



LATEST NEWS

Samrong Centre, Cambodia

AUGUST 2023



**Children of
the Mekong**

MEETING WITH AN ALUMNI

Thanks to your support of the centre in Samrong, you help 71 young people aged 13 to 20 to continue their education. We sometimes wonder, "What happens to these young people after they've been supported?"

To answer this question, we introduce you to Sopheap, a former sponsee with an evocative story to tell...

The portrait of **SOPHEAP**

Like all the young people sponsored by Children of the Mekong, Sopheap comes from a very poor family.



Sopheap is 25 years old. Born in the village of Prey Vèng, he is the 6th child in a sibling group of 8.

He has fought hard to pursue his studies, courageously following a path strewn with obstacles.

To help his family, at the age of 16 he decided to go to Thailand to work. With only 100,000 Cambodian riels in his pocket (the equivalent of around £18), he left home. Sopheap was reduced to slavery, and forced to work day and night. He finally managed to escape and return home. He recalls: "Everyone thought I was dead; my mother had organized my funeral. I hadn't been heard from in over a year."

He then decided to resume the studies they had put aside. It was then that the paths of Children of the Mekong and Sopheap crossed. He became a sponsored child, immersed himself in his studies with determination and rigor, and quickly caught up with his studies.



“

*Soon I'll be a math teacher.
A new life will then begin for me, in which I will, in
turn, be able to help those in need."*

”

Thanks to his diligence and perseverance, he obtained his mathematics teacher's diploma, and proudly achieved the goal he had set himself.



Sopheap now works for Children of Mekong. He has been a social worker and teacher for 6 years. Married with 2 children, he is able to support his family in a safe and healthy environment.



Having received the help he needed to study, he's now giving back by offering his help to young people who want to study but can't afford it. He is a role model to all the children, proof that with determination and effort, anyone can achieve their dreams and build a fulfilling life.



Very much involved with young people, this kind-hearted man puts a lot of energy into helping the sponsored children, reflections of the man he was a few years earlier. His inspiring journey guides young people and shows them the way to a bright future, away from the poverty in which they grew up.

END OF THE FIRST SEMESTER AND MOCK EXAMS!

The exams



The young people at the Samrong centre have just begun the second half of the year 2023. To close the first quarter, all the young people from the centre and external programmes took exams. This is an important milestone, which gives an interesting insight into the progress made by each individual, and the efforts still to be made for the second half of the year.



Preparing for the Bac



Every year in July, Children of the Mekong organizes a mock exam. The exam takes place at the Sisophon centre, which also houses the charity's Cambodian headquarters. It's an opportunity to assess the level of the pupils, but also to confirm their choice of direction after high school. In fact, it is the results of this exam that will be taken into account by Children of the Mekong when awarding scholarships to the sponsored children.

It's a stressful time for these young people, who put a lot of effort into their studies. To help them unwind and clear their minds before the exams, an outing was organised for the final-year students on the eve of the mock bac. They all went to the Banteay Chmar "baray". Barays are man-made water reservoirs from the time of the Khmer Empire, traditionally located around temples.



Everyone enjoyed a picnic under the shade of the trees, played board games and picked lotuses for dinner. All in all, it was a great time for sharing, and refreshing the spirits with good humour and positive vibes!

Mid-year review

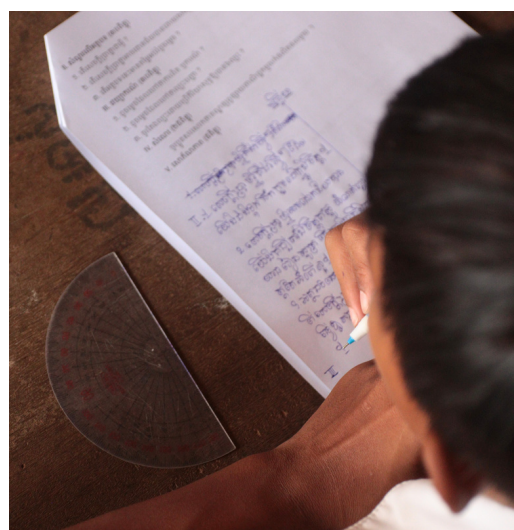


The local managers and overseas volunteers take advantage of the transition to the second semester to meet each student in the centre individually. This time spent with each student is an opportunity to discuss their day-to-day life and any family worries they may have, as well as to review their academic results and career plans. These special moments are much appreciated by both the sponsored students and the supervisory teams, as they enable them to better identify potential problems and/or questions that face some young people. They then work together to find solutions to improve the situation. The children are guided and supported in their thinking and decision-making.

At this point in the year, important choices have to be made, particularly by students in their final year. What university course do they want to follow? In which establishment? etc.

Some young people are more manual than intellectual or academic; sometimes, too, their families' situations are so critical that they opt for short studies so that they can help them as quickly as possible, without having to forego training.

Despite Children of the Mekong's support, some young people who want to go on to higher education are sometimes forced to stop school and go to work, without having obtained any qualifications, in order to help their families in need.



ZOOM ON

The Lotus

Called « **chhuk** » (ឈូក) in Khmer language, the lotus is a sacred flower, often represented in Buddhism. In addition to its decorative function, which is much appreciated in the West, the lotus also has nutritional properties, which are particularly exploited in Asia.

In Buddhist symbolism, the lotus represents purity of body, speech and mind, as "floating above the muddy waters of attachment and desire". According to legend, the Buddha was born with the ability to walk, and wherever he set foot, lotus flowers began to grow.



