

Women, Disability and Poverty



Sieng Sok Chann, Cambodia

DISABILITY AND POVERTY THE FACTS

- 22% of the world's poorest people have a disability.¹
- Women and girls with disabilities often face triple discrimination; being female, having a disability and being among the poorest of the poor.²
- Women with disabilities face additional barriers to achieving their sexual and reproductive health rights.

SOURCES:

- 1 World Bank, Disability Overview (2015)
<http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disability/overview>
- 2 Promoting Gender Equality. (2005). New York: United Nations Population Fund
<http://www.unfpa.org/gender/>

MY STORY: SIENG SOK CHANN, CAMBODIA

“I know a lot of problems that women with disabilities face: disability could lead into poverty because you have no job to do, you can be more vulnerable. Most women with disability in my area are single mothers and with one kid. All of them have been given up or were never cared for by their husband, just like me.”

Sieng Sok Chann, Cambodia

Sieng Sok Chann is a 29-year-old woman from Cambodia. Paralysed from the waist down since she was 13, she has been fighting the cycle of poverty and disability that can make every day a struggle for survival.

THE CYCLE

Being a woman has only made things harder for Sieng Sok Chann. She has to fight against three forms of discrimination –being female, having a disability, and being amongst the poorest of the poor.

The interaction of disability, gender and poverty not only exacerbate existing barriers, but they can also interact to form create new ones. Women with disabilities are often among the most vulnerable and are also more likely to be abused than women without disabilities.

A CONSTANT STRUGGLE INSIDE THE CIRCLE

“I think the outside world does not really understand what the real difficulty is for women with a disability. I repeat again and again, for women with disability it is really hard to live, so please include us.”

Sieng Sok Chann, Cambodia

After acquiring her disability, Sieng Sok Chann faced discrimination, isolation and abuse from her family and her community.

“I realized I was a woman with disability, I could not change anything. Many people said to me that the life lived like this is very vulnerable, why don't you go to die? They said words like this and made me feel very bad.”

Sieng Sok Chann, Cambodia

Like many people living with disabilities in a low or middle income country, Sieng Sok Chann could not continue studying and was unable to access the market, school, or healthcare services. In addition, she faced she faced discriminatory community attitudes towards her disability.

“I can say that most women with disability are embarrassed and feel ashamed to go in public and never join in the social life.”

Sieng Sok Chann, Cambodia

Discrimination, social isolation, illness and abuse are common experiences among women living with disabilities in poverty. Even though the links between poverty and disability and gender are strong, with the right focus and attitudes, the cycle can be broken.

TURNING LIVES AROUND WE KNOW WHAT IT TAKES

In 2015 the world committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. The 2030 Agenda and the corresponding 17 goals, including Goal 5 on Gender Equality, must be implemented according to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

By addressing the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in low and middle income countries, we not only achieve the human rights of persons with disabilities, but everyone benefits from their contribution.

This is why inclusion, across all development sectors, is important. Empowering persons with disabilities, including women and girls so they can receive a worthwhile education, access health and rehabilitation services, gain a livelihood and participate fully in society, is essential to ending the cycle of poverty and disability.

DISABILITY, POVERTY AND THE SOLUTIONS THAT **END THE CYCLE**

Despite the challenges she faced, Sieng Sok Chann was determined to be included in development projects. Her participation in education, rehabilitation and skills-training programs has opened up a whole community and Sieng Sok Chann has become an empowered and active woman. She proves just how much change can be achieved.

From a life restricted to the family home, Sieng Sok Chann now acts as a role model for other women living with disabilities. She earns her own living as a sewing teacher, plays sport, and has increased respect from people in the wider community who recognise she is a valuable member of society.

“I do not want people to say my spirit is disabled, or my capacity is disabled, I want to show the world I am strong.”

Sieng Sok Chann, Cambodia



Sieng Sok Chann, Cambodia

DISABILITY AND POVERTY THE FACTS

- Girls and women of all ages with any form of disability are generally among the more vulnerable and marginalized of society.³
- Up to 20% of women globally live with a disability.⁴
- Women and girls with disabilities are 2-3 times more likely to be victims of physical and sexual abuse than women without disabilities.⁵

SOURCES:

- 3 UN, (2012) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, New York.
- 4 Heinicke-Motsch, K & Sygall, S. (2004) Building an Inclusive Disability Community: A manual on including people with disability in international development projects. Mobility International USA.
- 5 Department of International Development (UK). (2000) Disability, Poverty and Development.

**END THE
CYCLE.** 
OF POVERTY & DISABILITY

End the Cycle is an
initiative of CBM

END THE CYCLE promotes the human rights and lived experience of persons with disabilities in low and middle income countries.



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