

## **The gift that keeps on giving**

There is a simple, startling fact about educating girls in developing countries: Educated girls eventually become educated mothers, who are more likely to send their own children to school, have healthier families and earn a greater income. It's easy to see how this single approach has the potential to break generations of poverty.

The benefits are obvious, but overcoming the barriers that prevent girls from getting an education is a difficult task in many parts of the world.

In 2002, CARE began working in the Cambodian province of Ratanakiri to bring education to indigenous children – both boys and girls - who had never had the chance to go to school before.

Back then, there were no schools in indigenous villages, not that it would have helped if there were because these communities did not speak Khmer - the national language used in Cambodian State Schools.

Now, eight years later, there is a very different story to tell.

At 27 years of age, Thavy didn't go to school herself, yet now she is teaching the future leaders of her indigenous village of Tiem Leu in not one, but two languages.

'When I was young the village was very dirty and not so happy. Many people could not read or write and there was no place to study.'

Tiem Leu is one of six pilot villages nominated to be part of CARE's Highland Communities Program. In 2002, the community met with CARE staff and agreed to be part of the program.

Thavy explains that 'because we want to keep our language and tradition it's important to teach in our native language, Kreung. But the children also need to learn Khmer in order to go outside the village.'

Despite the success of local schools opening in indigenous villages, there was still a disconcerting trend for girls not to attend.

CARE soon discovered that girls weren't dropping out of school- they were forced out by competing priorities.

Walking for hours to collect food was the only way Chana Roun and her daughter could survive the four hungry months of Cambodia's north-east highlands, when food is very scarce.

The pair would search for hours for fruit, berries and plants to feed their family, and would often still return with very little.

After witnessing the impact of food insecurity, CARE incorporated a food security component to the education program, providing seeds and training so families could grow vegetables year-round in their own home gardens.

Chana now looks over the neat rows of sprouting vegetables with an enormous sense of satisfaction.

'Before CARE, we didn't have enough vegetables to eat in our family. Now we have enough,' she beams, adding 'our children can go to school because we have the garden near the house and we can collect food easily. I feel very happy that we have enough vegetables. It really helps my family a lot.'

Now that they have food available from their home gardens, girls are free to be students rather than gatherers. And that's exactly where they can be found - in the nearby primary school where rows of young girls gaze up at the Khmer words on their blackboard, unlocking the language that will allow them to access their rights - not just as a minority group - but as residents of Cambodia.

CARE is able to help women and girls lift themselves and their community out of poverty because of the support of the Australian public - people like you. The impact of making a donation or leaving a gift to CARE in your Will has an ever-lasting effect in places like Ratanakiri, where there's a new generation of educated girls who finally have the chance to break the cycle of poverty for indigenous communities in Cambodia.

Donate to CARE at [www.care.org.au](http://www.care.org.au) or call 1800 020 046.