

SUCCESS STORY

Saving for the Future

A mother and daughter invest in their own potential with Pact assistance



Photo: Amanda Epling

Norng Savioun and her daughter, Prum Sok Heng, standing in their garage in front of Savioun's store in Stuenghav, Preah Sihanouk, Cambodia.

WORTH is Pact's women's empowerment program which provides women with the training to build their own businesses and achieve financial security by incorporating literacy and numeracy training into village-based savings groups. Women learn to save together and are empowered to become successful businesswomen and active members of their community.

Norng Savioun's garage is a flurry of activity. As neighbors come to buy coffee out of Savioun's store, chickens cluck and peck through the yard, and motos are parked under the awning waiting to be washed, nearly thirty women are gathered for their weekly WORTH group meeting. Though Savioun never finished middle school, she operates several successful businesses out of her home in the fishing village of Stuenghav in Preah Sihanouk Province. Her most important investment, however, is in her children's future. "It was hard for Cambodians of my generation to focus on their education so I want to make sure I am able to support my children to finish theirs."

Savioun is the treasurer of the Strey Soksan WORTH women's empowerment group which formed in February 2011 as part of Pact Cambodia's "Empowering Underprivileged Fishing Communities through Literacy, Savings-Led Microfinance and Health Promotion" project. With the financial support of Chevron Overseas Petroleum (Cambodia) Limited (COPCL) and in partnership with two local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Pact's WORTH program is improving the livelihoods of 430 men and women living in the impoverished fishing communities of Preah Sihanouk Province in southern Cambodia. Pact Cambodia, with the assistance of its NGO partners, provided Strey Soksan and other women in the province with the initial information and training to build and sustain their own groups which offer literacy training, village banking and microenterprise development to their members. Savioun is the mother of six. She used to work in the fishing industry like so many other women in her community but decided to build her own business as the income from fishing was irregular. She now operates a small store and moto washing business out of her home and raises pigs, chickens, and fish for sale in local markets. With the loan from Strey Soksan, Savioun was able to buy more animals and has been growing her savings to support her three youngest children through school.

Savioun's 17-year old daughter, Prum Sok Heng is also a member of Strey Soksan and serves as the group secretary. Sok Heng assists her mother with the business in the morning but attends high school in the afternoon. She is grateful for her mother's encouragement and for the financial stability that being a member of Strey Soksan provides her, "If I ever need money for books or school supplies it is very easy for me to obtain a loan from my group." As members of Strey Soksan, both Savioun and Sok Heng are working hard to obtain their goals for the future. Savioun is growing her savings and business enterprises and Sok Heng is on her way to obtaining the higher education her mother always dreamed of. Sok Heng emphasizes, "For me, finishing high school is not enough. I want to be a doctor." Her mother stood next to her as she said this, beaming.