



Fashion show by LGBTI group during the 'Open Heart' festival on 3 September 2023 at The Factory Phnom Penh. Photo: Sophoan Phean/Oxfam

"BERK CHET" TO PROMOTE DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN CAMBODIA

Impact Hub Phnom Penh and Oxfam jointly organized **"Berk Chet"** on 3 September 2023 at The Factory Phnom Penh. "Berk Chet" is a festival aims to celebrate and increase awareness of the diversity and inclusiveness among the five rightsholder groups including people with disabilities, LGBTI groups, women who are subjected to violence and/or exploitation, the elderly and vulnerable youth, indigenous groups, and ethnic minorities. It also highlighted the initiative carried out by NOW-Us! Award Cambodia awardees in Cambodia. The celebration conducted in Khmer and interpreted into Khmer Sign Language.

Knowledge exchange, team building exercises, and presentations of the NOW-Us! Award Cambodia winners' projects were all included in the event. During the festival, performances were included in the festivities. The performances honored the accomplishments of the distinct communities of rightsholders while illustrating their conditions. This was the second Berk Chet Festival, the first having taken place in Battambang on 27 August 2023.

Ms. Sophoan Phean, Oxfam National Director, said: "Oxfam is pleased to join with our partners to promote and

raise awareness about inclusiveness and diversity. In accordance with the **"Leave no one behind"** policy, we enable the community we work with (rightsholder groups) to fully engage in social development.

The "Berk Chet" festival honored the efforts of the seven NOW-Us! Award recipients in Cambodia. Through these activities, marginalized and minority groups were given the means to challenge prejudice, amplify their voices, and improve accessibility through embracing diversity and inclusion. To ensure that our needs and challenges are taken care of, it must begin with each and every one of us adhering to the maxim **"Nothing about Us, Without Us."**

Ms. Melanie Mossard, CEO of Impact Hub Phnom Penh said: "The festival provided a platform to showcase inspiring initiatives promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. She believed that the 'Berk Chet' Festival offers a unique opportunity to mainstream these essential topics in both Battambang and Phnom Penh, exposing the work of these organizations to the broader public."

Impact Hub Phnom Penh started the "NOW-Us! Award Cambodia" program

in partnership with Voice through Oxfam in 2021. Through cutting-edge initiatives including capacity-building bootcamps, addressing the underlying causes of rightsholder challenges, and fostering creative solutions, it seeks to empower and increase awareness about inclusion and diversity. The program also emphasizes professional and personal growth, including project and financial management. Following the bootcamp, teams present their cutting-edge social projects to impartial panels of judges made up of partners and Voice grantees from other civil society groups that cooperate with the five rightsholder groups. Seven teams representing these organisations received funds from Voice over the program of two seasons of NOW-Us! Award Cambodia to carry out projects that amplify voices and foster inclusivity for their particular communities.

Voice is an innovative grant facility that works to support the representative organization or informal group of the most marginalized and minority groups across ten countries in Southeast Asia, East and West Africa. Besides this program, Oxfam through Voice is supporting around 20 grantee partners working with marginalized and minority groups to empower and enhance their voices and capacity to fully participate in decision-making in community and societal development.

COMMUNITY VOICES THROUGH THEATRE “BEHIND THE DOOR”

Lakhon Komnit is an organization that began its operation with financial support from Voice in 2019. The main goal of this initiative was to amplify the voices of right-holders and uphold the significance of forum theatre. Due to technical advancements, community theatre has gradually lost its appeal in society. In response to this, the team developed the ‘**Breaking The Barrier**’ project, which aims to both preserve the forum theatre and amplify the voices of rightsholder groups. Lakhon Komnit has collaborated with three specific groups: women facing violence, people with disabilities and the LGBTIQ+ community.



Performance by Forum Theater group sharing real life experience of their community. Photo: Kimheang hean/Oxfam

On 25 August 2023, the organization organized a forum theater event called “**Behind the Door**” in Battambang province to address community issues and propose potential solutions. The participants included development partners, donors, students, teachers, representatives of people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ community, women facing violence, and local community members. The story of “**Behind the Door**” is derived from real-life experience of women facing violence, people with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ in Battambang province. The community members collaborated with Lakhon Komnit over several months, participating in workshops and training sessions to develop this performance.



2nd and 3rd photo: Participants shared their feedback after seeing the performance. Photo: Kimheang hean/Oxfam

Ms. Sok Chan Chhorvy, Oxfam Program Manager, expressed her enjoyment of the performance, stating, “I thoroughly enjoyed the performance. Despite not being professional performers, they portrayed their roles flawlessly. When we depict reality, it naturally resonates with the audience.” “Forum Theatre serves as an incredibly effective platform for capturing and presenting hidden truths to outsiders. I hope that after witnessing this powerful “Behind the Door” performance, the authorities will continue to provide support to those in need and address the community’s issues,” Chhorvy added.



A STRONG WOMAN EMERGES

Ms. Keo Navy is 53 years old and lives in Chambok Hek village, Puok commune, Puok district, Siem Reap province. She is a widow with five children (two sons and three daughters). Among them is a son named Chhoeuy Phatra, a young man with congenital Down Syndrome. Ms. Keo Navy deals with challenges in her daily life having no educational background. She is also a survivor of domestic violence from her ex-husband. She works as a tailor and she earns less than five thousand riel (5,000 riel), or 1.25 dollars per day.

