



Saving Lives Through Improving Children's Nutrition

Kim Yeng is a twenty-five-year old who lives in Cambodia. She was forced to leave school after the third grade because her parents could no longer afford to pay for her education. She had to help her parents by doing housework, farm chores, and taking care of her siblings. Yeng married her husband at age 20, and the couple soon started a family.

Last year, the eldest child died at the age of 4 after several bouts of high fever. Yeng recalls, "The nurse said our child had 'krun sonthom' (cerebral malaria) and said we had waited too long to take her to the hospital. I was so careless with my kids. My child would have survived if we had given her better care."

After losing one child due to lack of knowledge about proper health care, Yeng was asked to take part in a community assessment conducted by the Partners for Development (PFD) community health team. She participated in focus group discussions and helped to gather village children for height, weight, and age measurements. This led to more discussions on malnutrition, malaria, and other common childhood illnesses.

Yeng's motivation and interest in helping to improve the health of children in her community made her a natural fit for selection by the community for the village health volunteers program.



Photo: Partners for Development/ War Samnang

Kim Yeng is a Village Health Volunteer in USAID-supported Partners for Development Nutrition Education and Rehabilitation Program.

Through USAID, PFD provides support for training in the community. While discussing malnutrition, the community health team talks about the Hearth model - a community-based approach to reducing malnutrition developed as an alternative to more costly rehabilitation efforts that require use of a health facility. Mothers of well-nourished children set a positive example for mothers of malnourished children by teaching them to improve the nutritional content of meals using affordable foods available in the market, or which can be grown or gathered locally.

Mothers gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to significantly improve their children's health and nutritional well-being through workshops facilitated by government health workers, PFD staff, and local women trained in the Hearth method. By introducing these messages directly in the community, mothers are more likely to permanently adopt the new behaviors and continue providing nutritious food after the program is completed.

Nearly 200 mothers and others who take care of children in southern Kracheh Province now participate in bimonthly growth monitoring and nutrition education rehabilitation program efforts.

Over 100 moderately to severely malnourished children in twelve rural villages have recovered from this life-threatening condition during 2003 due to this program. Yeng is well respected in her village due to her work as a Village Health Volunteer, which has been officially recognized by the Provincial Health Department.

Yeng proudly displays her training certificate in her home and says, "I was elected as a Village Health Volunteer. I received strong encouragement from the PFD staff and wanted to learn everything I could about my new tasks. I have learned the importance of good health and what parents and the community need to do every day in order to improve the health of our families."

