

GATEways Case Study and interview at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, November 2014:

Imagine, even the fact we are interviewing Mary at the RUPP in this college exclusive to 1% of the population. Mary comes from a family of illiterate parents to 10 children trying to live off earnings from a small plot of land that was further reduced in size and earning capacity in order to pay medical expenses for their 2nd child, a boy. The family resources were further reduced when the oldest son left for Thailand, took a wife of his own and we assume, began fending for his own family. It is certain that only an external and multifaceted intervention of the GATE, GATEways and STREAM programs taking her from Grade 9 through HS graduation to complete her University degree.

Loeum Mary was born on September 8th, 1990 at Samrong II Village, Samrong Commune, Phnom Krovanh District, Pursat Province. Her father name is Ok Leum, he is 59 years old. He legally works as a construction worker at Thailand. Her mother has just passed away in April 2014 by breast cancer. Mary has 3 brothers and 6 sisters, and she is the 6th daughter in the family.



LOEUM MARY SITTING WITH US IN THE JAPANESE GARDEN AT THE ROYAL UNIVERSITY OF PHNOM PENH

“Hi my name is Loem Mary, I’m 25 years old and come from Pursat. I was selected to receive a scholarship from COCD and supported by Lotus Outreach (LO) in 2009 and until I graduated from year 12 after which LO further supported me to study Agronomy at the Royal University of Agriculture at Phnom Penh.” (through GATEways program)

After leaving home to study in Phnom Pehn under the GATEways program, I lived in a group house that taught me how to be independent and socialize. I now have self-discipline whereas before my parents had to encourage me to work at my studies.

In April this year my mother passed away and that discouraged me a lot. I didn’t feel like studying for the whole month, even with my father encouraging me. After a month I thought I shouldn’t let down all those that had helped me and got back to serious study and which I am now doing. With English I have focused a lot on grammar and not on speaking and recently began an English class for working on spoken English and now speaking well with my instructor. Normally when Glenn speaks I can understand most of what he says, but cannot respond quickly as yet.

I ask her, how do you feel about yourself, coming from a poor rural background and now coming into the urban university setting? Self-esteem and confidence? Changes?

Since I was young I never thought I would go to let alone finish high school. It was 10km to the nearest HS, there were 10 children in my family and only one bicycle!! By the time I finished primary school, there was a 2ndry school built nearer my home so I was able to go. I was going to drop out because of lack of money, but suddenly LO stepped in with a scholarship and I received bike, books, uniform, shoes and all the study materials I needed, and etc so I remained in school and did not drop out.

Even with the scholarship, attending school still required some expenditure and as time went on, my parents became discouraged and wanted me to drop-out. Thankfully I had won the most outstanding in the grade award twice in 5th and 9th grades, so when my parents spoke of leaving school, my teachers came home and met with my parents quite often and sensitized them to the importance of education and begged them to keep me in school. Eventually my parents understood the importance of education, were encouraged and agreed to keep me in school and I was able to graduate year 12 in 2012.

Through force of luck I saw a video of Professor Dr. Yang SaingKoma; president of Centre D’étude et de Développement Agricole Cambodgien (CEDAC) talking about organic farming and knew from then that’s what I wanted to follow.

After year 12, given my financial position I could only think to apply for teacher training and failed anyway. At that point COCD, one of LO’s local development partners, intervened and introduced her to University of Agriculture after which she came under support from the GATEways program. Apart from her formal studies Marie has also enrolled in various

agriculture short-courses such as compost and natural fertilizer and pesticide producing, hydroponic system, as well as project writing and a self-development course. Mary said that studying extra courses adds knowledge to her current subject, and she can also learn from the trainers experience as well.

After graduation Mary wants to be an agriculture specialist and help farmers in her hometown by providing modern techniques she has learnt from school to help them in their farming systems. Even now, every time she goes home Marie is approached by local farmers to advise them about organic farming which she does with pleasure.

Mary and her family expressed their gratitude and conveyed their best wishes to Lotus Outreach which has supported her since she was in secondary school.