“Violence destroys family, property, and time, and you miss out on everything.”

Since 2016, Ms. Keo Navy has had the opportunity to participate in many activities of the Rabbit School Organization, such as special education activities for families of children with disabilities and programs or campaigns that demand the rights of people with disabilities and vulnerable people. She participated in a study visit to Sot Nikum commune, Dam Dek district, and Siem Reap province. The study visit aimed to learn about farming and animal raising in 2022 organized by Rabbit School. At the same year, she participated in workshops, forums, discussions and other campaigns.

In 2023, she joined the campaign “Cycling for Change” to celebrate International Women’s Day with the Rabbit School Organization through the supported Voice project. The campaign aimed to seek support on social protection policies and initiatives from relevant government agencies, on disability identity card registration, on mobilising and recruiting drop-out students to return to school for both children with and without disabilities, and on promoting the rights of people with disabilities by leaving no one behind. After participating in the activities with Rabbit School, she understood her rights and sought support on safety and security from relevant authorities, including village and commune chiefs as well as from the district level, to operate the legal law which could protect her from her ex-husband.

She continues to participate and is engaged with local authorities to promote and raise awareness among other parents of children with disabilities. Through her commitment, her son was able to register for the disability identity card.

On May 25, 2023, Ms. Keo Navy began her own small-scale business of raising chickens, supported by the Rabbit School. Beyond her chicken-raising business, she has scaled-up her business by planting more vegetables, lemon grass, lime, papaya and other tropical fruits like oranges. Presently, she earns 100,000 riel, or 25 dollars, on a monthly basis from her farming and raising chickens.

“Based on her will, experience, hard work and passion on poultry raising, she foresees that it would be smooth and much better in time. She’ll continue and expand her knowledge through self-study and join in non-government organisation workshops and trainings to scale up her chicken-raising business. Finally, she feels that this society has not left her behind”



Ms. Keo Navy (yellow shirt) during the meeting with the Rabbit school staff and other community members.



Study visit and social protection campaigns for the rights of persons with disabilities

YAV THIP'S STORY OF CHANGE

Growing up as an indigenous Kouy woman from Banteay Meanchey province, Ms. Yav Thip was passionate about building her distinctiveness to involve herself in society and make her case known. However, due to low education and financial burdens, she pushes herself to face the societal gaps and fight for her dream and passion.

Ms. Yav Thip grew up in a traditional family and mindset with eight siblings. Since she is the youngest child in the family, they could not support her to get an education. As an indigenous Kouy woman, she lived in a community where she was bullied because of the

way she talked, the way she dressed, and the way she believed. Since she was young, she often got negative comments about how she looked; people thought she did not meet their beauty standards. All those things made her become a person who didn't believe in herself, had low self-esteem, and no confidence to talk and show herself in public.

She didn't want to go anywhere alone. Also, her family does not support her, so she becomes more traumatized by the society around her. She said, "I was so scared of talking to people around as they always bully and do not accept who I am, often people called me a beggar because of the way I am dressing up."

Ms. Yav Thip married in 2011 and recently lives with her husband and one daughter. As a 42 years old woman, she handles all the housework and takes care of the kid alone. In addition, she loves volunteer work (especially social work), so she is a village volunteer who helps to report on women's cases. However, her husband does not support her in volunteering, as it is no income. Recently, her family has made a living by farming rotation, cultivating rice, harvesting forest and non-timber forest products, fishing, animal husbandry, and so on.



Yav Thip sharing her idea during the Forum Theater Training of Trainers, October 2022. Photo: WPM

Furthermore, her community also suffers from the loss of land, forests, and natural resources caused by several development projects such as economic land concessions, mining, and hydropower. No prior-informed consent, consultations with local indigenous communities, and environmental impact assessments were conducted. On the other hand, there are cases of outsiders illegally encroaching on forests and privatizing land. Before attending the training and participating in the activities of Our Turn project, she was a person who had a hard time deciding to go out and get involved with social movements and improve herself because she grew up in a society that did not motivate women to study and go out. She felt

that she was not good enough to engage in social work. She said:

“ PEOPLE DO NOT VALUE ME BECAUSE I WAS JUST ONLY FINISHED GRADE 3 AND DON'T KNOW EVERYTHING, I AM LESS EDUCATED, AND THEY DON'T WANT ME TO INVOLVE WITH THEM. ”

After participating in this program, she has gained new knowledge to develop herself, especially since she knows she is not alone. More indigenous people face the same issues, and more minorities g well. After learning

about this by participating in Our Turn, Ms. Yav Thip gains more confidence; she dares to go out alone and talk, sharing with a group of people. She started to understand her identity and value who she is. She began to share her problems with other communities and exchange ideas with relevant stakeholders to seek solutions. In connection with another group, and the lesson was conducted, she has been able to know herself better and the people around her by sharing and learning.

Build more connections with the group and surround herself with inspirational speeches. On the other hand, back to her family and husband, she said, "After all the challenges, they started to understand me and accept all my volunteer work, and encouraged me to join the social activity to improve myself." She was so happy to reach her goal and understand her strength, and she will keep this positive energy onward. During the International World's Indigenous Peoples Day, celebrated at Sunway Hotel, Phnom Penh, Cambodia August 09, 2022, Ms. Yav Thip had a chance to stand up and raise her voice about indigenous women's issues and her community in front of many stakeholders, the Representative

of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Rural Development, also the Deputy Governor of the provincial, and any other Indigenous Elder Representative and non-government organization. On behalf of the indigenous community, she firmly believes that the Royal Government of Cambodia, civil society organizations, and the private sector will pay attention and contribute to solving the problems faced by the indigenous communities. As an indigenous community representative, she will continue to work hard to educate the next generation in building solidarity, preserving traditional culture and identity, protecting and sustaining natural resources, and encouraging indigenous peoples to develop a harmonious community and society.

