

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

A community's understanding of women's leadership, based on 30 interviews with people from seven villages in Svay Rieng Province, Cambodia

By Srey Mom Lund

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About this report

Women's Leadership is enriched with the voices of 30 women from Svay Rieng province. They explain what the concept of leadership means to them and share their views on women holding leadership roles. They tell of situations where they have been leaders. Many share inspired plans for what they would do to improve their communities if they were in positions of greater power. More broadly, they offer us insight into the challenges they face, the victories they have celebrated and the dreams they have for themselves, their families and their village, for the future.

The women were interviewed by Srey Mom Lund, an Australian Khmer student who was born in Cambodia. As a young woman who understands the local culture and can speak Khmer, she was ideally placed to develop the trust and respect required for local women to have expressed themselves so openly.

SreyMom added significant value to her research by returning, two years later, to the seven villages where she had conducted interviews. Those follow-up interviews proved challenging, particularly given that 90% of young women she'd spoken to from one village had moved to work in factories elsewhere. When these women could not be interviewed in person, Srey Mom sourced friends and family who could explain how the lives of her interviewees had changed.

The trends and stories within this report add to ChildFund Cambodia's understanding of local women and the needs of their communities. Listening to women and understanding what they have had to say about leadership gives us a head start in supporting them to reach their dreams and full potential.

In a cultural environment where girls and women strive to be leaders, it is heartening to remember that the Royal Government of Cambodia has given us, and our development partners, strong endorsement to mainstream gender and to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. Among the Government's policy commitments, within the National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development 2010-19, is to *"Enforce actions that increasingly integrate women into the governing process, increase access to services, and ensure women's and other marginalized priority needs receive resources"*¹.

Carol Mortensen

Country Director

ChildFund Cambodia

¹ Royal Government of Cambodia: National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development, 2010-2019; 28 May 2010 page 12

About the author

Srey Mom Lund was born in Kampot, Cambodia, in 1994. She is one of five children and spent her early years living with her family in Tug Tong village.

At the age of five Srey Mom was orphaned. For a short time she lived with her disabled grandmother before being placed in an orphanage in Kampot. Three years later she was adopted and moved with her new family to Phnom Penh where she attended elementary and secondary schooling. She is now studying a double major in development studies and anthropology in Australia, and expects to graduate in 2014.

Srey Mom is to be commended for having initiated this ambitious research project. She came to ChildFund Cambodia with an interest in researching the role of girls and women in rural Svay Rieng provincial communities, and was keen to explore their attitudes towards leadership and experiences of it.

As a young woman who grew up in Cambodia, this project posed several interesting challenges for Srey Mom. Initially, she felt uncomfortable interviewing elders and was not sure whether they approved of her being there. Having gained their respect and built her confidence, she now feels better equipped to contribute to both Australian and Cambodian communities.

The stories Srey Mom has gleaned capture the dilemma of many girls and women living in a province with limited resources and few economic opportunities, which leaves many with little option but to leave. However, the experience has also left her feeling more confident about women one day playing a significant role in leading Cambodia's future. She says it has reminded her of how capable, humble and selfless women can be.

"They have the patience and strength to slowly increase their leadership roles in the community and in society and wait for greater opportunities to lead in the future," says Srey Mom.

"The opportunities for women to lead are increasing very slowly. Cambodian women are aware of those opportunities and are using their skills and innovative ideas to expand those opportunities, step by step."

ChildFund's work in Cambodia

In 2007 ChildFund Cambodia was established as the representative office of ChildFund Australia. Since 2008, ChildFund Cambodia has been implementing programs that offer children and young people, including girls and women, opportunities to realise their full potential. We work across education, youth, livelihoods, water and sanitation, healthy communities, governance and safe migration sectors.

Access to assets, voice and agency, power and protection inform all our work. ChildFund progresses child rights, giving girls and boys the opportunities and the skills to become leaders amongst their peers and communities; and active citizens of Cambodia.

Girls and young women in communities where ChildFund works are encouraged and supported to access social services – education, health and child protection community-based response systems; they attend with male peers, life skills and leadership training. They participate in child and youth groups and conduct peer education activities.

Young women and men are equally supported to attend vocational training, develop a business plan and be approved to establish a small business and participate in savings groups.

Importantly ChildFund is facilitating children and youth to participate in sub-national 5-Year district development and 5-Year commune development planning in line with established Decentralisation and Deconcentration guidelines. Child and female youth representatives in communities where ChildFund is working today have a stronger role in commune and village development planning, as is enshrined in the Sub-National Democratic Development Program.

ChildFund facilitates children and youth, including girls and young women, to actively participate in reflections with organisational and sub-national personnel. Their contribution enables ChildFund to enhance its role as a learning organisation and increase awareness of the value they bring to consultations.

The impact of gender in Cambodia

The Cambodian Constitution prohibits discrimination against women. In 1992 Cambodia became a State Party to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. Despite these significant measures, Cambodia ranks 99 of 145 countries on the Gender Inequality Index. While women represent more than half of the population, significant gender inequalities continue to feature in Cambodian society. They continue to have significantly less than half of the wealth, resources and voice.

Facts and statistics

(Edited extract from Cambodia Gender Assessment 2004)

Gender relations and attitudes

- Women have lower status and lower levels of education than men. Their responsibility for domestic duties limits their capacity to generate an income and contribute to community decision-making and planning.
- Women are expected to protect their families' reputation and honour, remain close to home and be supervised by family members.
- Girls are more likely to leave secondary school than boys and receive fewer years of schooling.
- Women aged 18-36 provide more than 90% of household and family care (women contribute 3.3 hours per day, men contribute 0.3 hours).

Gender's impact on the economy

- 49% of the labour force is women.
- 83% of female workers are self-employed or unpaid family workers, compared to 77% of male workers.
- Caring for children is one of the main constraints preventing women from entering the labour market. Demand for childcare is growing in both urban and rural areas.
- 62% of the population and 44% of the labour force is younger than 25.
- 55% of people older than 25 are female.

Gender equality in paid employment

- 8.7% of households manufacture garments. One-third of these households have more than one garment worker.
- While most women with higher levels of education work in professional occupations, few have decision-making positions.
- Women have fewer recruitment, education, training and promotion opportunities and may be subjected to sexual harassment.
- Young women have started to migrate in search of employment, leaving them vulnerable to a range of dangers, including being trafficked.
- Girls in female-headed households with no adult male are far more likely to be working than children in other types of households.

Socio-cultural obstacles

- 45% of women believe it is better to educate a son than a daughter.
- 30% of men forbid their wives from working outside home, even when their wives want to. Men tend to believe women should be at home taking care of children and household tasks. When wives work elsewhere it implies their husband is not capable of earning sufficient income. Men may also become jealous if their wives work with other men.
- More than 70% of women workers are either illiterate or have less than a primary school education.
- Girls in the poorest income quintile are more likely to enter primary school late or not at all. They are also the least likely children to complete grade 6.

Gender disparities in leadership

- Data from seven line ministers show that women hold less than 25% of management positions in provincial departments and district offices.
- Cambodia has 13,890 villages, of which only 453 have women as chiefs. The Royal Government of Cambodia has decreed that one in three village leaders must be a woman.
- *Chhap Srey*, the traditional code for women, emphasizes that public decision-making is the domain of men.

Interview highlights

I only want enough female leaders – maybe about 20 more – for my village. Right now there are about 10. I want 20 more because females are smarter now. They can get involved and care about our country. I think they will do more to improve and develop our country in tourism.

Meas Srey Lenh, 13

The big role model of Cambodia who I want to be like is (Prime Minister) Mr Hun Sen, because he is in a position to help the country.

Phong Sophay, 13

I think that more females should support females to be leaders.

Soun Thary, 14

I want to be a leader. I want the whole country to develop and to do that I will build more hospitals. We have a hospital, but it is very far away and it is difficult to get there when we are sick. I would build more hospitals so it would be easier for everyone to get to them at any time.

Bhum Malis, 14

The reason women are good leaders is because they have different knowledge; they are fresher, braver and smarter about taking care of problems on time.

Sok Sochea, 15

In my village, one female teacher at the school has just become the principal of the school. When I see this women being a leader in my village I support her deeply and I want to be a leader one day, just like her.

Sam Pholika, 15

I am supporting young leaders and want to have more, especially female leaders. I want more females to be leaders because they understand the female's situation and problems. Most of the time male leaders don't really listen to women's problems. For example, with violence in the family, male leaders get mad at us in return. By having more female leaders, our community will develop even more and we will all be closer.

Ouk Chetra, 18

I want more females as leaders and I want them to be higher than males because males have always been on top. If women can be leaders, then the power for both genders might start to equal out and maybe there will be less violence in families. Also in our country there are more men that get good jobs than women.

Sien Samphors, 18

If I was a leader I would want to develop my village even faster, especially in agriculture. I want to develop chicken farming, to grow a greater number of farms. Lots of chickens die due to our poor technologies and methods. I also want to change the environment of the village by growing more rice for selling, which will improve our economy.

On Saran, 45

I really want to have more females as leaders because I want females to have the same rights and powers as males and to be able to do everything that males can.

Heng Sakhon,53

Interview findings

Women as leaders

Regardless of their age, knowledge and status, each of the 30 women interviewed agreed that both men and women can be leaders. They acknowledged that men are typically the country's dominant leaders and that men have more opportunities to become leaders than women. But they were unanimous in wanting more female leaders. They consistently commented on women being able to offer new thoughts and ideas, solve problems and manage time effectively.

Despite their enthusiasm for women leaders, those interviewed felt it was important to support leaders of both genders. They understood and admired the courage and bravery required for someone to become a leader. There was a sense that when men and women work together, they are more effective.

When asked about their dreams and aspirations as future leaders, many women wanted to develop the village by improving schools and building a university and more hospitals close by. They wanted to improve their roads to make it easier to get to the main town, so education and adequate healthcare could be accessed.

The women stressed that there should be more equality between the genders. Many felt this could decrease family violence and the abuse of women and children, because men would be more willing to listen to the other side.

Women were first invited to join leadership groups and become leaders only a few years ago. In many circumstances wives are controlled by their husbands and are not allowed to lead, as it would imply they had some level of control over others; culturally this is an issue when this includes men.

What makes a good leader

Gender aside, the women consistently said leaders should come from well-off families and be better educated than the people they were leading. Literacy featured strongly, as 20 of the 30 women stated that leaders must be competent at reading and writing. To some extent this might reflect that more boys in Cambodia have the opportunity to complete school than girls. This might have influenced perceptions that men are more capable and intelligent, and able to think and plan faster. Women also commented that men secured more significant leadership roles because of their physical strength, which enabled them to contribute to some manual tasks more effectively.

There was general consensus that leaders should put their community before themselves and be knowledgeable, critical thinkers who find solutions. Many described leaders as being brave

people, capable of working with all villagers and providing for the needy. The women described ideal leaders as being trustworthy, hardworking, patient, and providers of good advice and hope. Some women said it was important for leaders to show respect for the Khmer culture and those around them.

They admired leaders who had improved villagers' knowledge of health care, managing livestock, farming techniques and caring for the environment. Those who made improvements to roads and schools, worked effectively with external organisations and promoted equality were also highly regarded.

Views on who can lead

Many of the women interviewed volunteered that people who were blind, deaf or sick would not make suitable leaders; nor would those with drug addictions or men who were violent at home.

There was a strong sense, particularly among older women, that child leaders would receive less support and respect than adults. There were frequent comments that leaders should be older than ten and younger than 50. Their concern about older leaders was that they would not be strong enough to work as hard as the young, and that their memories would falter.

Women consistently felt that people need to have their own affairs in order before they can become leaders. If you can't successfully manage yourself and lead your own family, there is a consensus that you can't lead the community.

The contribution of young leaders

Young girls have joined children's clubs and attended meetings where they have improved their knowledge, often through games. They have learned about health, environment and farming issues which has boosted their potential as leaders.

The interviews reflect that there has been an increase in the number of girl leaders. In most cases they are the bright students who lead the class. They strive to do well in their education and participate in activities such as plays. Performances are well liked in the villages and plays are a way of building awareness and conveying important social messages. By participating, young girls are showing leadership by working to improve their village, one small step at a time.

Some girls did not have the confidence to be leaders. They were afraid that they would do something that the village would not approve of and so they would not be supported.

Adult views on young leaders

In 2006 some villages selected one boy and one girl to become youth leaders. The interviews reflect that these children have started to gain respect from older villagers.

The older interviewees supported the idea of having more young female leaders, as they believe that today's generation is much more educated than in the past. They said that grade four now is equivalent to what was grade 10 when they were young. They understand that students also have the opportunity to build their knowledge and skills by attending educational meetings run by organisations.

Many female students have become leaders at a young age, largely through opportunities at school. They typically start off with smaller roles on their student council, as leaders of children's clubs, or within their households as an adviser to friends and younger siblings. They see that middle-aged women now have larger leadership roles as teachers, vets, vice village chiefs and health advisers. They are proud of these women and their achievements and believe they have made their village more stable and strong.

These girls aspire to high roles and have big dreams which they are not willing to give up easily, despite the poverty experienced by their families. They want to develop commercial activities for tourists and build sanitary systems, bridges and a clean water supply. They want to improve villagers' health and plant more fruit trees near schools and homes.

