

# Introducing GATEways



## The Girls' Access to Education Women and Youth Scholarship Program (GATEways)

Higher educational attainment is strongly correlated with increased earning potential, with median earnings jumping an astonishing 60% for those with bachelor's degrees (compared to those with only high school diplomas). It is thus no surprise that many developed nations make higher education a priority in their pursuit of economic growth and development. Sadly, only 26% of Cambodians will graduate high school as a direct result of a genocide that took place in the mid to late 1970s. However, Lotus Outreach International is hoping to change that by providing university-level scholarship support to poor young women in this impoverished country.

There is perhaps a deeper social benefit to promoting higher education and one does not need to look further than Cambodia to see what happens when a nation is robbed of its educated citizenry. When the Khmer Rouge overtook Cambodia in 1975, it abolished currency and the banking system, shut down the public education system, evacuated urban centers and forced the entire population into the countryside to dig irrigation canals and till land. The Khmer Rouge eliminated all remnants of "old society" through deadly purges of the intellectual class. In just four short years, the entire country's educated class was systematically murdered and thrown into mass graves—including 90% of the country's teachers. Of the educated class members that survived, the majority fled the country never to return.

Today, Cambodia is only beginning to heal from the scars left by the Khmer Rouge. An entire generation missed out on public education, and today only 2% of women in the country have baccalaureate education. This dearth of professionals is directly linked to infant and maternal mortality, poor education quality, and



*Freshmen GATEways scholars at Meanchey University*

sluggish growth of the white collar sector. Further, the legacy of poverty left by the genocide means the very people who promise to help Cambodia develop—its future doctors, lawyers, bankers, and businesspeople—are unable to reach their potential for want of a few dollars each month in school-related expenses.

Since 2010, Lotus Outreach International has been providing scholarships to poor young women from the Cambodian countryside, and this year's graduation season will witness the conferment of higher degrees in nursing, accounting, and pedagogy to eight of the approximately 100 girls currently under scholarship support. In addition, nearly 150 girls will graduate high school this summer as a result of scholarship support provided through Lotus Outreach's flagship program in Cambodia, GATE (Girls' Access to Education). Lotus Outreach will mark the occasion with our third annual graduation ceremonies to be held in remote villages of Banteay Meanchey and Siem Reap, the Cambodian provinces from which the girls hail. Many, if not most, of the GATE girls express a desire to give back to their communities through studying to become nurses, midwives, lawyers, teachers, economists, agronomists, and NGO workers.

## The Shining Stars of GATEways

The story of 19 year-old Man Sima, valedictorian of her class in 2010, not only highlights the impact of GATE on the individual girls and their families, but showcases the “multiplier effect” of investing in the education of girls and women.

GATE literally changed Sima’s life. Applying for GATE support was a last desperate effort to remain in Cambodia—at her parent’s urging, she was planning to follow several cousins who had migrated to Malaysia for work. *“If I had never gotten support from GATE, I would be in prison in Malaysia now,”* says Sima. *“My cousins who have been working there went to prison where they were beaten with electrical wire because they didn’t have visas. Now they are not only paying off the debt they incurred to travel there, but have to pay off the bail agent too.”*

Instead, as a result of the GATE support package, Sima stayed in school, graduated at the top of her class and was accepted into the University of Law and Economics in Phnom Penh, where she is studying law with a scholarship from our GATEways program, a scholarship fund which is helping GATE grads transition into careers or further schooling. Sima now possesses a working command of both French and English, and achieved a 4.0 GPA during her freshman year. Perhaps most inspiring is Sima’s dream of paying her good fortune forward: *“I want to get a good job as a lawyer so I can contribute to helping the younger generation financially and spiritually.”*

**It costs just \$100 a month to fully support the university education of a girl like Sima,** bringing her family, community, and nation one step closer to healing from the scars of the past.



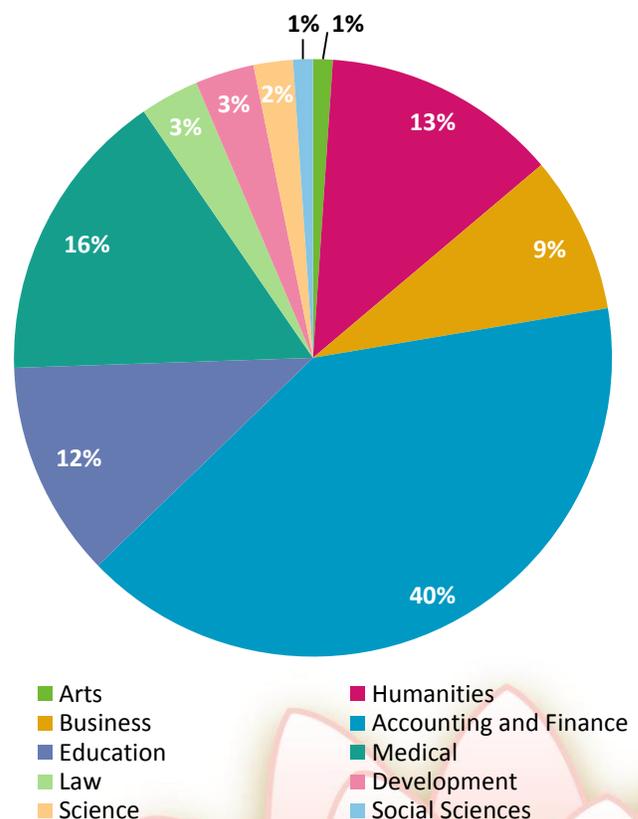
*When I was sick, you cared for me. When my bicycle broke, you helped me fix it. You educated me and offered me every opportunity you could.*

*You have been like my parents, and I will not be satisfied until I have been able to repay your generosity by helping others!* - Soven Mealea



GATEways scholars Sima (right) and Khen Srey Mom

## GATEways Scholars by Study Area



## What does \$100 cover?

- Housing and utilities
- School registration fees
- Textbooks and course documents
- English courses (required)
- Computer courses
- Food and water
- Transportation