Ms. Sar Sineth, a Representative of the Ministry of Women's Affairs stated that it does require participation from all stakeholders in solving violence against women. The Ministry of Women's Affairs has a specific task force to work on domestic violence to assist victims through the CWCC mechanism at the provincial and district levels. There is also a multi-sectoral response team on gender-based violence composed of relevant departments, such as the Department

of Social Affairs, the Department of Health, the Police Commissariat, the Department of Women's Affairs, and the Deputy Provincial Governor, to help solve problems and help women victims of violence. Currently, the ministry is piloting four integrated services in four provinces set up at provincial hospitals to provide services to women victims of domestic and sexual violence. The main activities of the Ministry of Women's Affairs include strengthening the capacity to provide counseling and legal services to women and girls in Cambodia, including indigenous peoples, and paying more attention to them.

Ms. Yav Thip will continue working as an Indigenous Elder Representative and be a voice for her community, especially Indigenous women and girls. She is using her confidence and potential to bring up the issue, influencing her to make a positive change in the future.

"Thankfully for being not discriminate indigenous people, please end any form of violence against indigenous women and girls."

Text by: by Sophet Suy, Program Officer, Women Peace Makers (WPM). WPM is an Influencing grantee partner whose project aims to change the public narrative of women in Cambodia facing multiple exclusions. They also target to influence relevant policies and enter discussions both at the local and national levels through mobilisation and skills-building of the focus rightsholder groups (indigenous women, women who are blind, ethnic & cultural minorities, and the LGBTI community).



Yav Thip joining the reflection and learning series with the five communities, July 2022. Photo: WPM

LINA, FROM BEER PROMOTER TO WOMEN'S GROUP TRAINER

Lina moved to Phnom Penh from Kompong Thom province in search of employment. Her first job was as a waitress at the Old market beer garden where she also works as a beer promoter. Like many beer promoters, Lina encountered common challenges in her job. Typically, beer garden and club owners are reluctant to provide beer promoters with legal labour contracts. Consequently, these promoters are vulnerable to exploitation. They face financial exploitation, lack of job security and can be dismissed without compensation or explanation. Female beer promoters often endure unwelcome advances from intoxicated customers who view women working in such establishment as lacking morals.

In July 2019, friends of hers participated in an educational session mounted by people from Solidarity Association of Beer Promotion Women in Cambodia (SABC) and were overwhelmed by the information and knowledge they received. They could not believe that they had not known about the existence of the organization that caters for their interests. The SABC organization gives a voice to Beer Promotion Women to advocate for positive change in their working lives among stakeholders such as the Government, beer companies and policy implementers to promote human rights, health, and dignity of Beer Promotion Women in the public and workplace. The organisation represents and works with all of its members and strategic partners to achieve equality, justice, and dignity for Beer Promotion Women.

After the narration she decided to get in touch with SABC. She learnt that SABC provides information and skills training to Beer Promotion Women and their partners and families to bring positive change to the social perspective and to improve policies for beer promotion work. The organization advocates for the Beer Promotion women among stakeholders to improve the sustainability and livelihoods of Beer Promotion Women



Lina during the training to a group of women.

in the present and future. Among the messages Beer Promotion Women received touched on health, HIV and sexual harassment and gender-based violence. The organization facilitates a 3-day life skills session covering gender, gender-based violence, sexual reproductive health, basic workplace rights for women and the impact of excessive alcohol consumption. Lina did not need any more persuasion and inquired when the next training would be mounted. She made the decision to attend the next session right there and then.

Lina attended the training session and learnt how to protect herself from harassment and what she could do if it happened. SABC also asked her if she had a strong interest in all the sessions and the work they do. Lina was willing and was offered the chance to become a volunteer for the association. With time she was exposed to capacity building sessions and she grew to become more confident and strong. Lina got to understand much better about her labor rights and gained awareness of how she could use this knowledge and demand her rights. She became brave and daring in advocating her opinion and raising her voice. Lina became a community resource and shares her understanding and pieces of knowledge gained from the training

with her peers whenever she has a chance.

After two years of joining SABC, she was given opportunities to work as a trainer for other female beer promoters as well. She had transformed from a vulnerable beer promoter to a labour and human rights activist ensuring that beer promoters like her are not harassed, exploited financially and treated as sex objects by the employers or the clients. The transformed Lina was able to say,

Lina views the job of women in the entertainment services (beer promoter) as ordinary and legal while the same is frowned upon by the community. She wants to make other beer promoters understand the value of their job and to value them as well as accord them respect as well as earn respect from the surrounding. With bits of help from SABC, Lina is hopeful that she can lend a helping hand to other female beer promoters to improve their understanding of their rights and protection.

"I have undergone extensive training to become a resilient woman who fearlessly confronts all challenges, regardless of their impact on myself or others. I am committed to finding lawful solutions to every problem that arises."