Understanding leadership

At the start of the interviews most women did not consider themselves to be leaders. It became evident that they did not understand the concept of leadership. This changed as interviews progressed and they came to realise that leadership can be many things, no matter how small. While they did not name it as such, they began to understand the concept of technical adaptive leadership, with or without authority.

The leadership roles identified in the villages included village chief, vice village chief, chief of commune, town chief, vet, teacher, school principal, youth group leader, housewife, student council member, parent, leader of a children's club, friend and older sibling.

More than half of the women interviewed identified that they had some kind of leadership role. Less than one fifth had no desire to lead at all. One third of the younger girls wanted to become a leader one day.

Those interviewees who wanted to become better leaders said they must be good role models and be able to teach themselves. They could then teach their families and friends.

Knowledge of leadership is growing through community links. It starts with people learning at meetings held by organisations at the temple or village chief's house every three months. The knowledge passes from the village leaders, to younger students and then other villagers. As this exchange of ideas works through the community, leadership skills will be passed on from one person to another, through future generations.

Role models

Very few interviewees knew about the leaders of Cambodia. Those who did identified them among their role models. Prominent role models included Hun Sen (Prime Minister), Man Sum On – please check spelling as I cannot find reference anywhere – (Title? Cambodian People's Party) and Bun Rany Hun Sen (head of the Cambodian Red Cross). Some expressed that these were good leaders and that they supported them, even though they had never met them or seen the work they had done.

Teachers and parents were the most commonly identified role models.

Support for leaders

Despite full days of work in the fields, farming, marketing, teaching and looking after their household and children, the women interviewed were able to put time into work requested by their leader or village chief. More than 80% were involved in re-fixing the main road. Many also raised money for fixing and upgrading school buildings, temple houses and orphanages.

Some leaders allowed meetings to take place at their homes, while others brought tea and snacks to community activities to show their support for leadership that would improve the village.

Providing feedback was seen as key in supporting leaders, as most community members do not have much to contribute financially.

Interview questions

Questions for young girls and young women

- What is your understanding of leadership? Please give your own opinion.
- Have you seen other women (young or old) taking action as a leader? If so, did you support them? Why or why not? If not, can you think of an example of men's leadership that you have seen?
- Who are your female leadership role models (in your province, town, and country)? Why?
- If you were in the place of this female role model, what would you do differently in order to be a better leader?
- Is there anything stopping your role model from playing her leadership role? If so, what?
- Would your family or community (eg, neighbours, school teachers and village leaders) try to stop you from having a leadership role?
- Do you want to be a leader? Why or why not?
- Have you been a leader before? What did you like about your leadership work?
- Have you ever taken leadership in order to fix or start something new in your village? If so, what would have made it easier for you to be a leader?
- Who are your role models and why?

Questions for older women

- What is your understanding of leadership? Please give your own opinion.
- Have you seen other women (young or old) taking action as a leader? If so, did you support them? Why or why not?
- If you were in the place of this female role model, what would you do differently in order to be a better leader?
- Is there anything stopping your role model from playing her leadership role? If so, what?
- Do you want young girls to be leaders? Why?
- Would your family or community (eg, neighbours, school teachers and village leaders) try to stop you from having a leadership role?
- Have you been a leader before? If yes, what did you like about your leadership work? When did you take up a leadership role? What training have you had in leadership?
- Have you ever taken leadership to fix or start something new in your village?
- What would have made it easier for you to be a leader, when you were young girl or young women?
- Who are your role models and why?

Women who were interviewed

	Name	Age	Village	School grade or occupation
1	Sok Sochea	15	Svay Phâm	7
2	Chim Rati	16	Svay Phâm	9
3	Heng Bunn Thon	42	Svay Phâm	Community and Service group leader
4	Neang Sokunthea	16	Svay Phâm	8
5	On Sarorn	45	Roka	Housewife and working with Center for the Empowerment of Females with Disabilitiesorganising microfinance
6	Chum Sok Chea	13	Svay Phâm	5
7	Chhay Pheakday	18	Beng Villang	11
8	Sam Pholika	15	Beng Villang	9
9	Heng Sakhon	53	Svay Phâm	Traditional healer and Khmer teacher
10	Kim Savay	20	Svay Phâm	Stopped school at grade 6
11	Kor Dani	18	Roka	9
12	Meas Srey Lenh	13	Svay Phâm	7
13	Neang Chariya	25	Svay Phâm	Factory worker
14	Chi Thyra	16	Svay Phâm	7
15	Sok Phan	45	Roka	Teacher
16	Ouk Chetra	18	Roka	Student working with Center for the Empowerment of Females with Disabilities
17	Phraj Rina	15	Chieg Mieng	9
18	Bhun Malis	14	Roka	6
19	Chin Sopeak	15	Svay Phâm	7
20	Sam Savann	13	Beng Villang	7
21	Sam Serey	49	Beng Villang	Vet
22	Sien Samphors	18	Beng Villang	9
23	Yeang Chann Than	17	Svay Phâm	8
24	Sor Chan Thon	39	Chieg Meing	Chief of the children's support

				group for ChildFund Cambodia
25	Soun Thary	14	Svay Phâm	7
26	Ong Srey No	39	Roka	Pre-vice village chief and secretary at Center for the Empowerment of Females with Disabilities
27	Say Boray	14	Svay Phâm	7
28	So Ny	18	Roka	9
29	Phong Sophay	13	Tra Pung Thmor	7
30	Sok Bunna	35	Tra Pung Thmor	Mother and a seller

Interview transcripts

These interviews have been translated and edited for purposes of clarity.

Sok Sochea

Age: 15

Grade: 7

Village: Svay Phâm

A leader is a person who is great at leading and who is brave and smart. This person would be 20 years of age, or older. Mostly I only see male leaders because they have higher education than women and are brave and stronger. Lately though, I have seen other female leaders who have taken up smaller leadership roles such as housewife, teacher, student council member and village vice chief.

If I was a leader I would build bridges, roads, toilet systems, schools, temples, wells and channels. I would want to make the roads look nice and big for travelling. I would grow gum trees 20m away from the roads, so if it rained the trees would not fall on travellers.

I would build big bridges from cement and metal so they stayed strong for longer and would not rust. I want to paint the bridges white, because it is my favourite colour, and I would get builders from my village to do the work.

I would make toilet systems from cement, with a good sewage system. Each house would have one. To do this, I would get a lot of support from different organisations. I think this is very important because if we just go to the toilet or litter everywhere it will get into our water system. For example it will get into our farms and flow into the underground water supplies. It will make us very unhealthy. I want to dig wells near each household so that everyone gets water more easily. I would teach how to grow plants using waste water from everyday use.

Right now ChildFund Cambodia is making us a new school building. If I was a leader I would make more classrooms because we have a lot of students and classrooms are still not enough for us.

Furthermore, I want to make the temple bigger so all the villagers will fit inside. We will have to make it look good. We need skilful artists to paint it with the correct beautiful colours.

Some women want to be leaders, but they cannot because they do not have enough education, their family has too low an income to support them, or they are just too young for the role. For example, I cannot be a leader because I am too young. I think by the time I am 20, I would have enough knowledge to become one. A woman leader should have finished high school or have attended university.

A person who is blind in both eyes cannot be a leader because of the need to see progresses in order to lead. People who are alcoholic cannot be leaders because no-one will respect them, as they cannot take care of themselves or others. Most of the drug addict people I've seen do not care about anything and just sleep or lay around. If a person is sick they probably could not be a leader, as they might die after getting the position.

The reason women are good leaders is because they have different knowledge; they are fresher, braver and smarter about taking care of problems on time. Even if they are very poor it does not matter, as long as all villagers respect them. I want more females to be leaders because they think more clearly and are more straight forward than males. Not all females have good knowledge. However, there are females who know a lot nowadays. In this village I want to have 25 female leaders. I want some of them to be vice village chief.

I use to be the leader of the school cleaning group. I did this every morning before classes started when it was my turn. When I finished I would tell the teachers and sometimes they would give me extra marks.

Maybe I am a leader of myself, my mother and grandmother. Sometimes my mother works, but most of the time she is free. I work as a brick labourer. I wash and scrub house bricks when people rebuild their homes. For every five bricks I get 100 riels. Sometimes in one day I get 1500 riels. I give 1000 riels to my grandmother to buy salt for our cooking and spend 500 on something for me to eat at school. I am very happy with this work because I go with many friends. They are very nice to me and they do much of the hard work for me. I want to work more to get money for my grandmother. I never think that what I am doing is too much. Sometimes I get mad at my friends because when I am doing work they splash water on me. However, we always get back together.

I also help my aunt with her rice farming. When I arrive late at school, due to my family situation, I have to clean windows as punishment. At school I missed classes twice because my mother was not at home and she needed me to help her look after our cows and do the house chores.

My role model is my teacher, because I want more villagers to gain knowledge. I want to be kind and respectful like my teacher. I want to teach culture and tradition most, as it is my favourite topic. Good leaders need to understand the people and the country.

Two years later: Sochea's role in providing income for her family has grown. Her mother is sick and her elderly grandmother needs to be cared for. Sochea had to leave school due to the family's lack of money and external support. She started working in a garment factory in Phnom Penh. She has shown leadership by deciding her own fate and by working to support her desperate household of women, who are unwell.

Chim Rati

Age: 16

Grade: 9

Village: Svay Phâm

A leader is a person with the most power who leads everyone successfully. We have very few female leaders here, but we do have a town chief who is female leader. I do not think that a housewife is a leader, because that is her role in society. On the other hand, the student president of a class is a leader, but a very small one. I am not a leader but I am one of the oldest of five children.

If I was a leader I would bring in a toilet system because most of the villagers here do not have the money to do it. I think it is very important to have a hygienic toilet system because we get sick a lot.

I don't want to be a leader because I am not very good at my education and I am not a very clear thinker. Some people really want to be a leader, but do not have the power because they do not get voted in by other villagers. If a person's family is poor, villagers will not pick them because they cannot even take care of their own family. No-one will vote for them because we want someone who is well off and can lead us to become like them.

I want to see female leaders in different villages even though not all women are well educated. Some women know how to do a lot already, such as raising children and being a housewife. Some are village chiefs. Being someone who studies hard would make it easier to become a leader. I want to be a teacher. That is an easy dream that might come true as long as I keep working at it. Listening and learning from teachers is a very good start.

I have never decided to do anything on my own before, but I want to make my village a beautiful place with clean environment and water so that tourists will come here. I have had this idea in my head for some time, but I have never told anyone about before.

I have only been to one meeting, when an organisation came here. I was scared because it was my first time but I learnt a lot about sexual education.

My role models are my parents because they are the people who take care of me and teach me what is right and wrong. My father is a motorbike taxi driver and my mother is a tailor at home. I don't want to be a motorbike taxi driver or a sewer, but I want to have a job and make money like them.

Two years later: Rati finished high school, but her family could not afford university. Her sister was pregnant and Rati needed to work. She decided to work in a factory with friends from her village. She gives some of her salary to her family and keeps some for her future schooling. Rati's

sister regrets not sending money for Rati's schooling. She did not realise how well Rati had performed in all her subjects, especially English and art. It is too late to change the past, but Rati is working for the future. Her family is proud of her small salary, which has had a big impact back at home.

Heng Bunn Thon

Age: 42

Occupation: Community and service group

Village: Svay Phâm

A leader is a housewife – the head of a household. Even though I am a housewife, I am still a leader. I also look after land. I lead a community and service group. It is my group's job to repair the roads once a year. Every time we see something wrong, we fix it as a group. This gets the job done faster, before the rainy season. I have been working for two years. Sometimes we grow grass along the roads as well, to prevent erosion when it rains, but it is difficult to get dirt during the rice farming period.

I go to meetings at the temple of Svay Phâm. In the meetings they have taught me that if a road is muddy, we must take all the mud out first before filling it with solid soil.

There are many barriers, like knowledge, that stop a person from being a leader. Disabled people would find it hard to lead because they would not be able to accomplish their work. For example if a person had disabled legs, even if they had a wheelchair it would still be hard for them because they couldn't go far away on a trip. We don't have good transportation for disabled people and the trip would cost them too much in the first place.

The leaders that I have heard of are Hun Sen (the Prime Minister of Cambodia), **Hen Sum Rin (check spelling – is it Hen Sum In? Also add title)** and Chea Siem (President of the Senate). Men Sam An (from the Cambodian People's Party) and **Hen Bum My (check spelling and add title and organisation)** are female leaders who have a very big role. In my village at school we have a female teacher. The Reproductive Health Association of Cambodia is asking for young school girls to join them. I have seen what they talk about because they have meetings at my house. They talk about diseases, where they are from and how they are spread. To show my support, I collect people for the meetings and provide them with water and tea.

If I was a leader I would bring more organisations to teach at the village. I am very happy that we have this already, but we want more inspiration.

There are no women here who want to become leaders because all their children have gone far away. The mothers do not have time to lead. Their children provide them with money by working far away from the village, mostly in Phnom Penh.

There are a few female leaders. One is the commune council member and one is the village chief, who is about 50. I want more women older than 30 to be leaders. Most women younger than that go to work at the factory.

