

# Cambodia: Looking at a bright future

***When she was 15, Sok was raped, ruining her reputation and pushing her out of school. She tried to commit suicide. Three years later, she was living at World Vision's Trauma Recovery Centre which provided regular counseling, love and care. Sok also received training as a hairdresser and has since opened her own salon. A portion of this year's 30 Hour Famine proceeds will go toward providing life-changing experiences to trafficked and sexually exploited girls.***



Sok was 15, in Grade 9. Her friends had met an American of about 60, who had recently moved to town. He had plenty of money and was adept at seducing young girls. Soon, the friends began inviting Sok to visit hotel rooms with them. She refused to do what they were doing, but did enjoy the jewellery and dinners out. Soon, Sok was missing classes. Sok had never felt so loved or popular but her happiness didn't last long. She was betrayed by three people she trusted: her aunt, a childhood friend and that friend's mother. The American man raped her with the help of some snacks provided by the friend's mother. They made her feel dazed and very sleepy, unable to move or defend herself.

"I struggled to escape," says Sok, tears in her eyes, "but he slapped me across the face. I saw every action he did to me, but I did not have strength to defend myself." The man left the room, dropping \$30 on the way out. With sorrow, hatred and anger churning through her, Sok took the money and went home.

## **A young life unravels**

"I was very shy and afraid that people would know my story. I stopped visiting my friend's house. I hated her," says Sok. She was shocked to discover that, in fact, everyone did know. "I went to school as normal, like nothing had happened, but to my surprise everyone started to insult me." The friend's mother thought Sok had received a lot of money for the sex, but was withholding the commission so she started to gossip. In Cambodia, if a girl has sex before marriage she brings shame to herself and to her family. Once her mother found out, Sok decided to end her life. "My mother blamed me a lot. I attempted to commit suicide by taking a lot of medicines, but I failed."

## **No retribution for crimes**

The men who perpetrate the crime of sex with minors, on the other hand, are almost free from blame or scandal. It makes it difficult for abused girls to reveal their stories or take action. Sok and her mother discovered that at least three other girls had also been raped by the same man, but these girls had kept quiet.

That was when they decided together to be brave. Sok's mother sued the woman and the Khmer American through a local authority. But the suit was fruitless; there was never enough money to see the case through. Sok moved into World Vision's Trauma Recovery Centre, Neavea Thmey, for rehabilitation. There, she received regular counseling, love and care from the centre's "house parents" who encouraged her to leave behind her traumatic past, to move on and to start anew.

## **A new life**

She received training in vocational and life skills, and made good friends. The centre sent her to a barber shop to practice with real clients. Now Sok is a different girl, victorious. She has just opened a hairdressing salon. "I am happy with my job as a hairdresser; I will increase my business in future," she says confidently. World Vision has supported Sok and her friends in their first year of business. "We provided 30 per cent, with the rest supported by World Vision to run the shop," Sok explains. "I thank World Vision for rebuilding my confidence. Without you I would have no hope at all. After my time at the centre, now my mother cares for me even more than my other siblings," she says with a big smile.

NOTE TO EDITOR: A portion of this year's 30 Hour Famine proceeds will provide life-changing experiences and hope as well as opportunities and skills to trafficked and sexually exploited young girls. Funds will also contribute to the reduction of incidence of trafficking and sexual exploitation in Cambodia.

# **Eat nothing. Do something.**

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