



USAID

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DEVELOPING

# YOUNG LEADERS

in Cambodia through Social Lab



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# OUTCOME HARVESTING

## I. OBJECTIVE: FOCUSES ON YOUTH TO BE ACTIVE CITIZENS FOR SOCIAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.

### Description

By the end of the grant period, 27 youth (including 3 interns) in Phnom Penh have developed into active citizens equipped with essential life skills and community development competencies. Through their participation in the AYL Social Lab, these youth successfully implemented capstone projects funded by community project grants. These projects demonstrate their enhanced capacity to engage in and contribute to social community development initiatives, addressing real-world issues and fostering a positive impact in their communities.



## Significance



This outcome addresses the urgent need for youth engagement in social community development in Phnom Penh, bridging gaps in traditional education systems. By equipping university students and high school graduates with soft skills, civic engagement strategies, and financial management competencies, the program fosters a culture of civic responsibility and proactive problem-solving. The empowerment of youth to take active roles in their communities is crucial for achieving sustainable community development, promoting inclusivity, and enhancing overall social well-being. These efforts contribute

significantly to cultivating a generation of responsible, engaged citizens dedicated to long-term community advancement. "Under the support and mentorship of API, you have developed and led projects addressing issues related to drug use, waste management, and community safety. I have had the chance to read about your projects and see the photos, and I have been immensely impressed by your creativity, compassion, and leadership," said Nicole Johnson, Chief of Party of USAID/Cambodia Advancing Youth Leadership Activity, speaking to youths during the Award and Recognition Ceremony on October 26, 2024.

## Contribution

The AYL Social Lab successfully empowered 27 youth, including 3 API interns, in Phnom Penh, to become active citizens and community leaders. Through a comprehensive training program covering life skills, civic engagement, financial management, and social development issues, participants gained essential knowledge and tools to address local challenges. Ongoing technical support in project management, facilitation, coaching, and mentoring further equipped them to implement impactful youth-led community development projects funded by community grants.



community development projects funded by

This initiative fostered leadership, civic responsibility, and proactive problem-solving, addressing the urgent need for youth engagement in social development. As a result, these young leaders are now driving positive changes and contributing to the sustainable growth and well-being of their communities.

## II. OBJECTIVE: FOCUSES ON BEHAVIOR CHANGE

### Description

By the end of the grant period, 27 youth (including 3 interns) in Phnom Penh demonstrated increased engagement in civic activities and community development projects. They exhibited significant improvements in life skills and community development skills through their active participation in capstone projects and community initiatives. These outcomes highlight a positive behavioral shift, as the youth moved from passive participants to proactive contributors in their communities, effectively addressing real-world challenges and promoting social development.



## Significance

This project is highly significant because it addresses the critical need for young people in Phnom Penh to develop practical skills and a sense of civic responsibility. Traditional education often lacks opportunities for young people to acquire and apply essential life and community development skills in real-world contexts. The AYL Social Lab bridged this gap by fostering a behavioral shift towards active civic engagement and community development, which is crucial for nurturing a generation of responsible, proactive citizens. This transformation ensures that youth are not only equipped to address immediate community challenges but are also prepared to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development over the long term.



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*Through our partnership with API, over 24 youth will participate this year to develop skills and gain experience in community problem-solving. I am excited to see where this experience takes you and to hear about your learning along the way! I would like to conclude by recognizing all the youth here who have put themselves forward to participating in the Social Lab – both in Cohort 1 and the upcoming Cohort 2! You have taken time out of your busy lives, with competing pressures, to think about how to make your community a better place. That commitment is inspiring. The AYL Team and I are proud to be a part of this event,”*

said Nicole Johnson, Chief of Party of USAID/Cambodia Advancing Youth Leadership Activity, speaking to youths during the Award and Recognition Ceremony on October 26, 2024.

## Contribution

The AYL Social Lab significantly contributed to fostering a culture of civic engagement and community development among 27 youth, including 3 API interns, in Phnom Penh. Through a well-structured training program, participants gained critical life skills, civic engagement strategies, knowledge of financial management, and insights into contemporary social development issues. The program also provided ongoing support through facilitation, coaching, and mentoring, enabling youth to implement impactful community development projects. These efforts empowered the participants to become proactive leaders in their communities, driving positive change and inspiring others to engage in civic activities. This transformation not only enhanced the participants' skills and behaviors but also created a ripple effect, promoting sustainable development and active citizenship across their communities.



# CASE STUDY

## AND VIDEOS

### Case Study No. 1



*Photo caption: Sall Men, practicing the Six Thinking Hats exercise during the Soft Skills Training on November 24, 2024, at Phnom Penh's ERA Hotel.*

“

*Before joining the USAID-funded Advancing Youth Leadership (AYL) program with the Advocacy and Policy Institute (API), I was solely focused on my studies and work. I didn't pay much attention to social issues,”*

says Sall Men, a 23-year-old female from the Charay ethnic minority group.

Born in the Som Thom commune, O'Yadav district, Ratanakiri Province, Sall Men is the eldest of three siblings. After finishing high school, she moved to Phnom Penh to continue her studies and graduated from the Royal University of Phnom Penh with a major in Tourism Management. After graduating, she worked as a manager at a Christian Church Center and later joined AYL as a volunteer, despite having no prior experience with projects or social issues.