Our school buildings are old but we cannot fix them because we don't have the materials or money. Thankfully ChildFund Cambodia is making us new school buildings.

***Two years later:** Bunn Thon still has a significant role as a leader. In addition to working as a leader in her community she is looking after her household, as all of her children are working away from her village. Her community leadership duty was getting harder. Sometimes it is difficult for her to go to meetings because she could not leave her house without the children. She also cannot retire, because all the younger working age members in the village have gone off to work in the main towns and cities. Only the youngest and oldest people are left in the village.*

Neang Sokunthea

Age: 16

Grade: 8

Village: Svay Phâm

Leaders help to make our country develop faster. They must be really skillful. In Cambodia there is a great leader. His name is Hun Sen. I have seen him on TV helping a lot of poor people. The only lady that I know who is a leader is the Village Chief's wife. She is the leader in charge of looking after the roads in and around our village.

I support them by giving them more courage to do jobs for the village. I like going to their meetings and I help out by answering their questions. They spend a lot of time teaching us about why it is important for us to go to school and the importance of doing our schoolwork. They even help us with our homework when we don't understand how to do it. I am supporting them and listening to their advice because I know that they are very knowledgeable and I know that they are correct.

If I was a leader I would increase the number of schools and temples and make them even better places because these are the places where we learn. I want to increase the number of temple houses for monks and nuns to stay in. The houses that they are in now are old. At schools I would create better tables and chairs for all the students.

One thing that makes it hard for a person to be a leader is if they are too young, for example if they are under 10 years old.

I want more female leaders because they seem to be smarter than males. I think they can develop the country more than males can.

I have never been a leader in fixing anything. I have fixed with sticky tape my little sister's broken book. I fixed it for her because she is young and cannot do it herself. I have also sewn clothes myself when some threads have come off –my clothes and those of my family members.

A person becomes a leader more easily if she is a better helper for the community, and if she is a good person and kind to everyone. It does not matter if the person is an orphan or poor. Youth Community Committee helps us to learn some new skills for a better life.

I want to be a teacher because teachers are great people who help younger people to become better people. A teacher shares her knowledge with the young ones to the best of her ability.

Two years later: Sokunthea has moved to Phnom Penh to work in the factory as her father's income was not enough to support the family. Her mother is proud of Sokunthea taking on this leadership role in providing for her family's daily needs. Sokunthea is about to be married and so is starting to think about her own family and the leadership role she will play raising children.

On Saran

Age: 45

Occupation: Housewife and working with the Center for the Empowerment of Females with Disabilities microfinance organisation

Village: Roka

From my understanding, leadership is an exertion. Leaders are trustworthy, successful and always complete given tasks. They understand problems before teaching us villagers how to fix them, so when they give us instructions, we can follow them successfully. They can also see the bright future of success which is why they work hard and never give up. They will never complete a task if they do not see the bright future behind it all for the people in their community.

There are people that are considered leaders. I have seen them with my own eyes. One person was brave and stood up for themselves in many situations. The person was young, with an older mind, and strong because they knew that they could lead. I have seen women who are leaders and a 17-year-old girl. Even though she is young, she is a leader because she is very smart.

I don't think that my village really has that many leaders yet – only a few because not everyone is smart. Before, there were only two to four young girls and middle-aged women who were selected to be leaders. Not everyone is clear with everything due to their lack of experience. The people who have studied are the ones who can understand and they have been to many meetings to learn. You have to be skilful in your schooling and everything around you to be able to become a good leader.

I support them as I see them getting really skilful and becoming a leader and I think that they are really brave. I support them by verbally complimenting them and saying they have done a great job.

If I was a leader I would want to develop my village even faster, especially in agriculture. I want to develop chicken farming, to grow a greater number of farms. Lots of chickens die due to our poor technologies and methods. I also want to change the environment of the village by growing more rice for selling, which will improve our economy. To do this we will use natural fertilizer. I have been using it, but I want to develop it and come up with more methods. This will improve the soil and make it more fertile. I only just started this method after an organisation came down here, to teach us how to make it. I am testing it to find out its results. It seems to be working and I share this knowledge around with other villagers who still don't understand the processes. I am teaching them this because I do want them to also improve their family situation.

I also help out with violent families. My family has to be a good example for others to follow. In my family we do not fight and when we do it is only small talk. My younger daughter and I are always capable of finding some solutions. Most people follow our example but not everyone does.

Many young women do not go to school and so do not have jobs. Despite the lack of experience in the workforce I am still willing to let them try. Hopefully the bamboo will grow.

Young women may not be chosen to be leaders because of jealousy. The young women might be younger and smarter than most villagers. Many people in the community think that a young female can't be a leader. I think that they are wrong because now days there are many smart young people.

Some villagers also think poor people can't be leaders, for example if they can't even support their own family with rice to feed the household. If one person in the family is sick then they will all have to work to support their sick family member and will not have time to be a leader. However, I still think that if someone really wants to be a leader, people should not stop that person from their dreams.

When I was young I was picked to be a leader in the community development group. I mostly took advice from my parents, because I didn't want to make big mistakes. Every time I decide to do something by myself, I get it wrong, so I really like getting advice from others.

As a young girl living in Cambodia, my parents wanted to stop me from going to school, but I wanted to stay longer in school and get more knowledge. I only went to school for one year and I still regret that my parents stopped me. Back then I could not do any leader's job because it was at the time of the Pol Pot. However, now I am a housewife. I have six children who are finding work. I support them to find jobs.

I allowed my youngest child to finish school. Two of my children are married and the others are working in Thailand as small restaurant chefs. I allowed them to go and find jobs because we needed the money. What we have is not enough. As the head of the household my children ask me permission to go to work. I allowed them because they came up with a really good point. My children asked how our family could develop if all of us just stayed at home together with nothing to do. I also allowed them because there are some close family relatives who live near Thailand that are keeping an eye on them and I know that they are safe.

I led my family to build this house. It was smaller and now it has a tin roof, rather than leaves. I tried to make the decision with my husband, but he said that we would not be able to make it because we don't have the money. At home I'm the one who looks after all the money, and I knew that we had enough. My husband did not know that I had been saving up and with the support of our children I was able to save enough to build the house. Now I am in the Center for the Empowerment of Females with Disabilities microfinance organization.

I like the fact that young women leaders are so brave and can solve problems with good solutions. Children today are so much smarter than back in my generation. I am very proud when they know how to fight back because they have knowledge. They understand very clearly the things that they talk about and they have better thoughts and ideas on different subjects. In my village there is a group of young leaders who are working on the rice bank project and it is very successful. They really can do it. They are a young group who are telling us villagers what to do. I like it very much because they are using their leadership skills. We are all trying everything new that the skilful youth who came to our village taught us, for example teaching us how to take care of our environment.

Roads are a very good example because we all walk on them. Therefore we have to help each other and protect them from going bad. We have to help one another to clean and improve our school. This is important because it is a good place for our children to study. Organisations and other skilful people are coming to teach us, but we are the ones that make it happen. It all depends on us. It is great that we are in groups that have different jobs to do to make our village develop. It is a mixed group of boys and girls that are leading us. They are around 25 years of age.

My village is great because there are many organisations coming to help us and the members that join are able to understand. People do take action in taking care of their own things when they see them broken. It would be easy to become a leader if I was younger. Now I am older I don't think I can do it anymore, but I still have the dream to be a leader. I'm becoming blind now. Nonetheless, I do wish for younger children to be leaders.

To get some training on being a leader, I have been going to meetings with the village chief. We have training meetings once every month. Each meeting takes a minimum of three hours and involves about 100 people of mixed ages.

In the Center for the Empowerment of Females with Disabilities, the village chief has taught us about schooling, fishing, road works, family violence, abuse of family members and the environment around us.

I believe the knowledge is passed on through links. First it comes from the Cambodian Government, which comes up with the knowledge. They pass it on to the province chief who passes it on to our village chief.

Two years later: Saran says her village has understood the importance of gender issues and teamwork, especially when fixing and working on roads. Her community is also slowly seeing the importance of sending young children to school. She says villagers are now able to practice dry season rice farming.

Saran's thoughts on women leaders have not changed – she wishes for more. She still has her same job, but says her skills have improved because of the meetings she has attended. She is learning more about farming with animals and vegetation, fishing, and families and children.

Chum Sok Chea

Age: 13

Grade: 5

Village: Svay Phâm

A leader leads in everything such as agricultural and culture and is a person who is 50 or older. This person is soft and kind and leads us in the right direction when we are bad.

I have seen many leaders, such as town and village chiefs, teachers and principals. I support them by giving compliments so that they continue with what they are doing. I go to their meetings and do physical work, especially clearing and gardening or fixing roads. I am doing all of this to support them because they are doing a great job.

If I was a leader I would do work that the government orders me to do. I would need to understand my village people and take care of them.

Some women really want to be leaders but cannot be because there are still many people – mostly men – who think that a female can't take on a big role, such as a leader, or do work that men can. I disagree with them because I think that females can do the same as males. Females already have a big role as leaders at home. They have to raise children and look after the family. I want more females to be leaders because women are already leading children in the right direction in life and most men do not raise children as well as females can.

Even if the person is poor or if they are female or disabled they can still be a leader. But an alcoholic person cannot be a leader. A person who does not have enough rights cannot be a

leader. A person can be a good leader if they have high enough education.

I have never been a leader before, but I am the oldest in my family. Maybe I am a small leader for my brother and sister. I have been teaching them the importance of studying hard and helping out in their free time with group works, such as carrying dirt from one field to the next, helping mum and dad out on our farm and cleaning around the house. When I am leading them I feel that it is easy and I like being a leader. I am doing a good job.

I have never fixed anything big in the village when I see it broken, but I have fixed some small jobs at home. I have done things like sewing up some clothes, fixing the pig fences, fixing up the bike when the chain comes off or other smaller pieces that are broken or bent. I only do the things that I can. I have also helped out with cooking at home for my mother.

I have joined the Youth Community Committee and go to meetings where we talk about the importance of looking after our school environment. I want to go to more organisations' meetings because they teach me new skills; to be a good daughter, good student and good friend to my parents, teachers and friends.

My role models are my parents because they are people who are kind and always try hard and never give us tasks. They are very soft to their children and friends. I like the type of farming they do and the action they take to make our village a better place. They are very clean and they clean the environment around them.

***Two years later:** Sok Chea is taking a bigger leadership role in her family as she is working to support her deaf mother and enable her siblings to continue their schooling. There have been positive changes in her life. As her siblings grow up, they are now helping her with household chores, so they are not as difficult. However, when children go to work in a factory their living standards improve. Without that financial advantage, Sok Chea's family has not been able to improve their living standards.*

Chan Pheakday

Age: 18

Grade: 9

Village: BengVillang

A leader is a person that guides us in the right direction. For example they teach us how to build new schools or farm with new techniques. The first image of a leader that I get into my head is a man who is about 40 years old and a very kind man that who no violence with his wife and children. He knows how to look after others and his wealth is medium. The reason why I don't see female leaders is because I grew up at a time when women did not go to school much and did not have as much education as men.

I have seen other leaders in other countries. At the moment in Cambodia there are no women leaders, but in the future there will be some. The vice village chief here in my village is a woman. She goes around telling villagers about meetings when other organisations come here. She is the only female leader. There are however many small leadership roles here such as housewife and teacher.

I feel happy to see female leaders and I support them. I make them feel proud, commenting on the good job they are doing and have done. They are good leaders and they are helping our village all the time.

If I was a leader in a village I would help to develop things that have not been improved yet. I want to bring new systems for waste water and make a system for clean water for our daily survival. I also want to make farmers understand more about growing rice so that the whole village will produce more products and we can be more successful.

I don't want to have such a big role because I don't think that I could do it. It is too big a role for me. A leadership role in a village is big enough.

I want to create this new technique for cleaning water so that when we drink it we will not get sick from it. Not everyone is helping us with this new technique. They don't listen to me because I am not a leader. Some listen because it is a good idea and others don't really care.

Some people cannot be leaders because they don't have supporters. Some disabled people can still be leaders if they have a lot of support. Poor people may have a problem being leaders. Gender does not really matter anymore. Age is not a problem because there are young people that are smarter than older people now. A drinker or drug addict can not be a leader because their mind is not working. They may lead people in the wrong and maybe dangerous direction.

I want more females than males as leaders because females give more meaning to other women. Most men don't understand female problems and show less care towards them.

I have been a leader of my school class. My teacher is my leader and I am my classmate's leader. It is a big responsibility. I am the oldest in my family of four children. When my parents are not home I have to look after animals and my small brother and sisters. Some times it can be a big task because there are a lot of chores to do.

I don't really feel anything as a leader. I just feel like everyone else. Maybe it's because the leadership role is not that big yet.

I fix small things, like tables, but only if I can. Yet I take action growing plants all the time. I help to decide and help the decision making of my parents. I helped with the decisions of building our house.

Sometimes there are meetings but I never really go because I have school and housework but if there is a meeting at school I do attend. They talk about the environment around us and our health.

My role model is Mrs Bun Rany Hun Sen because she is a kind woman and she runs the Red Cross. She helps everyone in the country and she is developing our country a lot.