OU VANDA THROUGH CAMBODIAN AGEING NETWORK DEMYSTIFIES AGE



“ខ្ញុំនឹងក្រោកឈរ ហើយ បង្ហាញទៅកាន់មនុស្សជុំវិញ ខ្លួន ឱ្យដឹងលើឆ្មារថ្មី បានក្នុងនាមជាមនុស្សចាស់ ម្នាក់ ”

ស្តី វណ្ណដា អាហ្វ ៦៣ឆ្នាំ
តួនាទីជំនួយ ប្រធានក្រុមប្រឹក្សាស្រុក/ខេត្តបាត់ដំបង

When Ms Vanda reached the mandatory retirement age of 60, she had to leave her position in public service, despite still being very active and capable of fulfilling her role as the Deputy Director of the Battambang Provincial Provincial Health Department. After retiring, she began to experience feelings of depression and isolation. The harsh reality of age discrimination and marginalization became evident to her. She was taken aback to find that even her former colleagues looked down on her. It seemed as though losing her position had completely devaluated her as an individual. These emotions were so overwhelming that Vanda briefly expressed a period of depression.

However, she was determined not to allow herself to remain in that state. Through her previous professional involvement with HelpAge Cambodia (HAC), she had gained knowledge and experience in cooperative efforts to support older people, particularly in the health sector. She developed a strong interest in establishing an Older People Association (OPA) in her village and received support from HAC to form one. Vanda began mobilizing elderly individuals who shared common interests to establish the OPA, aiming to address their collective needs and concerns.

In February 2028, the OPA was successfully established in the village, with Vanda being elected as its leader among 67 members. Most of the members were women over the age of 60. At the age of 63, Vanda is currently the active and dynamic president of the Cambodian Ageing Network (CAN).

HOW DID SHE ACHIEVE ALL OF THIS?

Due to her exemplary leadership and dedication in supporting older people through the newly established OPA, Vanda was invited to participate in a series of dialogues and consultative meetings with other OPAs and Federations to discuss the formation of an alliance for older people.

Upon the formation of the alliance, known as Cambodian Ageing Network, Vanda was elected as its President among the 18 founders' institutions. This appointment came as a pleasant surprise to her, and she now bears the responsibility of leading CAN members, covering advocacy work (Age Demands Action), SDGs, human rights, disability, and other significant topics essential to accomplish their committed strategy plan and goals.

“Through various training sessions, both I and many CAN members have

acquired significant knowledge and gradually improved our capacity to work for the elderly. I no longer feel discouraged or discriminated against. I am determined to stand up and showcase what older people are capable of,” said Vanda.

Over the past three years, Vanda has invested considerable effort in collaborating with all CAN members to engage in advocacy work and establish dialogue with multiple stakeholders and key government bodies. Their aim is to mainstream aging issues and seek support in addressing the needs of the elderly.

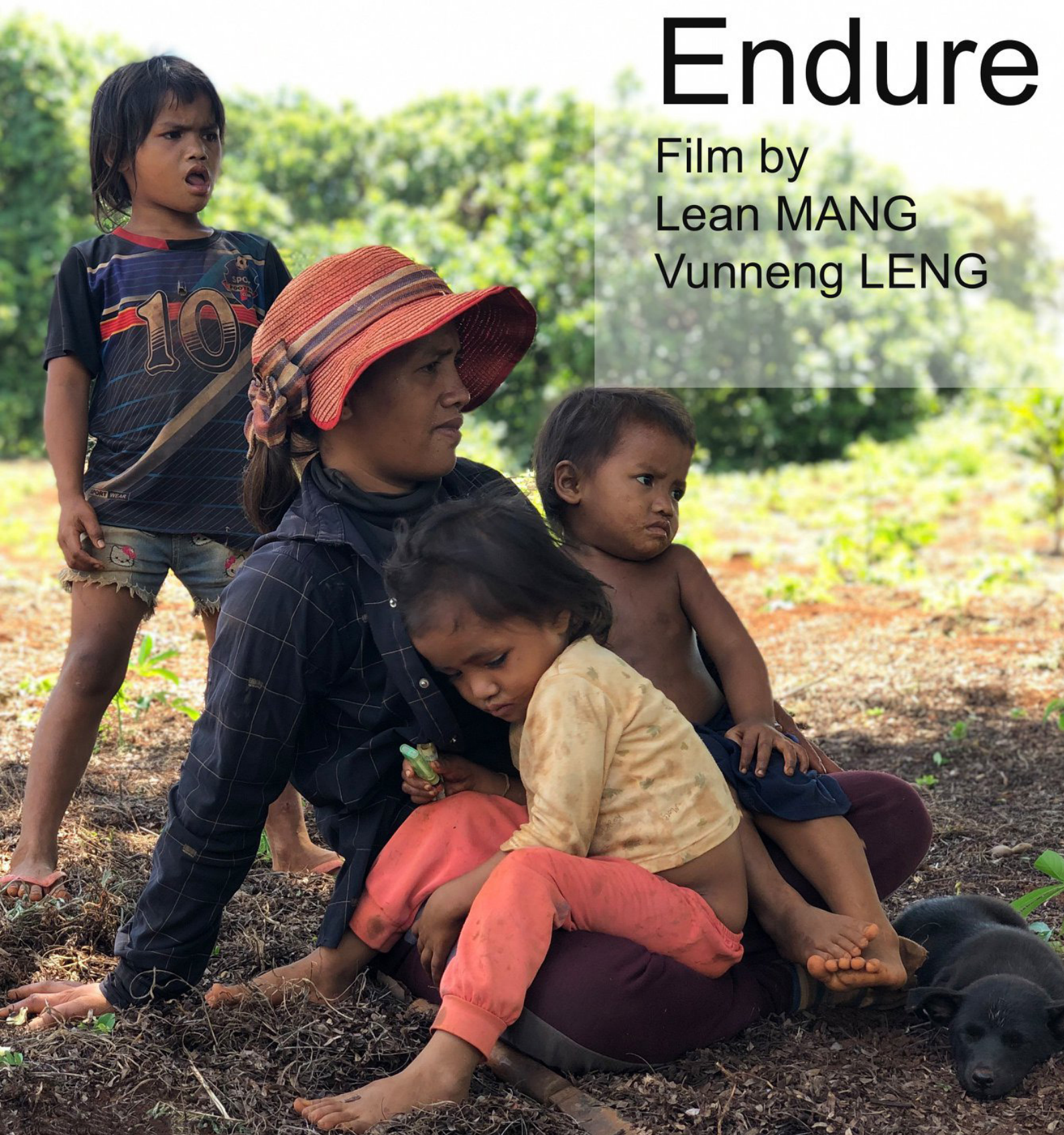
“It would be incredibly challenging for me to persuade the government, particularly at the national level, to support older people. However, with the backing up of CAN, I have been able to represent the interest of people across several provinces and have gained the confidence to advocate for the needs of older individuals,” said Vanda.

