

DISPLACED YOUTH

STORIES OF EVICTION FROM THE YOUTH OF PHNOM PENH

F and **F**
17

NOVEMBER 2010

FACTS and **FIGURES**
is a publication on urban issues by
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Over the past ten years, 130,000 families living in Phnom Penh have been evicted and relocated to the outskirts of the city. While people of all ages have been moved to resettlement sites, many of those severely affected are children and young people.

Being displaced is a traumatic experience, intimidation and violence sometimes accompany the process, but almost everyone affected endures mental stress and the physical impacts of being removed from their work, social environment, and community contacts.

Living outside the city is harder. There are less jobs and opportunities to earn money, and the men are often forced to seek new work in new locations that separates them from the family. This makes the situation harder for women and children who find themselves alone in entirely new surroundings, often lacking basic access to clean water let alone electricity and other services such as schools, health centres and Wats. Young people often also have to leave their school and friends behind. Some never return to school forced instead to take up work to complement their family's income.

As part of STT's youth and media projects, intern and media student Ly You Y spoke to young people in relocations sites about their experiences. Here are some of their stories.



“Every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.” Article 27, Convention on the Rights of the Child.

HENG LADY, 18



Heng Lady, 18, lives with her mother and ten siblings at Phum Andoung relocation site.

“I used to live in the Bassac area where my mom rented a house there,” she says. “We had moved in 1995.”

Because her family was poor, Lady quit school after grade 7 and started work as a street hawker.

In 2006, she was evicted to Phum Andoung. She was told the government needed the land in Bassac.

“But I think they just want the poor to live with the poor,” she says.

There was nothing at Phum Andoung when she and her family arrived there.

“When I came here, my family just built a house with tent and some wood,” she says. “We had no water, no electricity; we just lived under sunshine and rain.”

Since then, the government has built a concrete house for the family. However, to gain ownership of the house, the family now needs to make monthly payments over the next 5 years.

“We have to pay 96,000 riels per month, but some months we can only afford to pay 30,000 riels,” Lady says. Should the family be unable to pay, there is a chance the authorities will repossess the house.

When asked about her future, Lady says she previously wanted to study and become a doctor. “But now I just want to work and earn money,” she says. “If my brothers and sisters also have jobs, then we will have enough money to open a clothes shop.”



“I think they just want the poor to live with the poor”





Sok Veasna, 20, was evicted to Trapeang Krosang relocation site in 2006. The site is located 20km away from his former home in Phnom Penh's Bassac area, in the middle of rice fields.

The site is a quiet, dusty affair. Many of the houses are locked and empty, because residents have been unable to earn a living so far away from the city. Some have sold their house and now rent in Phnom Penh, while others just go back and forth to the city to work.

Veasna is the oldest among the three siblings. His father is a tuk tuk driver and his mother is a fortune teller at the Royal Palace. His younger brother attends a nearby primary school, while his youngest sibling, aged four, stays at home.

Veasna is not clear about why he and his family were moved to Trapeang Krasang. "All I know is that Sour Srun Company wanted us to give them our land and in return they gave us land here," he says.

It seems the land swap wasn't altogether fair.

"When I lived at Bassac, it was easy for my family to make a living, because we lived in the city and didn't have to



pay for transportation," he says. "At that time I used to study and eat at the NGO Mit Samlanh, while my mum was a food vendor. Our family never had a problem with making a living."

Since moving to Trapeang Krasang, Veasna has been able to continue studying at Mit Samlanh, as the organisation provides a bus service that takes him to their centre. However, life is not as good as it used to be.

Sitting in front of his family's dilapidated wooden house, the roof of which leaks when it rains, Veasna looks sad. "Living here is not good," he says. "The area is dirty, my family earns less than before because my parents have to travel long distances for work, and we don't have enough food to eat," he says.

"In the future, I would like to be an electrician," he says.



SOK VEASNA, 20

PHORN VANNY, 17



PHOTOGRAPH BY: CONOR WALL



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Phorn Vanny, 17, is the youngest of five siblings. She lives with her family at Damnak Troyung relocation site some 27km from Phnom Penh. Many flats were built there by the company 7NG for residents evicted from the city centre.

She and her family arrived there in 2009.

“When I first moved here I felt lonely and there was no water and electricity,” she says. “The health center is far away and the teachers in the school here are not as good as the ones in the city.”

Before, Vanny used to live in Village 4 at Boeung Kok Lake. There, her family could earn much more money than now and she had enough money to pay for studying English. She misses those times.

Though she has been able to continue her studies and now attends secondary school, she is the only one in her family to do so. Her family can no longer afford for her brothers and sisters to study.

Instead, they are working in garment factories and as motor-taxi drivers to contribute to the family income while her parents go back and forth every day to Phnom Penh for work.

