



SUCCESS STORY

Reducing Stigma and Discrimination

Raising awareness and acceptance of people living with HIV/AIDS



Photo: PACT

Lorn sells watermelons and mangos in Tanuk village in western Cambodia. Since a USAID-sponsored HIV/AIDS awareness program visited her village, business has improved.

Community forums help educate people about HIV/AIDS, modes of infection, and the impact of stigma and discrimination on people affected by and infected with HIV/AIDS.

Telling Our Story
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Lorn, a woman of 35, lives in Tanuk village in the district of Kravanh, western Cambodia. Lorn, who has one daughter, lives with HIV/AIDS. Her husband died three years ago, leaving her as the sole breadwinner. But because of her health condition, she found herself unable to make a living: nobody would buy the produce she grew. She was also excluded from community events and was forced to spend most of her time alone.

Unfortunately, Lorn's story is not unique. In many communities in Cambodia, people living with HIV/AIDS are discriminated against and stigmatized. Isolated and vulnerable, they are deprived of care and support. This has negative impact on both their physical and psychological health. Fortunately, that is changing: a USAID-sponsored project is helping to reduce HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination. The project organizes community forums, raising awareness and educating people about the disease. It also encourages people to help support those who live with HIV/AIDS. About 200 people attend each forum — audiences include home care providers, local authorities, people living with HIV/AIDS, monks, local and commune councils, community members, home care network representatives, and officials from provincial AIDS offices.

Since Lorn attended the community forum in her village, her life has improved. Neighbors and other community members are more willing to accept her and are more friendly. People visit her and purchase the produce she sells. No longer are members of the local community afraid to share a meal at her table.

Organizing community forums in the villages like Lorn's has increased public understanding of HIV/AIDS, modes of infection and the impact of stigma and discrimination on society and on the families of people living with HIV/AIDS. With help from USAID and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, people living with HIV/AIDS are no longer ostracized and can receive the support they need to live normal lives.