As a result, through a series of engagement meetings and dialogues, particularly with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY), Vanda and the Deputy President of CAN were nominated to join the Technical Working Group, consisting of five institutions including MoSVY, Provincial Office of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (PoSVY), Phare Ponleu Selpak (PPS), Cambodian Ageing Network (CAN), and HelpAge Cambodia (HAC). This group is dedicated to the development of informational and educational materials, as well as video productions, related to the National Ageing Policy and Age Discrimination.

“ I FELT VERY EMPOWERED AND MOTIVATED BY BEING A MEMBER OF THIS TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP WITH MOSVY. I COULD SAY, IT IS MY FIRST TIME TO JOIN WITH THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT TO WORK ON POLICY LEVEL. ”

ស៊ីនេម៉ា Endure

Film by
Lean MANG
Vunneng LENG



FILM POWER: LEAN, INDIGENOUS FILMMAKER CO-SHOOTING “ENDURE”

Mang Lean, a 23-year-old ethnic Tampuan from Ratanakiri province in northeastern Cambodia, is one of twelve young filmmakers who received training at the Bophana Center. This training was made possible through the project **“Amplifying voices of indigenous women and discriminated groups through innovative multimedia”** supported by film industry experts.

The documentary filmmaker training has had a transformative effect on Mang Lean’s life. It has elevated him from being ordinary indigenous youth to a young professional filmmaker, equipped with a heightened awareness of issues faced by his community, particularly those affecting indigenous women who have experienced gender-based violence. Moreover, his understanding has deepened through practical, concrete, and in-depth research uncovering community issues that demand attention.

The trained Cambodian and indigenous filmmaker students focused their effort on shedding lights on the experiences of indigenous women and other marginalized groups who face human rights abuses such as domestic violence, gender-based violence, lack of access to public services, and barriers in accessing education for children. Through their documentaries and films, they delved into these themes, effectively raising awareness on issues that had previously remained largely invisible.

In addition to acquiring technical skills in filmmaking, Lean also gained self-confidence to creating films that amplify the voices of marginalized women in his community. He aims to explore and highlight other prevalent issues at all levels. Through his filmmaking skills and utilization of information and communication technology, Lean has become an agent of change, amplifying the voices of marginalized women and addressing their concerns.

After successful training, Lean returned to Ratanakiri to support his indigenous community. He currently works as an Audio-Visual Officer at the Indigenous Language Conservation Organization (CIPL), which received a Voice grant to promote indigenous voices through the community media. In his role, Lean shares his film knowledge and trains indigenous youth from various communities such as Kachak, Jarai, Tampuan, and Kreung. His goal is to empower them to conduct research and do documentaries similar to his own.

“In the future, I want to be a film director. I’m excited to share the knowledge I’ve gained through my experiences and film training with other indigenous communities in Ratanakiri,” said Lean. His training and engagement with important issues in his community have already made an impact. His film, **‘Endure,’** has been recognized for achieving advocacy results and creating real change.

Directed by Mang Lean and Leng Vunneng in Tampuan language, **‘Endure’** tells the story of Nghas Hourng, the protagonist. She was married off at the age of 16 to Hoeung Nath, who was 28 years old. Residing in a small village in Ratanakiri surrounded by rubber plantations, cashew nuts and vast forest areas inhabited by the Tampuan ethnic community, life is far from peaceful. Nghas and her children endure regular beating from her husband, resulting

in her youngest daughter suffering from renal failure caused by the abuse during Nghas’s pregnancy.

In 2018, Nghas and her husband divorced, leaving her in a state of destitute in Ratanakiri province with her three daughters. One of her daughters is sick, and Nghas lacks the financial means to seek medical help. She tirelessly searches for crickets, vegetables, crabs, snails, freshwater prawns, and fish to sell to provide for her family. Some days, she earns 5,000 – 10,000 Riel (\$1.25 – \$2.5) to buy food and medicine, while other days she returns empty-handed. Despite the immense challenges she faces, Nghas never complains.