*“Joining AYL was a turning point for me,”* says the youth. *“The training courses, especially the soft skill training provided by API, helped me develop skills such as interpersonal communication, life planning/goal setting, problem-solving, leadership, decision-making, and*

*teamwork. I became more aware of my potential and my future goals and of societal issues and learned how to address them effectively in my daily life".*

The knowledge and experiences she gained from API and AYL have been "invaluable". She met new people, learned from them, and applied her new skills to various activities. "These experiences have enriched my daily life and prepared me for future endeavors. Moreover, I aspire to become a teacher and project officer in my community, using the skills and knowledge I gained from API and AYL to make a positive impact in my community as well", Sall Men mentioned.



*Photo caption: Sall Men, river of life (Past & Present), one of the practical exercises of the Soft Skill Training (23 November 2024).*

## Case Study No. 2

# PHEON BORIN AND HIS STORY

Before joining the API-AYL program, he was eager to learn more about youth participation in solving community problems and building good relationships within the community. He also wanted to gain practical experience and apply it to real-world situations. When he received information from a friend who had joined the Advancing Youth Leadership (AYL) program in Cohort 1, he decided to apply for a volunteer position, passed the interview, and then had the opportunity to participate in the project. "API-AYL program provided me with valuable lessons in problem definition, soft skills, leadership, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and citizen participation. The training on soft skills, such as goal setting, life planning, and leadership, was particularly impactful. The training helped me lead projects, solve community problems, and adapt to working with diverse groups of people. I learned to set specific life goals, think critically about issues, and find effective solutions," Borin says with a smile while talking to API project staff.



*Pheon Borin, participated in Soft Skill Training on 23 November 2024 at Phnom Penh ERA Hotel.*

“

*I had never learned or experienced soft skill training and/or community development projects before; I only focused on my studies,”*

says the 21-year-old male youth from the ethnic minority group in Ratanakiri Province.

He gained new knowledge, made new friends, and developed a deeper understanding of leadership. The soft skills training has been instrumental in his personal and professional growth.

Kun Tuo is a student at the Royal University of Phnom Penh and the National Institute of Social Affairs. "Previously, I participated in various teamwork and community activities initiated by my peers. However, I had not received formal soft skills training from development

organizations. I focused mainly on my studies and part-time work but was eager to engage in volunteer activities that positively impact the community,” said Kun Tuo, a 27-year-old male youth from Cohort 2. In October 2024, he joined the API-AYL Social Lab project and received extensive training, particularly in soft skills such as leadership, communication, decision-making, and problem-solving.

These skills are “essential” for everyday life and community involvement. “Through the program, I gained new knowledge and experience, built strong relationships with my team, and developed a deeper understanding of leadership and community engagement. I am grateful to USAID, API, and other relevant partners for this opportunity,” Tuo shares. In the future, he plans to continue developing his soft skills and implementing projects that address community needs. He is committed to contributing to his community through volunteer activities and applying the skills he has learned.

These stories highlight the transformative impact of soft skills training on youth, empowering them to become proactive leaders and change-makers in their communities. The AYL program has not only equipped them with essential skills but also inspired them to pursue their goals and make meaningful contributions to society.



*Kun Tuo discussed with peers during a peer discussion exercise about the critical thinking lesson in soft skills training on November 24, 2024*



*Tuo, explaining his river of life during soft skills training.*



*Borin, while drawing his river of life during soft skills training.*

## Case Study No. 3

# AYL SOCIAL LAB - TESTIMONIAL VIDEO

Video link: this is the video Link







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ADVOCACY AND POLICY INSTITUTE

## ADVOCACY AND POLICY INSTITUTE

**A leading Cambodian NGO active in advocacy,  
policy influencing, capacity building,  
good governance and dialogue facilitation  
between citizens and state actors**

*The Advocacy and Policy Institute (API) is a Cambodian non-governmental organisation active in advocacy, policy influencing, good governance and civic engagement. Capacity building and dialogue facilitation are at the heart of our efforts towards democratic and sustainable development.*

*We have received widespread acclaim from both local and international organisations for our reliability, relevance and professionalism. Over a time span of almost two decades, API has helped institutionalise advocacy skills and has been striving to make local democratic and accountable governance a reality. To these ends, we have been conducting more than 300 training courses for over 10,000 participants affiliated with civil society and community-based organisations, local councils, media outlets, trade unions, Government institutions and the Cambodian Parliament.*

*API is unique in the Cambodian civil society in serving as a connector and facilitator for citizens' empowerment in their interaction with government at all levels. API has acquired first-hand experience on policy issues like access to information (A2I) through its grassroots work. Based on this vast experience, we are in the best position to make the voices of ordinary citizens count in policy-making at the national level. Here we have been trying to support government actors serve citizens according to the law and contribute to an enabling environment for citizens and civil society to express their concerns. Finally, we have been playing an important role in helping citizens understand their rights, access to information and make use of the opportunities for engagement offered by various laws and government policies.*

*Our programmes are guided by a human rights based approach. API serves all Cambodians and values the diversity of gender, sexual orientation and identity, (dis)ability, ethnicity, faith and political opinions. At the same time, we are especially committed to supporting the most disadvantaged in their efforts to make their voices heard.*

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