Two years later: Pheakday has decided to go and work in the factory with her sister. She says there are not many opportunities in the village for her and her family doesn't have the money to send her to university. She says latterly her health has been very poor. She and her sister are constantly getting sick and lack energy. They work very hard for long hours at the factory.

Sam Pholika

Age: 15

Grade: 9

Village: Beng Villang

A leader is a strong person with strong knowledge. Mostly leaders are male because a few years ago everybody only picked men, but now they are beginning to pick more females. They used to pick males over females before because males had more knowledge and were much stronger at doing physical work. Families do not support females to attend school. Sometimes it is too far away and females cannot walk alone.

In my village, one female teacher at the school has just become the principal of the school. When I see this woman being a leader in my village I support her deeply and I want to be a leader one day just like her. However, I have never seen any young people as leaders. In my village the village chief is a male but the vice village chief is a female. They are very good leaders because when all the villagers needed water for farming the village chiefs organised for us to dig a water channel to get water to as many farmers as possible.

If I was a leader I would never have any problems with my villagers, unlike the leadership now where there are some disagreements. Solving problems as a leader helps develop the village even more because we have even better connection, no violence and all work hard to complete tasks together. I would teach the villagers to not be too greedy and to think of others.

I know a person who wants to be a leader, but he does not know how to read or write. The reason why many people picked him in the first place was because he is willing to work for everyone. From my point of view, if you don't know how to read or write it's difficult to be a leader.

I don't really want to be a leader. When a leader works correctly she is supported and gets good

comments, but when she makes mistakes everyone begins to hate her. As a leader we cannot change how other people feel about us. I want to work in an office.

When I was in grade 7 I used to be a leader. I stopped because some of the girls listened to me, but all of the boys would not listen to me. I spent two years trying to lead them and no-one followed my orders so I quit.

It is very difficult for me to stop being a leader because grade 9 is the highest grade there is and all of the younger classes are following our example. I used to like doing a lot of good things and my teachers would praise me, but some people said that when I was a leader I was very bossy.

In my village I have never fixed broken things. At school I helped out with some broken objects but mostly I told the younger classes to do it. I can still give orders to younger classes because I have the role as leader in my group for school maintenance. In my group there are five members and all of my group members listen to me most of the time.

At home when I see broken things such as pillow cases and dresses, I sew them up. When I was young my mother always told me to do some house work. As I get older I just do the chores without being asked.

I don't want to be a leader because I had experience being a leader and I did not like it. Today another person has taken over my role. She is doing a great job and I am supporting her for the future. She used to give me orders to bring some food for our teachers because they teach late classes and I helped out with preparing the lessons. We voted this new person to be a leader because when we were in grade 7 she went to Angkor Wat and she was very kind to bring back information and photographs to teach all the other children in the village. Her grades are very good. She always tries hard at writing reports and documents. When most of us get told off by our teachers at break time she would gather all of us and talk to us about why we were in trouble and the reason for the punishment.

To learn more about leadership and taking care of younger children she went to learn from the Reproductive Health Association of Cambodia. What makes her an even better leader is that all of her family members are very skillful and go to study in Phnom Penh. Their parents are spending lots of money on the children's education. However the family is not that wealthy. The great thing about her family is that her parents are pretty old and they don't drink so therefore they don't have arguments amongst themselves. The family is very funny. They are really good at jokes and give a lot of good comments.

My role model is the village chief even though he is a male, because I believe he is the smartest person in this village and everyone always has meetings at his house. I dislike the female vice village chief because she is not a very good communicator and only thinks about herself and is too lazy to split up the jobs. There is too much jealousy between these two leaders.

Two years later: Once Pholika finished grade 12, she went to work in Phnom Penh and continued to study part time. Pholika's family is very supportive and understands the key points of education. Her dream one day is to work to improve her family's living standards. In the future they will have a new house.

Heng Sakhon

Age: 53

Occupation: Traditional healer and Khmer teacher

Village: Svay Phâm

Leaders lead the country and develop schools, roads and hospitals. They are the type of people that we think can lead us all because they are brave and put all their efforts into their work.

Leaders should be 50 years old like Mr Hun Sen. I think leaders can only be male because I have seen with own eyes that males are leading the country. They are government people who link to other leaders, such as the province chief, town chief and village chief. There are many leader groups out there, though I don't know all of them.

In this village I am in the village commune group. Even though organisations are no longer working with us, my group is still going. I am working as the judge for the health centre. I am the one that walks around the village finding the people to get their shots against different diseases and many villagers still come to me because I am a Khmer traditional healer. I am a housewife looking after children and being a wife most of the time.

I have seen female leader elections in this village back in 1972, when we were voting for a female role as leader for a female committee program. There is only one female leader here in my village –vice village chief. At school there are small leadership roles, looking after school materials and school tasks. I support them only inside my mind because I have no time to go up to them and congratulate them face to face. At one time I did give them some opinions about them being really caring about their jobs.

When I was at one meeting we asked for a school building and now we have it. If I was a leader with a bigger role and I could request bigger, important things for my village I would ask for a modern toilet system and wells for each household. I also want to have a high school that will teach grade 10, 11 and 12.

There are many females who are not literate and therefore no-one votes for them. We have never had a person who does not know how to read or write who has wanted to be a leader. Some disabled people could be leaders because they probably have enough knowledge. I think that blind and deaf people cannot be leaders.

If you are poor, educated, kind and others respect you then you can still be a leader. People too young or too old cannot be leaders. I think 20 and older is a good age.

I really want to have more females as leaders because I want females to have the same rights and powers as males and to be able to do everything that males can.

I am pretty happy with my work because I feel like it is a job for me and I hate to see others sick. I like teaching young women about taking care of their babies and I like it when I weigh the baby to see if it is the right weight. I am not fed up with this job. I am still going.

I have never really fixed anything but I look after others' farm work and chase the animals off for them as we are all pretty much friends here. I helped with building this road four years ago. I am not helping physically, because there is a big group that has that job, but my family and every other family donates some money. We contributed 1000 riels only.

I am basically the leader of my house. I teach my children about farming, looking after animals and I teach my grandchildren to be good and not to gamble.

I think that a person becomes a leader easily if they have some literacy. They only need enough to understand, like if they have been in school until grade 7. The person should be kind and respectful to others.

I have been to many meetings, especially on health issues. After each meeting I would try using or doing what I had learned and then I would try to tell others. I am forming a rice collective and a banking group. I have learned so much about how important it is to have shots when we are the right age and I now go to teach at the school. Before the meetings I knew very little and I am really thankful for all of those meetings. They listen to me because they voted for me but I don't know why they voted for me.

I do not have a role model because I am too old now. I never really think about role models. I finished school at grade 10, but if you think about it now, that would be like grade 3 now. Grade 10 then and three now are learning similar things. Those in grade 10 now will learn more than I ever have.

I am a leader, helping people out with their health, but I do not wish to promote myself through this interview program. I don't want to be famous and I am tired with this task. I'm getting old and there is a lot of work in this village without the young working class. We elders have to do a lot more than we did two years ago. Our understanding has also improved and therefore we have little reason to stop until the villagers find a better replacement.

Females still lack confidence in taking up leadership roles because most of the older villagers have little or no education. Women still spend time doing housework and taking care of children and let the men play the bread winner role.

Most of the young females have gone to work in the factory, leaving the old women to take up leadership roles.

Two years later.....

If no update then can we note why not

Kim Savay

Age: 20

Grade: (Finished school at grade 6)

Village: Svay Phâm

Leaders such as the town and village chief are very good. They have a big impact on my life and have helped so much with my family situation. They give us rice when we run out. They have helped us many times. They spend lots of time making us well and giving us small fruit trees to plant.

If picking a leader, I would choose someone who has been a leader before because of their past experience. If we were to pick someone new, it would be hard for them to be a leader. I have only seen leaders that have been working as leaders for years.

I have seen teachers and student leaders. But a housewife is not a leader.

At home I am a leader because my mother is very sick and she cannot work. I have to look after her. I have to grow rice myself and help at someone's house for money. I do house chores everyday. In the morning I clean the house, brush the garden, cook some breakfast and collect water from the well for the day. Then at midday I cook lunch, wash some clothes and at night time I cook some dinner or sometimes we just eat the precooked food from lunch time. Most days repeat this pattern.

I asked to stop going to school at grade 6, because my family didn't have the money and no-one was looking after my mother. I have taken action without my mother or anyone having to tell me what to do.

I support all the leaders. I cooked food for some of the big meetings and helped with preparing and cleaning up. I give them lots of courage to do their work. I support them because I personally like them. They have taught me to be a better person.

I have learned many health and hygiene skills from organisations. Despite my lack of education

and the situation I am in stopping me from becoming everyone's leader I am the leader of my household and this role is already big enough for me.

***Two years later:**Savay's disabled mother sadly shared how her daughter broke out of her comfort zone and went outside the village to try and find work. She has been gone for a long time and her mother hardly hears from her. Savay made the tough decision to leave and her mother is uncertain how the world outside will influence her. Savay's future would never change unless she left. However now, her mother has no-one to look after her and is facing many difficulties with her day-to-day life.*

Kov Dani

Age: 18

Grade: 9

Village: Roka

I think a leader is like a machine head, where they control everything. They are brave, can make decisions and have many supporters.

I have seen other leaders in my village that are my age and older. These leaders are between 18 and 30 years old. I support them by joining in with their meetings and giving them more support. I listen to them. I have joined them to fix the road and I vote for them in the election. I did what they asked me to do and supported them to make the right decision, because they are good leaders. They listen to our ideas. In one of the meetings I had asked them to create a club for young people in our village, which will also create more games and activities for us to join in and have fun.

If I was a leader I would improve my village by developing it more. I want older women to have education and younger children to study more and go on to higher levels. I also want to develop a drama and cultural theatre centre here. We have some activities and games in Khmer New Year, but it is not enough. We have never had interesting cultural activities here before.

I have seen some villagers who don't want more leaders or do not want other people to be leaders because of their family circumstances and because they are poor. People don't like leaders who have little or no education or if their family has a lot of violence. They may not want to be a leader themselves. I could not be a great leader with a big role because there is not enough work for me to do.

I want both girls and boys to be leaders, but I want more girls to be leaders. There are already many leaders here, however the more we have, the better I imagine my village will develop because they all will bring different and new ideas.

I am a leader in my class student council at the moment. At home I don't consider myself as a leader because it is my mother's job. I do make decisions and ask my parents about what I want to learn at school and about my future. Even though I have a lot of ideas, before I can do anything I have to ask my parents as I am the youngest child in my family. I have asked them if I can become a sewer and both my parents agreed and I am studying sewing now.

I get upset when they say no to my decisions but most of the time they agree. When I get a job, it will be my turn to help to improve my family. I like talking to my family and like working together.

I have just fixed holes in the road in front of my house, because it is my duty. The rest is the village council's responsibility.

At school I encourage my friends to help with growing more trees because it is very sunny in the yard. I have grown three trees already. I am very proud because it was my idea. To do this we asked permission from our teachers. We brought the plants ourselves and picked the hottest spots in the front of the school. Our teachers also had this plan but they never mentioned it to us, so I started taking leadership action.

At home I help out with house work everyday. I give my friends advice not to go out too much but to help out with their family's chores more.

I am just a small leader now, but in the future I want to be a bigger leader. The things that will make it easier for me to be a leader are that firstly I must want to be a leader and secondly I will need the support of my village. To be a leader in my village I will need to work first. Every leader in my village has a job. The jobs are the roles that are given to us by the village chief. For example if they were going to have a childcare centre here in my village, the chief would put someone in the role to lead that centre.

Another important part of being a leader is the need to have a good education. It is very unlikely that a person will be a leader without education. Conversely, if they are a musician who does not have any literacy or education, but has a good memory, they could be a good leader for their band.

I go to study, listen and make notes at meetings in the province. I have learned how to improve my village. I have been to meetings in the province twice. They taught us to fix our own roads when they are broken without someone having to tell us to do it. I have also learned about pregnancy, where they taught us what to give the pregnant woman when they are sick. These are some of the important skills that I have learnt.

Two years later: Danihas not continued her sewing training. She has been to more meetings and passed her new knowledge on to fellow villagers. This knowledge relates to farming, animals and

building new water channels in the dry season. She says it is positive that when there was voting at the village the majority of villagers supported girls who were 20 and older. She says there has been an increase in the number of children's clubs and activity groups but she wishes the village had more teachers with good literacy and different skills to encourage students to be interested in learning.

Meas Srey Lenh

Age: 13

Grade: 7

Village: Svay Phâm

A leader is a person who guides everyone along the right path. That person is like my grandmother. She taught me the importance of going to school and how to be a good woman. The other females I consider female leaders are my mother and aunts. They are my type of female leader because they looked after me and have brought me up.

My mother gives me guidance. She cooks for me, washes clothes for me, looks after the animals by feeding them and taking them out. She taught me how to cook, look after animals, ride a motorbike, sell fruits and complete all the different housework. My aunts taught me not to fight, mentally or physically, with my brother and sister and to look after each other instead. I am the eldest of three children and I think I am starting to be a leader for them. However, I have never been a leader of the class at school or of my friends.

If I was a leader I would develop my village by building temples and new roads. I would grow more gum trees, Khmer berry trees and mango trees so the next generation has fruit trees and shade.