The film gained significant viewership and was widely shared among audiences, including the governing council of the Ochum district in Ratanakiri. After watching the film, the Governing Council Officer visited Nghas and verified the authenticity of the film content. Consequently, a house was constructed for her and her children through fundraising efforts and with the assistance of the O’Chum district administration. This intervention by the authorities demonstrated the impactful advocacy power of the film.

The indigenous youth, once ordinary and passionate about filmmaking, has transformed into a socially conscious human rights activist and professional filmmaker. His heightened awareness of social and economic issues, particularly those affecting indigenous women and vulnerable individuals facing poverty and gender-based discrimination, had made him a valuable asset within the community.



Mang Lean during an interview with Nghas for his film “Endure.”

THE ABILITY, NOT DISABILITY

Dim Sophea, 31, has had cerebral palsy since birth, affecting her movement and speech. She lives in Chamkar Samrong village, Battambang province with her two brothers, taking on the role of the family's head after their parents passed away.

Unemployed, Sophea earns a modest income by providing motorbike transportation for a sale company. She travels about 30km to another company in Battambang town. For each trip, she receives a fee of 10,000 riels (\$2.5). Sophea utilizes this income to support her family's daily needs.

Each motorbike ride brings fear due to her mobility and control limitation, particularly on rough and slippery roads during the rainy season. Sophea often encounters fast-moving cars, large trucks, and dump trucks risking overtaking. She occasionally slips off the road. Witnessing near accidents between motorcycles and large trucks leaves her shocked, stressed and devalued.



Sophea sharing her journey both with community members and local authorities

Those words traumatized her, leading her to drop out of school in Grade 12. She struggled with writing, lacked English language skills, and couldn't use computer. She had no idea how to find a job.

In 2021, she met a WWD-Lan staff who was looking for a support assistant.

She also got to know KHEN staff who attended the workshop and offered her additional work and tasks at the organisation, providing her with some extra income. In November 2021, Sophea registered and became a member of WWD-LAN through the RISING UP project funded by the Voice. Previously, she would never have had the courage to venture far alone from home alone due to fear and shame. However, being a member of WWD-LAN empowered her. She actively participated in various raining courses, workshops and activities. This newfound conviction enabled her to confidently attend seminars in Phnom Penh and other accessible locations to acquire new knowledge and pursue personal development.



Sophea speaking in a panel discussion during the National Forum on Inclusive Employment for People with Disabilities, December 2022, Phnom Penh.

Sophea felt trapped in her job, but she had no choice. The family depended on her income from driving the motorcycle, and if she stopped, they would go hungry. She felt drained and constantly blamed herself, feeling worthless. She had attempted suicide twice. Her neighbor often said to her that 'why are you still studying? No one will hire you with your disability.'

As someone with a spinal cord injury who used a wheelchair, she needed an assistant to attend the workshop in Battambang. During the workshop, Sophea saw many members of WWD-Lan who had different disabilities, some more severe than her own. However, she noticed that they all possessed unique abilities, which made her feel at ease within the group.

With support from Women with Disabilities group members, she had the courage to write and apply for \$1,000 grant from the WWD-LAN project. The grant aims to fund an initiative in Chamkar Samrong district, Battambang province. Despite her speech difficulties, she successfully led the activity and delivered the planned presentation during the workshop. As part of the project, she allocated \$150 to renovate wheelchair-accessible ramp slopes in her village. These slopes were essential for people with disabilities accessing services. Unfortunately, due to budget constraints, the

commune had been unable to renovate the slopes to meet sustainable and accessible standards, leaving the slopes neglected for eight months.

On August 9, 2022, Sophea had the opportunity to attend a meeting with Battambang Provincial Hall. She raised the challenge and asked for support from the province to facilitate the renovation of the ramp slope at Chamkar Samrong commune. At that time, Excellency Sok Lou, Battambang deputy provincial governor, immediately responded by taking the action as requested by Sophea. After the meeting, the team from the provincial hall inspected the slope and decided to build a new one to meet the state's standards. The ramp slope was completed on October 18, 2022, according to the standard, and now many people with disabilities use the ramp to access various services in Chamkar Samrong. This is her first work achievement, making her proud of herself, and many institutions began to recognise her. Some institutions working in the field of disability invited her to attend workshops and selected her as a focal person in the project as well as in the organisation.

In December 2022, she decided to quit her job as a motorcyclist and started studying how to use a computer, learning Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel. After learning computer skills through her hard work and the dedication to the team, KHEN has offered her the opportunity to become an office assistant, located in Battambang provincial town. The night before her first work day, she could not sleep. She felt nervous, mixed with happiness because she did not know anything, whether it was hard or not because of foreseen difficulty in writing. She also feared damaging the documents, making it more difficult for other co-workers. She thought again, "They've seen me having a hard time so far like this, and they still call me to work with them, maybe they want to give me a chance to do it, so I have to try." After coming to work for a while, she thanks the team for their support, guidance and for providing the opportunity for her to learn new things.



Sophea provided a training on domestic violence.



The ramp successfully built in Chamkar Samrong

She felt like she was part of a family. Now she feels so proud of herself, she would have never imagined reaching this level. Sometimes she would sit while thinking to herself,

"Before I was useless, but now I have a job, an honor to participate in society, and work with an organisation I look up to, which I always thought I could not do. Now that I have achieved my dream I have to keep trying; I must not give up!"

