

Media Release

8 March 2024

Pili, an inspirational leader for International Women's Day

On this International Women's Day, Jesuit Mission Australia celebrates the transformative journey of Pili, a young woman from rural Cambodia whose life has been reshaped through education and empowerment, thanks to the generous support of the Australian Catholic community.

Cambodia's education system grapples with significant challenges. Only 42% of Cambodian students in rural areas complete primary school, and only one in ten students complete high school.

Pili's life story reflects the harsh realities faced by many young individuals in Cambodia. Her parents, hardworking farmers, struggled to support her education beyond Grade 5. However, Pili received a Jesuit scholarship to attend the Taehen Student Centre, one of the six student centres run by the Battambang Education Project in partnership with Jesuit Mission Australia.

Pili's scholarship was truly life-changing. *"When I lived at home, I didn't have the confidence to talk or share my ideas with others. Living at the centre, I grew in confidence. I felt the centre was my second home,"* Pili said.

The Battambang Education Project, committed to uplifting vulnerable youth in Northwest Cambodia, provides students like Pili with scholarships, accommodation, and holistic care. Pili has not only beaten the odds and completed her education, she has completed tertiary studies, returned to work in the Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang, and also volunteers at the Taehen Student Centre, sharing her knowledge with the next generation.

Pili's journey continued with her earning a Bachelor of Accounting and Finance and completing a leadership course in 2023. Remarkably, she now serves as the Project Manager of the Battambang Education Project, proudly leading the very program that transformed her own life.

"Pili showcases the ripple effect of positive change that starts with just one individual," said Helen Forde, CEO of Jesuit Mission Australia.

"We are proud to be part of Pili's transformative story and remain dedicated to creating opportunities that empower more women to break free from the cycle of poverty."

Since her father passed away two years ago, Pili is now the primary income earner in her family. She takes care of her bedridden mother, pays for the education of two of her younger sisters, and cares for her niece and nephew who now live with her so they too can get a quality education.

Bishop Kike Figaredo SJ, Battambang Apostolic Prefect and Director of the Battambang Education Project, shared, *"From her deep suffering has come compassion and joy. Pili encourages the students to take on new opportunities and to uplift the community."*

Pili's story exemplifies the theme for International Women's Day in 2024: Invest in Women – Accelerate Progress. An investment in educating a girl today, will enable tomorrow's women to be powerful forces for change in their community and society. As we celebrate this day, let Pili's journey inspire us all to invest in initiatives that include and uplift the most vulnerable, who may then lead and accelerate transforming their country's future.

In 2024, your kind support could help open a world of new opportunity for vulnerable and excluded people, such as students from rural areas who are missing out on an education. To make a donation to provide quality education and scholarships to more young people like Pili visit <https://jesuitmission.org.au/pili-w/>

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Media Contact:

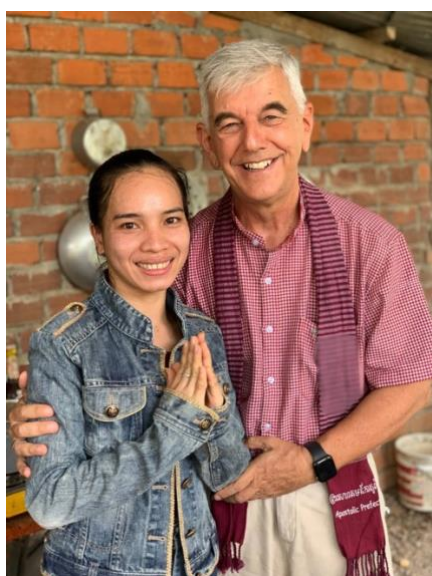
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Caption: Pili (left) with her mum.



Caption: Pili (right) at Taeheh school in 2007.



Caption: Pili and Bishop Kike Figaredo SJ, Battambang Apostolic Prefect and Director of the Battambang Education Project.



Caption: Pili (centre), at Jesuit Mission Australia's International partners meeting in 2023.



Supporting Links:

Pili February Appeal donation page

<https://jesuitmission.org.au/pili-w/>

About Jesuit Mission Australia

Jesuit Mission Australia works in over 10 countries across Asia and Africa to uphold the innate dignity of people living with the effects of poverty, especially the most marginalised and vulnerable.

Funds from our supporters:

- Break cycles of poverty through teaching and education
- Protect the health of communities by providing medical care and programs that improve access to clean water and toilets
- Develop independent, sustainable communities through livelihood training and income-generating projects
- Provide vulnerable individuals with pastoral care, social inclusion and advocacy
- Support refugees in crisis
- Enable effective disaster response and relief.