With temples, I only want to build a few more. I would also teach the villagers about environmental issues and how to look after the environment so that it will be healthy for them all. They are doing that, but I want to ask them to do more.

Some females cannot be leaders because they don't have the power to be. If a woman has family members who are rich, they have the power for her to be a leader. I don't think that I could be a leader because I am too young now, but I think that maybe after I am 20 years old I could be a leader.

Those who don't have much knowledge, who are really disrespectful to other, or who are drug addicts cannot be leaders. Leaders are those who care, have a higher education and finished grade 12 at least. They are respectful and only involved with good friends, not those who skip school or take drugs.

I only want enough female leaders – maybe about 20 more – for my village. Right now there are

about 10. I want 20 more because females are smarter now. They can get involved and care about our country. I think they will do more to improve and develop our country in tourism.

I have fixed things. I fixed the fence around my house and the pig fences without anyone telling me. I also sew and wash clothes no matter if it is mine or my sister's. I have also repair holes in the road, even though it was someone else's job. I only filled it up with dirt. I have also been involved in doing many activities such as cleaning dishes for my teacher when I have free time because I feel like it and it is important to respect and do our teacher's favors because they have been working hard. This happens on a normal school day. The village has not come to ask me to do anything with big responsibility yet because they think I am still too young to help out.

I have gone to the children club here with RHAC. The meeting was about health; on teen health, HIV AIDS, disease here and different games. These games are meant to help us when we are upset and to help us entertain ourselves when we are bored time as well.

As I said already, my role models are my parents even though they are fruit sellers at home. I want to be a seller and have a salon like my father. I want to have both of these jobs when I grow up.

***Two years later:** Srey Lenh has gone to work in Phnom Penh, at a young age, in order to support her family.*

Neang Chariya

Age: 25

Occupation: Factory worker

Village: Svay Phâm

A leader is a president or someone in government and for my village it is the town and village chief. A leader is a person that has enough knowledge to develop our country. This person can be male or female and they would be about 20 or older.

There are some leaders here but they do not have very big jobs. When was at school there were many younger leaders at school. I supported them, praised them and some times I would go to listen to their meetings and listen to their conversations. I was never brave enough to ask questions, but I shouted from the back with some answers. When I asked leaders to help us they tried and some of our wishes came true. For example, I got my well when I asked them.

If I was a leader there would not be much I could do to develop things because every other leader has done everything I could think of. I don't really want to be a leader as I don't have enough literacy. Some people really want to be leaders, but they did not get to be, because the whole village needs to vote for them. All the villagers voted for someone they could trust, who would support and develop our village and who had new ideas to help our village.

Some women really want to be a leader, but if no one supports them, they will not get the job.

Disabled people or poor people can still be leaders as long as they have good knowledge. I want more females to be leaders because today woman have the same rights as men. Females and males have different ideas as leaders, but I'm not sure what they are.

I have never been a leader, even when I was at school. Now I am living with my mother, she sometimes asks me whether we should buy land and I tell her my opinion. She asks my permission and advice because I am the one who works hard at the factory in Phnom Penh to get this money for her.

***Two years later:** Chariya has gone from the village work in a factory, leaving her young children at home for her mother to look after. This has been difficult, but her income is supporting her family.*

Chy Thyra

Age: 16

Grade: 7

Village: Svay Pâem

A leader is a person we respect, who is brave and kind. We can trust and depend on them at all times, especially in time different times.

In my village I have seen the town chief on TV. She works for the government.

I support our leaders inside my head and show my respect by listening to them when they need help with some of the activities. I go to watch many meetings because they are near my house. I like the work my leaders do and when I am at the meetings, they try to get me involved in some questions.

If I was a leader I would work to make our community a better place. I would work on temples, schools, roads, and bridges.

I am not a leader, but I kind of want to be a leader. Those who really want to be leaders some times can't because village people do not like them. Children under 10 can not be leaders because they are too young and they don't have very much knowledge. If people are too old they also can't be leaders because they can't work well. If I was going to vote for a leader, I would pick people older than 10. This is the age when they have more knowledge.

I want to have more females as leaders because they can do the same work that men can. For example they can be village chief and do housework.

I am a leader for my siblings, as I have to look after them and play with them. I need to cook for my family too. In school I am the leader of my school group. This is the answering group in class.

I am just happy to take action in a small leadership role.

I hope to fix my school. When I see small things that could be fixed, we do it ourselves. I go and ask all my friends to help me. I want to clean the garden and grow more grass so that we have more places to sit and less dust.

I have never learned about leadership from my teachers, but I went to meetings at the commune council and they taught me about children's health. I used to have this really interesting idea for my village, but I don't want to tell anyone. I just want to keep it in my mind. I always talk to my parents about disease and my parents listen to me. This makes me happy.

***Two years later:**Thyra has taken action and shown leadership by going to work with many of the other girls in the village.*

Sok Phan

Age: 45

Occupation: Teacher

Village: Roka

A leader needs to be a good person, who is worthy and truthful. They need to be loving towards everyone in the village, be patient and understand others.

In my village now there is one children's club with one girl as a leader. They organised meetings for young people and give advice to each other about what they have learned, whether it is from school or from different organisations that come over to our village from time to time.

To support them I give them good comments. I tell them that they are young, brave and smart enough to be leaders. I give them some food and money when they have meetings because they don't have anything yet. I really like supporting them because this will be good and encouraging for them. They will be helping with our community later in life, because they are loving people and they will bring development and new knowledge to the community. By having more young leaders I think there are no bad effects. There are only benefits for us all.

If I was a leader I teach my family to be a good family role model to the community. I would develop education for everyone. I think that education is very important and I want to teach the people in my village myself. I would also do more farming education, especially on plants and animals. We are farming here every day, but with new and better techniques we can achieve more products and benefits.

I would try to learn more skill from different organisations and I would apply it to see different results. I have learnt some new knowledge already from the CFED (Cambodia Farmer Economic Development) organisation. I will do more farming for both feeding my family and for small

trading.

If someone is in a family with difficulties, these big problems make it difficult for that person to become a good leader. If the person is poor that would be another problem. Some people have no time to be leaders because they have to work in the factory as a sewer elsewhere. Four of my five children are working in a factory in Phnom Penh and only my youngest child is still at school. She will only study until grade 7 because then she will work to support the family too. Anybody can be a leader as long as they have literacy, are loving and have great patience. But if they are old, about 70, they can't be a leader.

I want more children to be leaders because today's generation is so smart and I believe they will be the ones to develop our village even more. They will bring more skills and a time management plan for us. I believe that time management is the solution.

I think I am a leader because I have been working with UNICEF and I am teaching children aged three to five. This leadership action brings benefit to young children in the village and to me, as I am earning some money. But the important thing is that I love children and even when they are bad I can teach them to be good.

There are times when I have to pick up the children from their houses because their parents are working and have no time to take them to classes.

I have never taken action as a leader to fix anything by myself. I only join the groups already organised by our village chief. With the community I have never done it, however in my family I have made decisions myself. My family has created a water pond next to our house. I am leading my family when buying animals to raise. My family members are great listeners. They listen to me. I love being a leader because they listen. If they don't I lose my confidence. People who listen to me are my family members and friends, but the whole village listens to me.

The thing that would make me a better leader would be to know more about how to be a leader. I have seen a mother in my village who is trying to lead her family but she cannot because she cannot even talk to them. You can't be a leader if you can't even look after yourself first. I really like my village chief because he is a very understanding person. He never drinks and he is not racist. He knows how to be a leader and he is doing a great job for us all.

I go to learn how to be a leader from UNICEF once or twice every month. If I can't go, one of my family members goes for me. By doing that I'm not the only one that understands, but also my family members understand. The organisation has taught us health issues as well.

I have learnt how to be a teacher to young children from other teachers that work in the organisation. Before this I didn't know how to be a teacher. All I knew was that I love young children. After 20 days of classes and training at Svay Rieng, I understand more about being a teacher.

My family is very supportive. I love kids and the things that I do make me a better person. I understand that teaching someone is a big task and to make a community function I need to start with my family. Some very good examples are farming and looking after animals, communication with all family members on the impact of drinking, gambling, violence and testing out new technology and skills.

I believe that I have grown as a person. At this point I am taking action to lead four groups of older people, mostly the head of household. My situation and understanding has improved tremendously. In the past, at times I use to borrow rice and money from other villagers due to our family situation. Now I come up with new plans and solutions to the cash issue. When all my children marry or work away my husband and I grow vegetables and most villagers come to buy some from us. I sell this very cheaply. We have got the best method in farming and what we grow it is very productive and successful. Every time my children send us some money, we use some for our everyday utilities and the other half is for our investment in the household and our big plans to improve the house. My children are very proud of us and I believe we are a good role model with our money planning and good spending.

Even though I don't have much education, I can still come up with new ideas. With the knowledge that I have, I can teach the younger ones. One very good student of mine who has become successful is Chetra. This makes me happy. It makes me want to continue with my work.

This is an amazing village. Everyone helps each other out. Some very good examples are when someone needs physical support to upgrade their house. All the people do all the heavy work and the ladies do the rest. They form big groups of helping hands and are full of laughter. It puts a big smile on my face every time.

I love my village chief and support his every move. He supports me and informs me about education, taking a leadership role and getting out of my shell of uncertainty. He understands us and supports everyone to improve.

I have this grand plan for my children this coming holiday. I have decided to have a family discussion about their future and start to divide the two pieces of land that I have for my children. I want to do this now, before I get any older. Therefore all my children will have the right information and have no misunderstanding.

I am a bit weak and feel quite unwell and at one point wanted to stop this teaching job. However I love the children so much and they feel the same. No one wanted me to stop, unless they can find someone to replace me. The word "teacher" keeps me going with what I am doing. It gives me such pride. I'm happy.

Two years later:

Ouk Chetra**Age:** 18**Grade:** Student and working with UNICIEF**Village:** Roka

A leader could be either male or female. A leader is a kind person; they respect their own culture and others, they are caring towards everything, they are smart and understanding and if they do not understand then they take the time to try and understand to the best of their ability.

There are leaders in my village of both gender who are very good leaders. They come up with solutions to solve our problems every day. For example they learn better techniques for farming crops and they teach all the villagers the new skills. I like it when they bring in new ideas for us. Another aspect that makes them such fine leaders is when they have meetings. They always ask us younger children in the village to join their meetings. We get to give our points of view to the elders. To show my support for their leadership role, I obey and show that I am willing to try the new ideas they are teaching us.

If I was a leader of my village, I would come up with new and unusual ideas that no other leader here brings up. As well as the new topics, I would also bring up the problems that the majority of the community needs support for. As a leader I would want to develop my village economically and so I would come up with some new ideas around cultural drama and arts. I was thinking of making a musical team that would travel to other villages to play for profit.

Here in our village, a disaster that all farmers are facing is the pest problems on our crops. To solve that problem I would come up with more useful and friendly methods to get rid of the pests. We are not doing enough to solve our troubles yet.

There are many things that could make a leader's dreams fail and make it difficult for that person. These might include if the person is sick or if the person had bad parenting – if they were not given the opportunity to be a leader or understanding the value of leaders. It is important for leaders to have a good education. Without education it is harder to be a leader because most leaders need to be able to read and write. However, in my opinion, you don't have to know how to read or write to be a leader, as long as you are able to understand when talking to the community.

Age can be another problem, if a person is too young they can't lead. They need to be at least 15 years old. If they are too old, 70 and older, they can't lead either. Gender is another issue. In my village we prefer female leaders over male leaders, because females can do just as much as

males today.

I am supporting young leaders and want to have more, especially female leaders. I want more females to be leaders because they understand the female's situation and problems. Most of the time male leaders don't really listen to women's problems. For example, with violence in the family, male leaders get mad at us in return. By having more female leaders, our community will develop even more and we will all be closer.

Young leaders are good at solving these problems because we are very good at getting people together. If there are more young leaders they can get all the community together, like with our children's club. Another reason why I don't want older people to be leaders is because sometimes when they have a meeting, they only invite older people and not younger people. We miss out a lot. Older leaders also have short or long-term memory problems, so they cannot remember much, unlike young people who can remember better.

I am a leader at the children's community club in my village, working with UNICEF. I really like the job because I have gained a lot of knowledge and I can use that knowledge to teach other children in my community. I have learnt about human rights and games that make children forget about bad problems and only think about good feelings. After taking action as a leader and talking to other children in my village, I understand more about the problems in their lives. It has taught me to respect and support children with HIV and AIDS, orphans and those who are sick, whether it be mentally or physically from abuse. This experience that I have gained at a young age will help me to be a better leader in the future.

I like to fix things I see broken at school. The most recent thing I took action in fixing was my class black board and cleaning up the classes in the morning. I have not fixed any thing in the community myself, but when the community was fixing the main road I went to join them. I have also helped out with the dishes at the community celebration at the temple.

I have also organised the end of year party with my classmates. Fixing small things around my house, like fences so that the animals do not get out, and helping out with housework is a normal thing for every young child here.

To take a bigger part in leadership in the future, I will work hard at school. I will remain willing to join meetings with older people every time, to show them that I am a patient person and full of willingness. I will need more support from my community, so showing them my commitment will be a good start. I will have to be more respectful to my community and get as much support as possible from now on. I will have to keep working better and make better plans. I will get young people together and I will be a good daughter at home, helping out my family even more.