In addition, her neighbors stopped criticising her and started praising her, saying that it was better for her to have a job and earn a living. Sophea now receives invitations by various organisations working in the field of disability to attend seminars and

to be a guest speaker to share her experiences with the participants.

A MESSAGE FROM SOPHEA TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES AND PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES:

Encourage them to reject the notion that their disability limits their capacities. Avoid action or words that reinforce negative beliefs. Instead, foster a mindset of perseverance and empower them to seek opportunities for personal growth. Encourage active participation in society, attending workshops, and acquiring skills that they enjoy, to the best of their abilities. Remember, with determination and support, they can overcome challenges and thrive.

NAM RATHA: THE KUI SPEAKER



Nam Ratha is a 22-year-old indigenous youth living in Bongkern Phal village, Romtom commune, Rovieng district, Preah Vihear province. She is the fourth of six children. Nam Ratha graduated from grade 12th and went on to study at the University in Phnom Penh majoring in Information Technology (IT) for two years. She is a young girl who does not like community work and she does not speak her own native language much. She prefers speaking Khmer to her Kui language. Throughout her years in high school and college, she faced a lot of discrimination from friends and people around her. These factors made the young Ratha feel reluctant to speak in her native language both in daily communication with family and friends

in the village.

In 2022, the Organization for the Promotion of Kui Culture (OPKC) staff hosted a meeting to promote their Voice-supported project on the importance of preserving the Kui language and their cultural identity to community members. The objective was to empower the community for them to be able to engage in advocacy with stakeholders standing for their rights as indigenous peoples. This project caught the young lady's attention to start speaking her native Kui language with community members again. Furthermore, Ratha also helped in teaching Kui, Khmer and English languages to 30 children in the community. In addition to

that, she participated in activities with community members, such as facilitating and leading youth groups to participate in community activities such as forest patrols, planting trees and protecting community lands of indigenous peoples. As a result of her active contribution, Ratha was elected as a commissioner for the 2023 national elections.

Nam Ratha mentioned that "Speaking Kui language is a way to preserve it for a long time, to not lose the native language of the Kui people and to make children understand the value of using the Kui language because the language is important for the Kui people. It is also the identity of the indigenous people."

Nam Ratha was discriminated whenever she used her native language. She also received no encouragement from people around when she took initiatives in leading youth groups in her community. Despite discrimination from neighbors about the use of her native Kui language, Ratha never gave up. She overcame discrimination and challenges from outsiders because her love for her own native language and cultural identity is much stronger. Nowadays, she also helps train children and works with young people in her community as well.

*Text by Khun Kim, Project Coordinator, Organization for the Promotion of Kui Culture
English translation by Norah Lay, Volunteer
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KIMHENG'S LIFE EXPERIENCES AS LGBTIQ+ IN CAMBODIA

I am Tol Chhourkimheng, a 30-year-old LGBTIQ+ rights activist with Love is Diversity (LiD). In fourth grade, I understood I was not straight, and I felt exceptionally different than others with particular preferences to the opposite sex. Societal norms dictated that as a female, I needed to have a relationship with a male. Later, I met a few folks who shared the same feelings. But, more critical, I began searching on the internet,

which made me curious in how and why same-sex feelings occur and my doubts about homosexuality. I also obtained knowledge and information from university lectures. I first came out to my co-workers and friends. A few accepted me most of them did not. I was advised to change for various reasons; I had no future, no children, and my parents would be embarrassed. As an activist, I began with Love is Diversity and am improving

my awareness of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sexual Characteristics (SOGIESC), solidarity, self-love, and self-acceptance. Everything starts with love; we deserve respect regardless of who we are.

My community and family still have limited knowledge of the LGBTIQ+ community's needs. While employers are beginning to take gender identity



Kimheng (second right) and his team

and expression into account, legalization and legislation remains a mirage. As a result, LGBTIQ+ community members are not legally protected against discrimination, bullying, and violence. Still, LGBTIQ+ people face personal, family, work, and social challenges.

Back then, this was challenging the most at the moment that made me very depressed living in a toxic environment with no support system in place, and this was hard enough to continue, and later I quit the job. An employee stated with solid feelings of discrimination against homosexuality that he would kill all LGBTIQ people if he became the country's prime minister, and there are no spaces for LGBTIQ people in this world.

HOW DO I PLAN FOR A SAFE COMING-OUT JOURNEY?

Family not accepting one is impactful. One feels unloved and unsupported of who we are and want to be. Parents try to change us and expect us to follow them, although it would be impossible to shift SOGIE in a lifetime. I hope family members will try to understand and not deny genuine desire. Whatever golden net is, I will choose the ability to fly high over being secure in a trap.

My family accepted me when I came out, and I slowly told them I am part of the family. I am trying to finish my education and eventually get a job. I am starting to develop a sense of independence for my economic and financial situation. I dream of continuing higher education, and my effort will pay well – winning the Australia award to pursue my master's degree; this is the right time to raise my voice on SOGIE. Reflectively, evaluate what is best to fly with and be confident enough to overcome those consequences. How much do you learn from yourself and who you are? How ready have you built to go further? This is my way of coming out and is suitable for me, but I am not sure if this works for others.

