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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



Success Story

Integrating Women into Climate Change Programs

USAID supports women leadership in climate change issues in the Lower Mekong



Chinneth Cheng speaks at the Equality in Climate Change training in Vientiane, Laos.

Photo Credit: USAID LEAF

“I am no longer alone. My colleagues and friends in believing women have as great a role to play as men in addressing climate change. Knowledge and skills I have gained from USAID programs has inspired me to keep advocating for greater gender integration in the climate change work of my country.”

-Chinneth Cheng

Chinneth Cheng grew up the eldest of three daughters in a farming family near the Mekong River in Eastern Cambodia. Doem Sdao, a rural, agricultural community, was poor and isolated. Not surprisingly, Chinneth never heard of “gender equality” until she was recruited to join the Cambodia Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) in 2007, where her education in Law and Development Cooperation led her superiors to give her a leadership position on gender and climate change. After attending a month-long training in the Philippines, she was tasked with mapping MoWA’s engagement with other ministries, NGOs and development programs on the topic. “I quickly learned to understand the concepts of gender integration, how to assess gender gaps in our work and most importantly, how to begin mainstreaming it into government policies.”

Chinneth admits it’s a challenge to address gender equality issues in climate change in Cambodia. Her professional duties and growing personal interest in this area led her to participate in the United States Agency for International Development Lowering Emissions in Asia’s Forests (USAID LEAF) program’s Asia Pacific Leadership Initiative on Gender and Climate Change in November 2013. The Initiative trains government staff to identify gender gaps in climate change policy, equips them with tools, and develops skills to advocate for gender integration in climate change and REDD+ policies. “Through USAID LEAF I improved my leadership and negotiation skills and am better equipped to promote gender integration in other ministries,” says Chinneth.

Cambodia’s ministries charged with climate change mitigation are now actively reaching out to MoWA on gender and climate. As a leader of the MoWA team addressing gender integration in government climate change and REDD+ policies, Chinneth says that working with the Forestry Administration, as an example, is crucial. “The Gender Champions trainings

gave me the opportunity to connect directly with them, and I have found there are many areas in which we can collaborate. Many ministries charged with climate change policies are now actively engaging MoWA for guidance,” she says.

In a November 2013 workshop in Bangkok, part of a series of events supporting an emerging network of gender champions, 20 women from USAID LEAF’s six countries—Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Thailand and Vietnam—recommended solutions for better gender integration into REDD+ and climate change activities. As a result, comprehensive capacity building and mentoring mechanisms were developed to enhance champions’ competencies in strategic planning for gender integrated programming. Using these skills, champions like Chinneth are poised for success in integrating gender issues into climate change policies and plans.

“The USAID LEAF trainings have improved my skills, and those of my colleagues from other countries,” she explains. “We will be role models in our offices and lead the effort to ensure gender equity in climate change policies and programs.”

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