

First Women Wins Youth Leadership Challenge

Phnom Penh
May 07, 2008



Twenty-year-old Sreang Lalune became the first female contestant to win the popular Youth Leadership Challenge television competition on May 7. Sreang beat male finalist Rin Sot, 25, in the final contest of the show's third season. The competition is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Sreang received a two-week trip to Washington, D.C., to attend a youth conference and meet with representatives of the U.S. Government. She garnered 800 more text-message votes than fellow finalist Rin, after the two responded to questions about their leadership styles from viewers and

members of the studio audience. U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia Joseph A. Mussomeli presented her with the prize during the live broadcast on Cambodian Television Network.

Sreang said she was excited to win the award. "I think it is a very good program that provides a great opportunity for young Cambodian people to exhibit their talents and abilities," she said. "I now feel more confident in making decisions and facing challenges. Also, I learned how to improve my weaknesses and have the courage to face difficulties."

The Youth Leadership Challenge is loosely modeled after American TV shows like *The Apprentice* and *American Idol*. The Cambodian version tests the leadership and debating skills of promising young men and women selected from around the country. The season began with 16 contestants, all of whom are university students in their late teens and early twenties. Sreang, from Kampong Cham Province, is pursuing a degree in environmental studies at the Royal University of Phnom Penh.

Each week, the contestants were divided into two teams to compete in challenges such as creating a web log or organizing trash-collection teams in local neighborhoods. A panel of two judges selected one team as the winner, while the losing team had two members eliminated from the competition.

The judges were Seng Theary, an author and Executive Director of the Center for Social Development, and Chea Samnang, a film star and Goodwill Ambassador to the United Nations Population Fund.

USAID is committed to helping Cambodia nurture and develop its next generation of leaders. To that end, USAID contributed \$382,586 to the International Republican Institute (IRI)'s Youth Program and the Youth Council of Cambodia, which implemented the Youth Leadership Challenge. IRI's training programs and seminars have reached nearly 150,000 young Cambodians since 2004.