I have been learning with different organisations such as UNICEF and CEFED, who come here once a year. We go as a group and there is one leader and many group members.

***Two years later:**After finishing school, Chetra failed to get into teaching and there was no other job position in the village. Her only option was to go and work in the factory and save some of her salary for further study. She wants to be a teacher. When she went away she took all her books and study materials with her to revise after work. Her level of education has given her an advantage, working in the factory. Her position is higher than other girls as she is the leader of a small group. At home, her mother sells deserts and farms rice. No-one forced Chetra to go to work, but it was one of the best things that she could think of at the time. There is not much work other than farming in the village and she did not want to waste all of her hard work at school. Chetra will keep working towards her dream.*

Phraj Rina

Age: 15

Grade: 9

Village: Chiang Meing

A leader is a person that takes us in the right direction. They have good behavior and good knowledge.

I have seen a female leader who is about 40 years old. She is the vice village chief and works on the children's community group. I have never seen younger leaders here. When I see an older female as a leader, I like it. She is my role model. She raises money for orphans and works to develop our village.

If I was a leader I would do things the same way, but I would work even harder. I would try to find organisations that work and support orphans and disabled people. I would bring new methods to farming so that we can do better in our daily life and have more profit.

Things that stop a person from being a leader include if there is no-one in the village that supports them and if the person has bad behavior. Leaders need to be kind to show that they understand everyone.

I want to be a leader because I want to be respected by others and teach and guide my people to go in the right direction. Some young people want to be leaders, but their parents do not want them to because in the countryside you earn little money and parents see that as the priority. Some find it hard because there is no support from the village people and they get a smaller number of votes. Whoever gets the most votes will be the leader.

I am the representative of children for my village. I teach the village what is dangerous for children and together we learn how to sing and learn new games. I really like being a leader and advertising news to people around my village.

It is important to study hard, help our neighbours and get support from our village friends, and

help out with housework and parents. We get support from our parents and they will support us, give us courage and provide us with money.

I help when I am told to, but I have never started anything myself because I am young and I don't want to make mistakes. When I see others fixing the road, I help without being asked. Once when some children got in an accident I took them to the hospital. I have always communicated with my parents about buying new things. I have asked my parents about new farming techniques and about watering the vegetables.

If I was to be a leader I would need support from everyone, especially those who voted for me, my parents and the village chief. If I was going to vote for someone, it would not matter if they were young or old or what gender they were.

I went to meetings at the temple every three months. They taught me about drugs, games, children's rights and family violence. After they teach me I have to take that knowledge and teach it to other children.

In the factory I was a leader. It was such an honour when the boss came and chose me to take up this role. As a leader, I consider myself as a caring and understanding person for the 23 people that I look after. I take time to do my work well and time to listen and understand what my group is going through. I do my best to not be rude to them, but get the work done on time.

Two years later: Rina left her village to work in Phnom Penh at the end of grade 10 because her family did not have enough money to let her continue school. Going away was her decision, as she wanted to support my family. Now she has finished working at the factory and is continuing her high school study. She regrets that she started school too late for the class president vote, but says that she will apply next year. Her views on leadership haven't changed, but she adds that leaders should be smart, literate and confident. They should care about their work and tasks that will improve society. Rina dreams that she will finish grade 12 and has a strong desire to go to study in university in Phnom Penh.

Bhum Malis

Age: 14

Village: Roka

Grade: 6

A leader is a person who guides us in the right direction. They give us advice and support us to go to school and respect elders.

There are only two female leaders here in my village. The young girl is 16 and she leads the children's club meeting. The older female leader is Mrs No, who is the village chief.

When I see leaders I support them by going to meetings. I have also given them a lot of comments about the great job they have done for us and will still do in the future. I will do anything when they ask. I have gone out helping them collect people around the village for their meeting from time to time when they ask me. I support them and do the work because they ask me. If they don't ask me I don't do anything. I supported their leadership in the first place because I wanted to, not because they asked me to support them. I think they have done a great job. Being a leader is a big deal and it is hard.

If I was a leader I would make more schools in my village because there are only two schools here. I also want to build a university because the university in town is too far from us. Transportation has always been a problem. I would build more roads that would be easier to ride on and last longer. The reason why the road is still bad and bumpy to ride on here is because no-one has done anything to fix it. If I was a leader the roads would be my big priority.

It would be really hard for someone to be a leader if their parents did not want it. It is easier to be a leader when you get a lot of support from your family and friends first.

I want to be a leader. I want the whole country to develop and to do that I will build more hospitals. We have a hospital, but it is very far away and it is difficult to get there when we are sick. I would build more hospitals so it would be easier for everyone to get to them at any time.

I was a leader at school, on the student council for my class. At home I help out with housework by getting water from the well, looking after the cows and my little sisters.

I dream of making my own house one day and I want to work in the factory and hospital. I cannot be a leader and take this action yet because I am still very young. However I believe that there is nothing that can stop a person from being a leader. I want to become a leader one day too, so the thing to do is to study hard and do more good for the community.

To learn new things and understanding more about leadership, I go to learn with the Center for the Empowerment of Females with Disabilities. I have learnt how to save money with the banking project. We started this a few months ago. The other important thing that we have learnt about is health and how to be more hygienic.

The leader that I look up to and I want to be like is Chetra. She is a very good leader and she has taught us good things from the past. She brings new, less dangerous games for the children's club on Sunday. As well as every thing she has done, I also like her personality. She is a very kind person and respects others around her.

Two years later: Much of Malis' dream has come true. She wanted to work in a factory in Phnom Penh and she has achieved that. She has helped her family to build their new home. They used to have a small hut but their new house has some wood and cement stairs. Malis wanted to finish all of her schooling, but her family could not afford for her to fulfil this part of her dream.

Cinh Sopeak**Age:** 15**Grade:** 7**Village:** Svay Phâm

A leader leads the country upwards. In my village there are two leaders and a village chief. They help us when we have problems. The big thing they have done was getting the community to mend the road. I have seen the chief of the province, who is truly a big role leader.

I am a leader. The whole of my family left home to live in Phnom Penh for two years and my job is to look after the house. This is a very big job. Some times friends come to stay with me. I can still go to school, but I am scared because we have many animals at home and land to look after. During the rice growing season, my family pays for others to farm rice for us.

I have heard of Mrs Bun Rany Hun Sen. Our leaders are helping the country very well. They have built new schools, bridges and roads for us. They also help the poor in the countryside by giving them food and money. They have helped people who are sick with diseases and people with HIV and AIDs. They are spending their life helping us and I like everything they have done for our country.

I don't really want to be a leader, however if I was a leader I would be a teacher. I want to teach the younger generation the same knowledge as I have in English. I have only just started but I really like the language.

Some people who want to be leaders could not be because they don't have enough knowledge or they are too young. People who are blind in both eyes can't be leaders.

I want more female leaders to control the world because they can develop our world too. They can go to work in the government and in the health sector. I would ask them for more hospitals and schools because there are not enough now and they are very far away.

I am a small leader for my friends and I like the job. It is really fun. When I see other students running and playing on the table in class I ask them to stop because it is wrong and no-one else will tell them. I am strong. I tell the ones that don't listen to me that I will tell the principal.

In my village, the village chief, monks or our teachers will tell us to go and fix our roads and temple gates and clean the inside of the temple as a community. In most of my free time I like watering the garden at the school and temple. When I was on duty to clean up the school on Thursday and my group members did not listen to me, I just did it myself.

A person will become a better leader if they are knowledgeable and supportive.

If someone wants to be a leader, they should go to school and get lots of knowledge from teachers. I have been to the Youth Council Committee. I have also joined the organization Reproductive Health Association of Cambodia, where we are learning about diseases.

Two years later: Sopeak was working in the factory with all the neighbouring girls of her age. She had finished grade 9 at school, the highest grade the village has to offer.

Sam Savann

Age: 13

Grade: 7

Village: BengVillang

The only female leader I have seen is the vice village chief. I went to a few meetings and all the leaders were talking about HIV and AIDs and other diseases. I supported these leaders because they are doing a great job for everyone here.

My school principal asked me to help out with the school playground. I took this leadership role.

When my parent fight, sometimes they listen to me when I ask them to stop, but sometimes when they are in a big fight they don't really care what I tell them. No-one can go against them.

If I was a leader I would fix the bridges and roads as they are not in a good shape yet. I would also teach people more about violence issues and new methods of growing vegetables products. For example if we were to grow morning glory, I would mix the fertilisers with the soil and leave it for a while to settle. Then I would start growing the plants.

I would also advise them to take their children to get different shots against diseases. I also want more wells and channels because of flooding. Too much water kills all the rice because there is nowhere for the water to go. I want more wells and channels.

Some women can't be leaders because others do not want them to be. If a woman is a bad person and does everything incorrectly they will not support her. If she cannot communicate with others she will always be the opposite of everyone else and things will be twisted around.

Age is not a problem. Nor is being poor, being a particular gender or being disabled, as long as you have good knowledge to be a leader.

I don't want to be a leader, but if I have to I will be a chief of the town. I have never been a leader.

I have never fixed anything myself. I have tried to help out with the whole community when they were repairing the main road, but I was scared that I would make a mistake. I don't want to get told off by because they did not invite me.

I was helping out with the school garden. Celebrations at the temple are a big part of our life, so I was involved in collecting money for the party. Sometimes I am willing to do it myself, sometimes I am asked by other people. I get to help when the leader is away and others are busy. I was free and so I went to help out.

I am changing myself. I was very poor at learning, but to get better I would review the work everytime I got home. I started learning in 2008.

A person can be a leader if they have knowledge and literacy. A leader should be 20 to 50 years old. Older than 50 their mind is old and under 20 they are still studying.

Our leader, the village chief, gained his knowledge from the town chief and the town chief learnt it from the chief of Cambodia.

In order to make all my dreams come true, I am continuing my study. Having such a supportive family encourages me and pushes me forward. My older sister went off to work and sends some salary back so that I can keep studying. At home I also help my family out with selling and doing some housework.

Two years later:

Sam Serey

Age: 49

Occupation: Vet

Village: BengVillang

A leader is a person who is strong, such as the house leader or the oldest person in the household. In the village a leader is the village chief and in the whole country it would be the king and Mr. Hun Sen.

A leader is a person with knowledge of everything. When I think of a leader, the really big one would be the king, so they are male. But below that there are females. There are so many

leadership roles that a female can play. Even in my village the vice village chief is female.

I supported every female leader because I know they think clearly before making decisions. I think that females don't give up easily and complete their tasks. They will do things again and again until they reach their goal.

Here in my village I am working as a vet. Not many males want to do this job because it is hard. I will do everything to save animals. I also look after children in this village, especially the little ones. When they are sick, I call a health centre to come and get them. If they don't come, I look after them myself because I have learned how to use needles.

I am a housewife. I look after my children and work to get money for them to go to school. Apart from farming and being a vet I also make and sell white rice wine. I work only to provide what's best for my children.

If I was a leader, I could not imagine myself leading the country. But if I was looking at a smaller leadership role, I would be a leader of my village. I want to teach my village how to farm better and farm rice twice a year, in the dry and wet seasons. I would also teach everyone about human rights and human health. People here, including me, don't have that much knowledge. We have pity on ourselves.

Some people cannot be big leaders because they don't have enough knowledge but they can take a small leadership role, such as leader of a family. Some women cannot be leaders because they are too poor or they are married. When females marry they can hardly be leaders because their husbands are controlling them and they have to be housewives looking after children and the house. There is no time to be a leader when you have to be a leader of your own family. No one is stopping me, but I don't think I have enough knowledge. Age can be another problem. If someone is too young they can't be a leader because older people will not listen to them. Above 20 years of age and below 50 is great. I have seen it myself that children are not listened to by the older people in some meetings.

Being knowledgeable and brave makes it easier to be a leader. If a person is too poor, maybe it is not a good idea to become a leader, because other villagers will look at them and say "look at yourself. You can't even get money to buy rice for yourself. How can you be a leader, telling us what to do?"

To be good leaders we have to do things correctly the first time and believe in ourselves.

I want more females as leaders because women understand women. I don't mind about their age or their wealth, as long as they can take action in a leadership role. Children this generation are smarter and I am willing to let them lead me.

As a small leader I am happy about my job because even higher leaders believe in me. When I

was a young girl I used to imagine that I would be a doctor and a teacher. I completed my dream because even though I never finished school, look where I am. I am so happy with myself and what I have done and everyone also believes in me. I can do my job with little education. I could have been a teacher if I had finished school, but I am still happy.

The things that I fix when I see them broken are small because bigger things like fixing the roads are impossible for me. We need a village chief to lead this. I have taught villagers about bird flu and villagers always call me for help.

To learn more about being a vet I go to meetings in Svay Rieng, but I go to meetings about children's health here in my village. I basically go to every meeting there is, as long as they ask me. Meetings take place once a month.

My role model is Man Sum On from the Cambodian People's Party. I think she is the biggest woman leader in the country. I have read so much in the newspaper, and heard on the radio and TV about her leadership role. I like her even though I have never met her before, but if they were to call me to meet her right now I would do anything to get there.