Many parts of the lotus are edible, or used in cooking or for ornamental purposes. The large lotus leaves can be brewed and enjoyed as tea, and are also often used to wrap food.

It's much more environmentally friendly than plastic wrap, and leaves a rather pleasant taste!

The fruit comes in the distinctive shape of a shower head. They are green in colour and contain seeds that can be eaten raw or cooked.

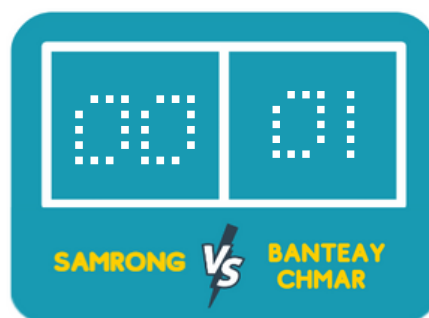
In Cambodia and Thailand, lotus stalks are used as vegetables, in soups and salads, or in stir-fried dishes.



MEETING BETWEEN THE CENTRES



The derby



To everyone's great delight, the children from the Samrong centre travelled to the Banteay Chhmar centre, another Children of the Mekong centre around sixty kilometres away. After a successful edition in 2022, the game was on again this year!

Under the banner of sport, the competition raged between the 2 centres: young Khmers lend themselves easily to the game! After games of football, volleyball, pétanque and even 100m races, the day was crowned by a traditional Khmer evening.

Despite a fierce battle, the children from the Samrong centre finally lost out to those from Banteay Chhmar. Having put their sporting talents to good use, they all bid farewell happy with a day of team spirit and solidarity.



THE RICHES OF CAMBODIAN NATURE



In Cambodia, there are many NGOs working to support the Khmer population in various fields. In Samrong, Children of the Mekong regularly works with *GreenShoot Foundation*.

This British NGO focuses mainly on sustainable development and agriculture.

As part of its holistic training programme, Children of the Mekong is committed to providing its children with a school education, but not only that. Helping young people to open up to the world in which they live, to respect it, and to make them aware of its richness but also of its fragility, is also part of our educational mission.

Taking advantage of the presence at Samrong of a Khmer-American doctoral student working on a thesis on wild foods, a meeting was organised with the young people at the centre to discuss the flora of the surrounding area. It turned out that the young people had a wealth of knowledge about the environment around them! Coming from very poor backgrounds, the resources available to them are



essential and easily accessible means of subsistence. So they learn the secrets of the plants and trees that grow around them at a very early age. This knowledge is passed down orally from generation to generation. The aim of this doctoral student's thesis is to document this knowledge so that it can be preserved and perpetuated.



Over a weekend, 30 children accompanied a team of researchers into a protected forest tended by monks, to harvest fruit, vegetables, leaves, and mushrooms. The young people took over the field in a matter of moments and quickly filled bags and buckets with the victuals offered by nature. Back at the centre, they cooked what they had gathered for dinner: a real treat!

THE NEWS



The rainy season is supposed to have arrived... Unfortunately, it only rains a few drops, and not even every day!

So the area, not to say the country, is cruelly short of water.

Cambodia is a country particularly hard hit by climate change. Most of the families we help are farmers. So climate change has a particular impact on them.

The situation is particularly worrying for the families in the villages around Samrong, including those of the sponsored young people. Unfortunately, the lack of rain has already killed off a large part of the cassava harvest. Rice crops are now in danger. Some rice shoots have already turned yellow or brown, dried out by the sun, when they should be growing visibly.

The consequence is direct and can already be seen: some parents have decided to leave for Thailand to find work and pay off the debt incurred to plant the rice. Sometimes they decide to emigrate as a family. Unfortunately, this means that the children lose suddenly their schooling.

The Samrong centre (as well as the 5 other Children of the Mekong centres in Cambodia, whose locations are shown on the map below) is a life-saving response for these young people, enabling them to continue studying and not jeopardise the building of their future.

It's worth noting that a number of young people want to become agricultural engineers, in order to meet the many challenges of climate change and help the region to develop.



**The 6 centres of
Children of the
Mekong in Cambodia**

INTERVIEW OF THE "BAMBOOS"

Bamboo" is the name given to Children of the Mekong overseas volunteers.

Because, according to an old Asian proverb, "bamboo bends, but does not break".

The Samrong centre you support is supervised by a bamboo couple, Laetitia and Gabriel Capocci. Meet them.



Laetitia, aged 31,
urban planning and
property development
engineer

Gabriel, aged 30,
engineer, IT project
manager.

Laetitia & Gabriel

What were your motivations for this experience?

- Putting your time at the service of a meaningful cause
- Access to education was a subject close to their hearts
- Learn about a culture different from their own

A memorable anecdote?

"One Sunday at the end of the day, the sun was setting. I was teaching them some choreography and they loved it! We were joined by other young people, the music was in full swing, everyone was letting off steam and laughing; it was a slightly unreal moment with the light falling and all the laughter of happy children.

Since then, we've been dancing almost every Sunday." Laetitia

On the occasion of Women's Rights Day, I explained why this day had been created and showed a video: "strong women". We are now training for the Angkor temple marathon. I was so proud to hear 13-year-old Sophet tell me "I am strong, I can run like the boys!"
Laetitia

What struck you?

"The fear of failure is very present in both children and adults.

Khmer people don't dare venture into unknown territory for fear of not knowing how.

For example, children are very shy when it comes to speaking English.

We try to speak as much Khmer as possible, with lots of mistakes (which makes them laugh a lot) in the hope of showing them the way."



SAMRONG EDUCATION CENTRE SAYS THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT



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the Mekong**