Sitting on a wooden bed outside her new house, she says she wants to be a teacher. “I suggest that the government develops this relocation site so that it has foreign language schools, a health care center and factory in which residents could find work,” she says.

“I suggest that the government develops this relocation site”

TRY CHANNY, 21



“There was no water, no electricity. I had never used to live like that.”

Try Channy, 21, lives with her family and husband in Anlong Kngan relocation site. Located in Sen Sok district, the large site is home to many former residents of the Bassac area in central Phnom Penh.

Channy was evicted to Anlong Kngan in 2001. Life at the bare site was like nothing she had known before.

“It was very difficult,” she says. “There was no water, no electricity. I had never used to live like that. My family just built a house with tent and some wood on a rice field. When it rained, we could not sleep. We had to wait until it stopped.”

While other children were playing around in the city, Channy was collecting dirty water from the canal in her village for making a meal. That was a far cry from her previous life in the centre of the city.

When she was 14 years old, Channy’s father contracted tuberculosis. To support her family, she quit school having only reached grade 7 and began working in a garment factory. Life was tough.

Since then, however, things have improved. “If I compare my life today to my life in Bassac, I think nowadays my family has a better standard of living, because we don’t have to pay for the rent,” she says. “Also, my father has recovered from his illness and mom also has a job as a tailor.”



San Sokundo, 21, lives in Trapeang Krosang with his family. He is the youngest of seven siblings and runs a barber shop in his home.

Sokundo and his family moved to Phnom Penh in 1992. Initially, they rented a house in the Bassac area. After a fire in 2001, the family moved to rent in nearby Village 78.

Coming from a poor family, Sokundo quit school at the age of 12, having attained only grade 6. To support his family, he started working as a barber.

In 2007, Sokundo and his family were evicted to Trapeang Krasang. There they got a plot of land measuring 5X12m as well cash compensation.

“When we first moved here, we built a new house,” he says. “I felt bored. We had no income, no water, and no electricity. Some of my friends, because their families are better off than mine, prefer to live in Phnom Penh.”

Sokundo’s mother is a coconut vendor, while his brothers and sisters work at factory. The eviction to the city’s outskirts affected the family income.

“My life has changed a lot since we were evicted here. It is difficult to earn money because not so many people live here. When I lived in Village 78, there were many people so you had a lot of customers, but now it is quiet”, he said.



“My life has changed a lot since we were evicted here”



SAN SOKUNDO, 21



HUN CHENDA, 18

Hun Chenda, 18, is a garment factory worker. She has five siblings: one brother and four sisters.

“I used to live in Bassac with my parents and siblings,” she says. “My dad was a food vendor and my mom sold groceries at home. I had a good living over there. My parents could earn a lot of money, and I was very happy.”

In 2001, a fire tore through the area. “Many families were forced to leave their house that day,” Chenda says. “My house was far away from the fire, so it didn’t burn. Still, I was evicted.”

“The authorities told us that they would give us a land title for our new land. They also said the new site would have a school, hospital and market,” she says. “When people heard that they decided to move to here.”

“They had a truck for us to move our house. I had to tear down my house and then rebuild it in the new place”, she said.

After some time, her parents sold the land in Anlong Kngan and moved to live in nearby Sen Reak Reay. Chenda is not sure why the family moved. Their new house cost US\$300, but came without a land title.

Most of residents’ houses in Sen Reak Reay are old and rotten, and few have funds to repair their homes. Many houses are located along a dirty canal.

When Chenda was 14, she quit school and started working in a garment factory. Her father had been sentenced to two years in prison, so she had to help support the family.

Chenda doesn’t expect to stay in Sen Reak Reay permanently.

“I know that we just live on a temporary land and we will be evicted to somewhere else one day,” she says.



“I know that we just live on temporary land and we will be evicted to somewhere else one day”



UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

(plain language version)

All children have the right to what follows, no matter what their race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, or where they were born or who they were born to.

1. You have the special right to grow up and to develop physically and spiritually in a healthy and normal way, free and with dignity.
2. You have a right to a name and to be a member of a country
3. You have a right to special care and protection and to good food, housing and medical services.
4. You have the right to special care if handicapped in any way.
5. You have the right to love and understanding, preferably from parents and family, but from the government where these cannot help.
6. You have the right to go to school for free, to play and to have an equal chance to develop yourself and to learn to be responsible and useful. Your parents have special responsibilities for your education and guidance.
7. You have the right always to be among the first to get help.
8. You have the right to be protected against cruel acts or exploitation, eg you shall not be obliged to do work which hinders your development both physically and mentally. You should not work before a minimum age and never when that would hinder your health and your moral and physical development.
9. You should be taught peace, understanding, tolerance and friendship among all people.

PHOTOGRAPH BY: CONOR WALL