Two years later: Serey's role as a vet has improved tremendously. She understands much more and is able to put what she has learned into practice. She says she knows all the methods now and her job has become bigger and more important. She is the only vet in her village and she now works for three communities.

She is honoured that a lot of people support her and look up to her as a powerful and intelligent woman. She says she is doing very well for herself and providing strong support for her family. She believes it is important for all of her children to school. Her son is studying in Phnom Penh. She cares for her children's education before improving their living standards. The family's house is getting older and is falling apart. Serey says there will be time for that later, but time for her children's education will run out if she doesn't watch closely. She is very proud of herself and the decisions she has made for the benefit of her family. The important quote that keeps her going is "it is my right and my duty".

Sien Samphors

Age: 18

Grade: 11

Village: BengVillang

A leader is a person who teaches us to do the right thing, for example teaching us to listen to the teachers and go to school and why education is important for us. The first leader I knew was a female leader. She is a leader in my class.

A female leader is a person who is kind, respectful and liked by everyone. She does not have

friends who influence her to do wrong things, such as not go to school. Basically she needs to be perfect in almost everything and everyone will respect her. In education she must be very smart, getting the highest grade all the time. They have to be smart and know how to be a leader.

I have seen other woman as leaders. One is the vice village chief. Outside my village Mrs Bun Rany Hun Sen (the Prime Minister's wife, who heads the Cambodian Red Cross) is helping the needy and orphans, providing us with money and food and other daily supplies.

At school there is a student leader who leads her class. Leadership at home is the mother because she is taking care of their children, the house and animals. I support them because a mother has a small leadership role. She is teaching us to do the right thing. I support my mother by doing the things that she tells me to do. I have also joined some meetings, just to listen to new ideas.

If I was a leader I would want to have a leadership role like Mrs Bun Rany Hun Sen. I would continue building new temples, schools and bridges and because our country needs more money I would try to get money and support from outside the country. I want to help the orphans and the elderly.

Some young people want to be leaders but they cannot be because they don't have enough education and their family is poor. They have no money for school and so need to help their parents with everyday survival. Sometimes if people have old parents they need to look after them all the time.

Disabled people can still be leaders as long as they have enough education, but people who drink and take drugs cannot be leaders. People younger than 20 should be at school and so cannot be leaders. They should finish grade 12 first. If they are too old, over 50, they cannot be leaders because that is the age you start losing your memory.

I want more females as leaders and I want them to be higher than males because males have always been on top. If women can be leaders, then the power for both genders might start to equal out and maybe there will be less violence in families. Also in our country there are more men that get good jobs than women.

I have never been a leader. In my family I never really get to be their leader because I am not the oldest and we are all almost the same age, so there is not much I can do. I am still studying and still depending on my family. I have worked in the rice harvest season for my family. I give 80% of the money to my parents and the rest is for me to go to school and do my own thing.

I never thought that I was a leader, but now I understand that I am a small leader for my family. I am very happy to help my family get money. I am solving some financial problems for them. When my smaller brother broke plates I would clean the place up. I fixed the bed downstairs and then I painted it. I also fixed the pathway for my parents at the farmland. I

mostly help with anything I see, but only small things that I can do.

When there are meetings, I mostly go for my mother. The meetings are usually about animals and water and key solutions to make our village a better place.

My role model is the Prime Minister of Cambodia because everywhere on the news shows Hun Sen creating or rebuilding our community. I want to be a leader like him, who works to develop our country and has the power to do it. I also want to be like my class leader because she is kind and smart and even older people respect her. I love the way she talks. I am doing things like her because this is the best way to get my dreams to come true. I also like how she studies. She knows what she is talking about and she always finishes first of all and is correct too. She has good leadership skills and we want to respect her and be like her. That is what I call a leader.

***Two years later:** Now that Samphors is married she is more active in her decision making and better understands the idea of leadership. Two years ago she says she did little to help the family, but now she does almost everything that is asked of her.*

Samphors doesn't have a big plan for the future as she has only been married for a short time. She and her partner are working to save up and plan their future. For now, her husband is working away and she is staying with her parents. She and her husband don't have a home of their own yet, but Samphors says one day they will.

For now, there are tasks to be done. A lot of the time Samphors doesn't need anyone to tell her what to do. She just takes the action herself, as she has grown up.

Yeang Chan Than

Age: 17

Grade: 8

Village: Svay Phâm

A leader is a person who completes tasks, such as improving or building temples, schools and roads. They also improve agriculture and commerce. They come from a well-off family and can complete big tasks given to them by the village.

Leaders in our country are mostly male. The female leaders that I have seen work for the community. I heard about this female leadership role from my parents.

I hear that there are only a few female leaders, so I support them, as they are girls like me and I believe in them. I know that women work hard to be leaders.

I would not know what to do if I was a leader, because I have never been a leader before.

Some people who want to be leaders can't because they don't have the will to be. They do not believe in themselves. For example, a person who has the power to be a leader is our village chief. He takes care of people and solves problems for them. He provides us with rice when we have no food at home.

I want more female leaders because women also have the right to be leaders and they have enough knowledge nowadays. They can develop their family's knowledge and introduce new farming and transport systems, like making roads bigger. I want the village to have more motorbikes. I also want our village to have an electricity system. It is very dark here and I want to have some light at home. Today we use battery lamps at home and some houses do not have them because they cannot afford it.

I used to be a leader of the cleaning class group at school. I am the second oldest in my family and there are times when I have to look after my little sister and brother.

When I see my stove is broken, I try to fix it myself. I use mud to fill in the broken parts and leave it to dry out in the sun in the afternoon.

I have been involved in rice harvest training, where I go to help harvest other people's rice and they come to help me when it is my family's turn. I help out with anything that my village asks of me. I help with many celebrations at the temple and friends' houses. There are times when I blocked the paddy line on the hill between my rice fields and others because it would prevent destruction of my rice and reduce further erosion.

A person becomes a leader faster if they are knowledgeable. It doesn't matter if they are poor, disabled or female. If they have knowledge and are 20 or older, they can become a leader.

I joined the Reproductive Health Association of Cambodia when they were talking about issues like pregnancy and planting rice. To plant rice, firstly we have to plough the ground so that the grass will die. Secondly we shovel the soil and take all the sticks and grass from the ground. Then we have to pull rice out of the ground and kick off the dirt. Then we plant it in the ground again and finally we harvest the rice. This is the traditional way. I have also learned how to grow plants using natural methods from organisation's programs that took place in my village.

Two years later: Chan Than has gone to work in a garment factory to support her family. The village does not have classes that are higher than grade 9 and she could not continue to study in the village, even if she wanted to.

Sor Chann Thon**Age:** 39**Occupation:** ChildFund chief of the children support group**Village:** Chieg Mieng

Being a leader is a good job. It can lead children in the right direction for the future. The first thing that I see inside my mind when I hear the word leader is an old person that is about 40. I can't imagine a leader to be a young person because younger people don't have as much knowledge as older people.

I have only seen older people as leaders in my village and most of them are male. However, there are females as well. Each of them has different duties around the village, whether it's working as group leader or banker with the ACLEDA Bank, a teacher looking after children, or farming. I support them. I have worked with ACLEDA before. I have been going around teaching young children about diseases such as bird flu. I went to their meetings when they had events here.

If I was a leader I would do things differently. I would develop the schools and wells. Schools are far away and so I would like to make more schools, especially kindergarten for all the young children who can't walk long distances. I want everyone to have one well per house. I would fix roads and build more hospitals. I would help out with orphans and I would support them with books, pens and money for school. If they were sick I would send them to a care centre on time. I would create an orphanage because there are a lot of orphans here. They are living with their grandparents. On a positive note, most orphans are still going to school.

It is difficult for people with little knowledge and not very many skills to be leaders. I want younger children to be leaders too because they have enough knowledge, but not as much as older people. They don't have experience in leadership roles.

I just won the position as chief of the children's support group for ChildFund Cambodia. I support volunteering groups for my village.

If I was a leader I would give young children advice about why it is important for them to go to school. I collect children for meetings when organisations come here to teach new things. I just want to support them to have a better future. To make me a better person, I will have to support the younger children to be braver and to give good advice to people around them. People in my village like me, and this is why they support me. I am kind, loving and feel sympathy for children in my village and I am willing to do everything I can to support them to have a good future.

I had never helped out with anything for the community before, but I had joined in to fix the

main road when our villagechief asked me. I did not do it myself, because I have other duties and the job is very big for one person. I don't have the power to ask other villagers to work with me. It is not my role.

It would be very hard for a person to be a leader without literacy. The villagers watch every move we make, so if we want to be good leaders, we need to watch what we are doing. Being a happy person is important. So is being wealthy enough that you don't have to think about everyday life. If we are wealthy enough, our minds will be on leadership work rather than being worried about food and surviving until the next day.

To learn how to be a better leader I used to go to meetings in Svay Rieng about children at the health centre. I had never really been a leader before. I go to meeting in Svay Rieng every two months and meetings nearour village twice a month. These meetings have taught us new ideas every time. I have been learning about health and we are learning about bird flu. With ACLEDA we are learning about banking, growing vegetables and farming animals. I have already used this knowledge to teach young children in my village.

I want to have more teaching centres so that villagers don't have to go far to learn about pregnancy or growing crops. Also, if we have more health centres, when villagers get sick they will not have to go far. From what I have seen, women are now seen to be more educated and seeing a bright future a bit more.

Personally, I can analyse my thoughts clearly. Thinking and brainstorming is important. That is what keeps me going, as I still have time to learn from myself and from others.

Younger children still have difficulties taking up leadership roles because they are easily tricked. Older people can still think more clearly and are more certain. Currently I am working with the Village Development Committee, concentrating mostly on fixing roads and sewage systems. This requires working as a group.

When I go around teaching, children come up to me and request that I teach them more. I could not because my role was set out by the Child Fund program. However sometimes I take my own action to teach those who have missed out or who I think need more understanding.

***Two years later:**Chann Thon says her life has improved and her knowledge has increased. She says she can think more effectively, is better organised and her knowledge has opened her eyes. She volunteers her time because she loves her country and wants to support it. She knows deep down that her small influence will have an impact on someone's life.*

Soun Thary

Age: 14

Grade: 7

Village:Svay Phâm

The word leader describes a person who helps and leads our country to develop.

I have heard of leaders of Cambodia, but I don't know who they are or their names because I have never seen them before. I know someone that lives near my house who was a leader. She was a teacher at the University of Svay Rieng. I used to think that she was just a normal person. Now she is just a leader of her family, as she can't find a job.

Some of my classmates are class leaders, but I don't think of them as leaders because we are the same. This could be because their leadership does not seem that big to me. I support them because they are brave to be leaders and because they are female. I think that more females should support females to be leaders.

If I was a leader I would develop the whole of my village, firstly by increasing the number of hospitals and roads and also by increasing the agricultural activities here. I would increase rice farming. I think that we should follow new farming techniques so that we can increase rice production. I would only use natural compost fertilizer for growing rice.

I don't really want to be a leader, but I want to be a teacher. This dream has not come true yet, but I am working on it. I am studying hard and I take extra classes. I am learning more English and mathematics. I really want to teach children to be smart and good children.

Some people who want to be leaders cannot because they are younger than 20. Younger people can't think as skillfully as older people, but if they are over 80 they can't because they are too old. I am not sure if a disabled person could be a leader.

I just want more females to have the same rights that males do, in order to get leadership roles. I think they are able to understand more of the girls' situation.

At home the leader of my house is my father and I have never been a leader. I have never fixed anything either.

I have never been to any meeting and have never been invited. In the future I will go and maybe I will learn something new, perhaps new skills.

A role model is my teacher Mr Tom. He is an amazing teacher, who is very kind. He cares for us all and is a forgiving person.

Two years later:Thary is living in Kampong Cham now. She has quit school and taken up beauty salon classes. She says having moved away from the village, she doesn't know what is happening there anymore, but she doesn't think much would have changed.

Ong Srey No

Age:39

Occupation:Secretary at the Cambodian Farmer Economic Development organisation

Village: Roka

In a family, if a good person is kind, they should also be a leader in a group. They need to be good at their role. The person should also have a good enough education. They need to be truthful when they take a leadership role.

The younger generation has many female leaders because they are skillful and good at group work. A housewife can be a leader and at school there are many leaders.

When I see younger leaders doing a great job I support them. I do this by going to meetings and providing food for the event. These are children aged 8-18. They talk about violence and playing safe games and act out different plays.

They are too young to improve the community, but they are good at giving advice to each other. They can go to meetings with the elders. I remember when people in our village would not allow children to go to meetings. Since 2006 they have been allowed and the villagers have picked one girl and one boy to attend. These are the smart children and I believed they can become good leaders. They are respectful children.

When one child decided to stop school I supported them to continue, to improve their chances for the future. I will support everyone to keep up with their schooling, no matter how poor their families are.

If I was a leader I would develop my village. I would develop farming plantations and teach villagers not to have animals too close to the farm. I would encourage them to learn how to use animal manure for better production. I would also help them realise what they already know and to build on that knowledge.

I would also help violent families and support their children to go to school. I want them to have the same amount of education as other students. When a villager does not understand the idea of education, they will not support their children to be leaders.