Although the government supports non-discrimination based on SOGIESC, tangible legislative and policy initiatives should be planned on the pledges of non-discrimination to LGBTIQ persons. Based on the experiences of meeting with many LGBTIQ people, legal support is crucial to eliminating discrimination against homosexuality. Furthermore, LGBTIQ people urge the government to legalise same-sex marriage to ensure that LGBTIQ people get equal rights and opportunities in society.

Some progress has been achieved in advocating for the interests of LGBTIQ+ people through social media and the larger community. Hopefully, LGBTI people will become more self-assured and encouraged to engage in and be represented in community activities and events. They are utilising their skills to reach their potential and, of course, the society for development, leaving no one behind the action.



“ Nothing about us without us;
we join hands to make an inclusive and diverse world. We have no right to discriminate against others; others would not be entitled to be bullied and discriminated too. We are all free and equal based on the universal declaration of human rights. **”**

NOW-US! AWARD NIGHT 2022 HONORS INITIATIVES THAT ADVANCE INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

Impact Hub Phnom Penh and Oxfam through Voice celebrated initiatives that advance diversity, inclusivity, and the empowerment of Voice's rightsholder groups who are people with disabilities, indigenous communities and ethnic minorities, women facing abuse and violence, vulnerable youth, the elderly, and LGBTI people. Voice's guiding principle of Nothing About Us Without Us (NOW-US) Cambodia NOW-US! Award cohort II officially launched on September 1, 2022, at the Factory Phnom Penh and continued to shine, uniting rightsholder voices and honoring unsung efforts with inclusiveness and diversity.

The NOW-US Award is a pretty particular initiative to genuinely "Nothing about us Without Us!" truly put into effort practice. We are thrilled to be collaborating on this program with Impact Hub in Cambodia. said Ishita Dutta, Voice Program Manager

Ten rightsholder groups were selected to participate in onsite Bootcamp, a program to strengthen its capacity and revisit innovative and inclusive approaches. Its curricula enhance diversity, storytelling, leadership, and design thinking. They are prepared to throw the best pitch.

"The program is the best. I understand the meaning of Nothing About Us Without Us. I very much appreciated Pichmony; the ambassadors and organizing committee team are working hard, firm support, and inspiring; we got fruitful results for 2nd year of the project." said Mr. Ngach Samin, the Voice ambassador of Indigenous People and/or ethnic minorities group.

During the 5-day NOW-US workshop, the project initiatives were all impressive; I am so proud of them. In particular, the 5-day boot camp helps them learn more, plan more precisely, and practice pitching, and most of them do well on the last day. _Chhoeurng Rachana, Voice ambassador of LGBTIQ+ group.

"It was a privilege for us at Impact Hub to offer NOW-US Bootcamp 2022 for our rightsholder groups from 10 teams across the country to connect and be empowered while witnessing their passion and initiatives amplifying magically at the same time. This remarkable experience would not just prepare them for the Award ceremony, but it will also as a dot for their many years to come in their missions to building the world with the inclusive community they want to see." said Pich Pisethneat, Head of Impact Incubation of Impact Hub Phnom Penh." – PISETHNEAT PICH, Incubation Lead of IHPP

In its second edition, the NOW-US Awards is ready to host ten semi-finalists for final pitching on September 1, 2022. Eighty participants gathered in a happy crowd and clapped loudly, making the night of the Award ceremony unforgettable. The jury committee finally identified the monetary awards after several discussions.

The first place of NOW-US! 2022 with 25,000 Euros goes to **Phum Asia Youth Center** to further the mission of digital literacy skills that reach out impactfully to Kui indigenous youth in remote rural areas in Kampong Thom Province. This educational program aims to empower and strengthen

indigenous youth to better equipped them to adapt to the context of digital society and the industrial revolution 4.0.

Cambodia Sign language for all wins the second NOW-US! Award 2022 with 15,000 Euros to promote and normalize the use of sign language for all. To promote accessibility and inclusion for persons with impairments, particularly for the deaf and hearing-impaired, series of videos and digitizing content will be produced in sign language.

The third NOW-US! Award 2022 of 10,000 Euros goes to Arts and Mental Health, which carry the **"Pka Sla Ekareach"** organize film festival, content creation, and run media campaign that will encourage and empower women and girls to live on their self-independent, combat gender stereotype and social norm that put pressure on single women who want to live independently.

More excitedly, **La CHHOUK Recycled and Creative Fashion** wins the most public vote prize published on media that explicitly post the link to vote. La CHHOUK Recycled and Creative Fashion further focuses on educating and spreading awareness to parents and guardians about the rights, values, and acceptance of gender diversity within the LGBTQ+ community. In particular, La CHHOUK is a stunning fashion show featuring recycled-material outfits made by a group of LGBT designers, models, and makeup artists. The aim is to change public perceptions of trash and turn to the worth of recycled items that will protect the planet from further environmental damage. "OUR FASHION – OUR ENVIRONMENT – OUR WORLD"





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Voice aims to strengthen the capacity for lobbying and advocacy of civil society organisations and representatives of rightsholders groups. In effort o Leave No One Behind, Voice wants to empower these groups to have their voices heard and respected, using innovative ideas and approaches.

Within Voice we look at intersecting inequalities or overlapping vulnerabilities, resulting in people feeling doubly discriminated and excluded. Voice considers four dimensions of exclusion: social, spatial, economic and political.

To reach the right groups we use innovative outreach methods. The voices of women and girls are prioritized as they are doubly affected by traditional gender stereotypes exacerbating exclusion.



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