

Cambodia

Cambodia has experienced an economic growth over the past two decades. The population living below the national poverty line has also rapidly decreased. Unfortunately, many children still lack the care of their biological parents, due to poverty, years of conflict, migration and a rising number of people suffering from HIV/AIDS. About 36 % of children in Cambodia are also involved in child labour, forced to work in agriculture, the fishing industry, quarries, as domestic servants or begging and selling on the streets.

SOS Children's Village Cambodia was founded in 2000 and is now present in seven locations in the country.

During the current situation SOS Children's Villages' work in Cambodia has been more important than maybe ever before. Children in the country were already faced with the hazards of human trafficking, child labour, prostitution and beggar rings, and being struck with the pandemic made the situation even more perilous. SOS Children's Villages in Cambodia has committed itself to the future success of these children through various programmes that help them cope with and succeed with hardship that might otherwise limit their opportunities. But to secure every child's right to a safe and loving everyday life in the middle of a pandemic has demanded adaptations and adjustments of all programmes.

SOS Children's Villages Cambodia has worked hard on getting the government to change legislation on alternative childcare and create evidence-based national guidelines on family-like care to obtain legal recognition of the SOS childcare model. Amongst other things, in 2020, kinship care was initiated and implemented in two SOS Children's Villages in Cambodia, with a variety of tools and strategies to measure childcare quality in the programme to align with national guidelines on the minimum standard of alternative childcare.

Programme information

The Children's Village in Prey Veng

The Children's Village Prey Veng started its activities in November 2019 in rented accommodations, and in March 2020 the village was completed, and the children could move into their new homes. There are currently 22 children living in three family houses.

Prey Veng is located in southern Cambodia, on the eastern banks of the Mekong. The province is one of the less wealthy areas of the country, despite its agricultural base. The region also faces regular flooding during monsoon season and the challenges have increased further during the pandemic.

During the school year 2019–2020, before the pandemic struck, the children were enrolled in the public school near the village. Depending on their ages, they attended classes from kindergarten up to grade 4. During 2020 there has been a lot of focus on developing capacity and providing guidance and support through online training to all children and youth as well as co-workers to help them cope with the covid-19 situation.

To ensure the quality of the care, monthly checks have been made in the village for lodging, food, clothes, household materials, hygiene and cleaning to ensure that each child has been properly taken care of.

SOS Children's Villages in Ratanarki

Ratanakiri is located in northeast Cambodia, a remote area where many indigenous people live in relatively isolated villages. It is an agricultural region, where most people work as farmers or workers in the rubber and cashew plantations. The education level is low, and the plantation labourers live under very poor conditions and their children do not have access to basic services such as health care and education. Many children in the province are also malnourished, and many are orphaned or abandoned and in need of family-based care.

There are 72 children living in the Children's Village Ratanakiri, where they are being taken care of by SOS mothers, SOS aunts and other staff, including two educators.

All children in the Children's Village Ratanakiri have been attending kindergarten, primary, secondary or high schools, except one who is still too young.

The Youth Programme in Ratanakiri

The youth home in Ratanakiri aims to support the young people in their transition to adulthood, and to increase their capabilities to build lives of their own and become self-reliant adults.

Remedial classes of mathematics, physics, chemistry, Khmer literature and English are offered to those in need of support in their studies. The youths also get guidance on planning for their future, and encouragement in taking responsibility for their home.

The 24 youths in the programme are living in a rent house outside of the village together with two youth leaders. They are all attending secondary or high school or Vocational Training Center, and all of them passed their exams for the academic year 2019/2020 and could move on to the next grade.

The Malnutrition Programme in Ratanakiri

A malnutrition centre was started by SOS Children's Villages Cambodia in 2012 and has served the entire province of Ratanakiri. The center works with local authorities to identify malnourished children under five where there is a threat to the life of the child. Typically, the children are 40 % under their normal body weight. With their parents' consent, the children usually stay at the centre for three to six months. An individual treatment plan is done by a nurse, who also monitors the progress of treatment results and reports to a medical doctor. When a child is admitted to the centre, it will first be dewormed, bathed, and cleaned. Then a specific treatment plan with the doctor's prescription is started.

Within the programme, SOS Children's Villages also works with the parents to teach them about proper nutrition and hygiene to improve the home conditions. During the time a child stays in the centre, the family gets a respite for caring for an ill child and struggling with medical bills. When the child is discharged, life necessities such as mosquito nets, shoes, toothbrush, and milk powder are provided to the family. The child's condition will also be followed up after six and twelve months.

During the year, nine children have been supported in the malnutrition programme. At the end of 2020 there were 4 children in the malnutrition center in Ratanakiri.

The malnutrition project has been incrementally facing challenges to find children eligible for the project. Logistically, it has also been challenging as families of the children are widely scattered in the hilly region of Ratanakiri, making monitoring, and follow-up support difficult. Based on this, and to prevent the separation of children from their biological families for longer periods of time, the team assessed the possibilities for, instead of providing the support in the Children's Village, set-up and implement a community-based malnutrition programme. The assessment showed that there are already other actors working within this field and responding to this need, and hence this specific malnutrition project will be phased out during 2021 and from 2022 the funds will be re-allocated and used to strengthen the nutrition- and health aspects of the family strengthening programme in the same location. Nutrition and health promotion is one of the areas included in the holistic support provided to families within the family strengthening programme and the team will also continue to collaborate with governmental- and non-governmental partners to ensure that children's rights, including the right to health, and nutrition aspects in the region are adhered to.

Since the start 2012, the Malnutrition Program has reached 341 children that have received acute nutritional support and care and after recovering and being in good health, have been integrated into their families.

The year in numbers Prey Veng:

- Children in the villages **22**
- Family houses **3**

The year in numbers Ratanakiri:

- Children in the village **72**
- Family houses **10**
- Youths in the programme **24**
- Children in malnutrition programme **9**
- Children in malnutrition programme since start 2012 **341**



Mao reading before class. Photo: SOS archive

Mao Pitch studies hard for his future

Mao Pich is 16 years old. He and his younger brother and sister were brought to SOS Children's Villages Kampot in July 2015, where they have all lived ever since.

Pich's parents got divorced when he was very young. The siblings stayed with their father when their mother got re-married, but the father was turning into an alcoholic because of the stress from the divorce. When he left to work as a construction worker in another province, he left the children with relatives without any contact or support.

Life in the home of the relatives was hard and Pich and the siblings was not taken care of properly. Before coming to SOS Children's Villages, Pich went to school irregularly, and he didn't get enough to eat or decent clothes. When he and his siblings came to SOS Children's Villages they got a loving home, good care, study materials, school uniforms, extra help in school, where Pich also learns English and takes computer classes, and get all the support they need. During the years in the village Pich has become calmer and more secure and is a good and active student who is in the top five in his class in grade 10.

In the beginning of 2020, he was selected to represent his school in national outstanding student examinations. Unfortunately, he didn't get through the provincial level, but this was a great accomplishment that he feels very proud of.

After school he makes good use of his free time. He reads a lot and practices mathematics, physics and chemistry exercises, and does research on what he doesn't understand. He takes the extra classes provided by SOS Children's Villages in mathematics, physics, Khmer and English, has completed several computer courses and speaks better English than ever before.

Pich has big ambitions for his future: first he wants to go to university, and then become a scientist, that is why he concentrates on his studies.