Children who have not had good guidance could still be leaders. If they have not been behaving they will not be good for a leadership role. If they are poor but have good health and are willing, they can achieve a role as a leader. They may be poor but if they have skills, they can lead. In my village there are widows who look after the whole of their family, just like everyone else. They sell snacks and are still able to send their children to school.

I like supporting more young people to become leaders. If there were more young leaders they

could teach each other to become better people and later become leaders with older people in the community.

I have been a vice village chief before. I went around and gathered village people together. I sometimes would gather around 100 people. I taught them about health, HIV and farming. I taught them about the environment and health. I am still a leader and at the same time I am working as the secretary for the Cambodian Farmer Economic Development organisation. I promote the issues to smaller groups. I love the job and I love teaching others what I know. I teach them and they teach someone else, and that person or group then goes off and teaches someone else. The information is passed on.

I fix the road when I see it is difficult for bikes and cars to travel. When I see something that needs fixing, I can't stand it. There are so many things that I've been involved in.

At my house there is no man because my husband works in Phnom Penh. I have made my own chicken net. I don't wait around, I just try new things. I also bought some small animals to farm them to be bigger. I am also the inspector at the new school, which is being built by ChildFund right now.

I find it easier to be a leader because I have an education and I always work and keep up with the things I do. My family is supportive.

The Cambodian Farmer Economic Development organisation taught me how to be a leader, so I became a good leader after my village voted for me. Meetings happen every three months. The organisation holds the meeting in the village centre, for example at the temple. We go as a group of three. Their staff come from Phnom Penh to teach us and the three of us each have different jobs.

Two years later: Srey No's says she fought to get to the position she is at. She says she is delighted with her position and the decisions that she has made. She says she will fulfill her duty until she can no longer go on. Even though her contract is only for five years, she wants to work until she is extremely old. If she can no longer work for ChildFund, she will find something similar to do that will make her village improve.

She says she has been working to improve women and children's health for two years and her role keeps getting bigger. She says there has been great improvement, particularly in family education at village, district and commune levels. Family and living standards have also improved. She says some families are selling what they farm and grow – things like palm sugar and tamarind – but more young women are leaving to work in the factory. She says one sad example is Chetra. Once she finished school there was no job for her at the village, but at least she had the option to take a good job. Srey No says life for most village families improves if their children go to the city, but some older couples stay struggling.

Say Boray

Age: 14

Grade: 7

Village: Svay Phâm

A leader is someone who can lead a country to develop fast, in agricultural and in commercial activities. We would consider them a good person, who is kind, takes care of others and provides food and daily equipment for the needy.

I don't think that a person who can't read or write can be a leader.

Our town chief is a female leader. She always helps others when they are in a bad situation. At school there are girls who take action in leadership roles and as class leaders. I support all these people because they are brave to want to be leaders. I give them courage to be leaders in the future. When I go to meetings I agree with their good ideas and vote for the best in class. I obey all the leaders in this province and do anything to help out. I support them because I think it is the best way to keep them in the job and make them happy and willing to do more good work to develop our village.

If I was a leader as a village chief I would not know what to do. I cannot think of anything, maybe because I am not a village chief. For now I can only think of small things, such as to grow more trees, especially fruit trees. There is not much to develop in my village because I think that it is a good standard already. One important thing is making travelling easy for villagers by improving the road. I'm not sure what to do yet but I want to make it nice. I want to make my village an interesting place. I want to make a restaurant that sells only Khmer food for the tourists.

Some people really want to be leaders, but they can't because they don't have the knowledge to lead the country. If people do not want them to be a leader then those people will not get a lot of votes.

I want more females to be leaders because women can improve our country just as well. I just want to see more women being leaders. I want to see women helping women. To make this come true, I wish for women to support women to be leaders, starting in my village.

I have never been a leader at all, even at school, and at home I am the youngest.

Even though I have never been a leader, I do want to be a leader one day. Right now, everyone is telling me what to do and people are not listening to me as I am very young. If I was a leader I think the elders would listen to me. Family members do not listen to me, but they give me the right to do some things myself, for example if I want to wash the dishes or help out with the family. Mostly, I am told what to do all the time and when my parents talk about something important, they only talk amongst themselves.

Some people really want to be leaders, but they cannot because they have no supporters and they don't have much literacy.

There are meetings here in my village but I have never joined them before because I feel young. I really wanted to go. I think it would be good for my future to learn new things. The obstacle stopping me is my age. I will go to the meetings in the future if we are going to have them and if I am allowed to.

My role model in Cambodia is a leader like Mr Hun Sen because he is a good leader for the country. For females I like Bun Rany Hun Sen because she works just as hard as her husband, helping our country and the people. I like them both.

Two years later: Boray has sick for some time and so had difficulty studying. She has not achieved any leadership role, but she says she still has her dreams.

So Ny

Age: 18

Village: Roka

Grade: 9

Leaders guide us in everything because they have more knowledge than us and can lead us.

There are three leaders here who are about 45 years old. There are hardly any younger leaders because children who are 17 and younger don't have enough knowledge and some have to do chores for their family. We don't support young leadership roles because most of the younger generation chooses not to learn much at school, or even go to school in the first place. All they think about is money and having fun.

Even if some younger children have the knowledge required to be leaders, they can't lead if their parents do not allow or support them. Knowledge is the key, if they don't have knowledge they have nothing. Leaders need to be smarter than the people they are leading.

I will support them and I also want to be a leader some day. When leaders do good things I like it. I comment, telling them that they have done a great job. Mostly, if I don't like what they are doing or agree with it then I don't say anything. I don't like leaders who are greedy, or think about themselves before their villagers.

If I was a leader I would just take a big breath, think deep into my inner soul and lead my people in the right direction. I would teach them how to work better in groups and come to meetings on time. They have to manage their time well. Housework should be put to one side and group work ordered by the leader should be done first. Many villagers here don't contribute much of

their time to community work. They commit more of their time to their own house work.

Some women could not be leaders because their husbands control them. They are told to stay at home, do housework and look after children. Some people could not be leaders because they don't have time and they are too young.

I want to be a leader because when our country has developed they will want more leaders and I will have enough knowledge to be a leader by then. I want to lead my village to grow rice in the dry season, but I can't do that now because there is not enough water here and I'm too young.

To make my dreams come true I must study harder and go to all the meetings to learn about HIV and AIDS, children's rights and bird flu. We join the meetings because we are good citizens of our village.

Children here aged 14 and 15 years old made a play for the whole village to watch at the temple and I was the mother. It was mostly teaching about violence in the family. The aim of the play was to teach our village about drugs, dangerous games and diseases. I really liked that play. I want to be a leader because I like children and all the children have so much fun. I like answering questions, playing different games and learning new things.

I have never done anything in my village to fix things, but I have joined other villagers to fix things when they ask me. I have decided to buy a bike with my family before.

It would be easier to become a leader and make my dreams come true if I had more free time. Leaders need to sacrifice a lot of their own free time. Being a leader will be easy for me because I know how to write reports, but I will need a lot of support from my village. I will need to be a very good and respectful person to everyone from now on. Most importantly, I will need to get support and courage from my family members.

I have been to meetings many times as a group member. The meetings sometimes take place at the village chief's house or the temple, as it is the centre for everyone in my village.

Two years later: *Ny has changed her view about youth and their leadership role. She says more young people are taking on leadership roles and gaining leadership skills. Education in the commune and village has also improved. She says villagers have become more supportive.*

Ny says she has grown and become braver. If she sees a leader do something she thinks is wrong, she has the will power to let them know. She says two years ago, she would never have had the guts to do it, but now she understands more. Ny says 65% of her dreams have come true. She is now a member of the Youth Improvement in Commune and Village, which is supported by ChildFund. She feels like her village supports the youth group, particularly her parents and family. Ny says she still has much to learn about leadership. What she has learnt, she has practiced at

home. Her latest project was farming fish. As one of three people from the village selected to work on the project, Ny says she is delighted to give it a go.

Phong Sophay

Age:13

Grade: 7

Village: Tra Pung Thmor

A leader is someone who guides someone else in the things they do every day. The person needs to be smart like a student council leader, who guides all of their classmates to clean the classroom. A leader of a country is a person who leads the citizens to fix their own roads. A leader is like the village chief and teachers, who have a lot of knowledge. I have seen a lady who is about 40 years old who is a leader. She is the vice village chief of this village. I have also seen one girl who is about 17 years old who is still studying. She leading an organisation called Reproductive Health Association of Cambodia in the youth group. I supported her leader by giving her praise and I helped her by obeying her orders. For example, she asked me to join a group to fix the road. I went to meetings last week at the village chief's house, learning about the Reproductive Health Association of Cambodia. I supported them, so they will continue working well and not feel down.

If I was a leader I would extend all the roads to make them bigger and then I would teach my family about violence and the need to be a loving family. I would have to study harder and work hard at the job I have. Some young girls and older women cannot become leaders because they have problems with studying and don't try hard at their own job, at home or at school. They may not become leaders if they cannot join the voting ceremony. If a woman's family is poor it may be difficult for her to be a leader. If she is too old or too young it could be a problem too.

I want to be a leader very much because I want to develop the wealth in my family and the community. If I was a leader I would help the villagers in the dry season by providing a machine to help them get water, so that they could farm. I only half believe that I will be a leader because the status of my family is low. We need money right now. To be a leader I have to study harder and work with the community. That means following the orders of the leaders and the village chief, going to meetings, giving advice to friends and joining as many events as possible.

I am a leader at my school. I am the president of my class in grade 7. I am a leader of all my small sisters and brothers and I give them advice to study hard and listen to mum and dad so that they will have a good future. The thing that I like most about my leadership role at school is helping out with cleaning the class and being a role model for studying hard. I have never fixed anything that is broken in my village before, but I help the community to fix the temple by providing materials that they need. I have seen things broken around me but I cannot fix them because I don't know how to.

I have many ideas in my head and I tell myself all the time to study hard so that I will have a good job in the future. I have told my parents that I agree with their plan to buy oxen and cows, but I tell them that we should buy oxen and cows that are not too big so that we can grow them and they agree with my idea.

I have never decided to do anything myself, but I know that if I do I will tell my parents and they will support me. I take action in helping out with farming the rice when my teacher asks me. I don't want to decide to do things myself because I am afraid of making a mistake and then my parents will be mad at me.

In the future I think I will be able to do things myself and make my own choices, because I will be older by then. I would be around 20 years of age. The reason I don't go to work in a factory like everyone else is because I want to study. The girls who go to work in a factory don't want to study.

To become a leader I must listen to my parents, do my school work and help the teacher and the community. To learn how to be a good leader I have been going to meetings with the Reproductive and Child Health Alliance, and a community program called 'Friends must help Friends' at the village chief's house.

My role models are my uncle and auntie, because they both have good jobs. But the big role model of Cambodia who I want to be like is Mr Hun Sen, because he is in a position to help the country.

Two years later: Sophay's idea of who makes a good leader and her understanding of leadership concepts have not changed. But she says she would like to add some more role models to her list. She says there are many inspiring villagers who have leadership roles, including her sister Chan Sovanny, who has shaped much of Sophay's understanding. Sovanny is currently living near Sophay's house and also works with her. She is not just Sophay's boss, but also her leader in the youth group. Sophay likes how she works with other youth and wants to thank her and support her work further.

Sok Bunna

Age: 35

Occupation: Mother and a seller

Village: Tra Pung Thmor

Leaders can lead others to be good. They can be either male or female. They can lead us in how to build good roads and teach kids about drugs and the dangers of gambling. I don't know any leaders of the country but I have heard of them. However, I know leaders in my village and these leaders teach children and I support them with pride.

I provide them with a little bit of money so that they can organise events. Historically I have helped out with fixing the broken school. We go as a big group to collect as many villagers as possible – sometimes even 40 of them. I support my village leaders because they have done a good job of leading us and I know that they will be even greater in the future.

If I was a leader I would work harder to make more roads and I would teach both young and old people. I would support people with family issues and drug addicts. I would give them advice to go in the right direction, to the best of my ability. I would develop schools and temples.

If a person does not want to be a leader, that could stop them. Other obstacles might be not fitting in with others or not having the support from villagers. If people are poor and have a good education they can still be leaders if they are smart at literacy. Only a person who can read and write can be a leader. I want females to be leaders because I know that we can work just as well as males can; men such as doctors and lawyers.

I believe that I am a leader in a way. I am a leader of my family and in my village I am a small leader because I give advice to my village friends when they do something wrong. I really like being a leader and I like being the leader of my family because we communicate well and they listen to me. There are times when they don't listen because they disagree with my ideas.

I have taken action and shown leadership by fixing roads myself without anyone asking me. When someone was sick I went and helped them. If it is just a small sickness I look after them at home, but if they are really sick I take them to the hospital and support them. I have been to one meeting in Svay Rieng. The meeting was about the election. At the village chief's house I learnt the role of a mother and how to look after my child. Most of the meetings at the village chief's house are about good citizenship, to help our country to be successful.

Two years later: *Bunna's daughter is no longer living in the village. She works for a florist company in Thailand. Working away was a significant decision, which showed her capacity to take control of her own actions and be a leader. Bunna finds it is difficult not living close to all of her family members, but the money her daughter sends back home has a big impact.*