



SUCCESS STORY

A Women With a Dream !

USAID believes that combining women's empowerment with access to service strengthen both her and the family.



Heng Sovannary who work in Phnom Penh's Garment Factories: "Sewing a Healthy Future".

USAID funds CARE/Cambodia and other local NGO's on a workplace health program for workers in the garment sector. The program focuses on HIV/AIDS education and awareness, disseminates information on reproductive health and provides improved access to clinical services.

So far, more than 35,000 women in 15 major garment factories (20 percent of the women employed) are involved. Heng Sovannary is proud to be one of them. Recruiting, training and deploying a network of trained volunteers within the garment industry itself has paid off handsomely for USAID and its partners; there are fewer cases of reported illness. But the real benefactors are the thousands of young women like Heng, who become informed and knowledgeable enough to protect their own health and well-being.

Heng Sovannary, a 22-year old garment worker who lives near Phnom Penh, has lofty dreams. She wants to become a lawyer. But in the community where she lives, Heng has been stereotyped as a "bad girl," a "loose woman" - all because she works in Cambodia's garment industry.

Heng is among the 200,000 Cambodian females from poor rural families who work in a garment factory. She is part of the young labor force that flows into Phnom Penh desperately seeking an escape from poverty. The money Heng and other garment workers make goes toward paying rent, buying food and supporting their families back home. Their days are long and their work conditions difficult-- to say the least. To add insult to injury, they are shunned by a society that believes young girls should not live away from their families. Young men, who seek them out as sexual partners, would never dream of marrying them. Although they are proud of their independence and their role as wage earners, many of these young women are at risk for HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, and unwanted pregnancies.