their voices, and claim their rights. For her, real change comes from collective strength, where workers not only learn, but uplift and protect one another.

“

After eight years working in the banana plantation, I know how demanding this job is. We work long hours under the sun, often handling chemical sprays without proper protective equipment such as masks and boots, and without fully understanding how seriously they can affect our health.

For the past three years, I have been attending training and workshops with the Cambodian Labour Confederation (CLC) to learn about social protection and workers' rights. Even though my employer questions my participation, I continue to attend and bring that knowledge back to share with other workers, even when it doesn't always feel safe.

At times, I feel threatened for sharing information about workers' rights and encouraging them to join the union. But I cannot stop. Women need to understand their rights and demand proper leave, National Social Security Fund cards, and adequate protective equipment to keep us safe from chemicals and other dangers.

Today, more than 100 workers in the company I work for have joined our union. I will continue to advocate for better working conditions including pregnancy leave and stronger social protection. For me, the union is our collective strength, it is where we can speak openly about our concerns, support one another, and work together to push for meaningful change.

”



# RISING AGAINST HARASSMENT

## KIMYAN CHHENG

Kimyan, 42, has been actively mobilizing women working as masseuses, beer promoters, and entertainment workers in the heart of Siem Reap province. She regularly conducts workshops and trainings on occupational safety and health, social protection, and labor rights helping women better understand and protect themselves in their workplaces.

Having worked as a beer promoter herself for 19 years, Kimyan experienced firsthand various forms of harassment, unfair wages, poor treatment, and social discrimination. These struggles shaped her determination to support other women facing similar challenges. When she was elected as a core teacher and community leader, she committed herself to sharing her knowledge and experiences with younger women. Through her guidance, many have gained the confidence to understand their rights, uphold their respect, and pursue personal growth.

Kimyan strongly believes that her volunteer work as a union leader can create meaningful change in the lives of many women. By helping them recognize their rights and the value of their work, she encourages solidarity and collective action. She hopes that this growing unity will one day influence policymakers to improve working conditions and create a safer, more dignified future for the next generation of women workers.



“

I've worked as a beer promoter for nearly 20 years, and I know what it feels like to have no proper leave, no social protection, and to face discrimination but I've learned that change begins when we stand up for our rights.

I join training, lead small workshops, and speak in public spaces to help women workers understand their rights and stay safe. In my community, many people see me as a committed advocate for women's rights.

I work closely with masseurs, beer promoters as well as women in the entertainment sector, supporting them in a place where discrimination against their job is still common.

My advocacy may not generate financial profit, but it creates something far more meaningful; confidence, safety, and hope for the women working in the agri-food sector. Seeing them grow in knowledge and strength is the impact I value most and the reason I continue this work with pride.

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