



## A day in the life of...



# Srey Kolab

*Having traipsed for two hours through dense jungle to attend school as a child, this teacher appreciates more than most the value education has for rural villages*

I GET up at dawn, when my husband leaves for the fields. I collect water from the well and cook rice for my children's breakfast. I then walk with them to school, where lessons begin at 7am with a song in Khmer, the national language of Cambodia.

The village where I now live, in the Ratanakiri Province, is quite different from the one in which I was born. About 150 families lived in my village; most had four or five children, but as sickness was common, many would experience the loss of a child.

We were lucky that there was a small school just two hours away and my parents always encouraged me to attend, even though I had to walk through dense jungle and would often arrive to find no teacher that day. I went three days a week until I was 11 years old.

When I turned 15, my parents arranged for me to marry my husband, who was from a nearby village. There weren't any schools within walking distance and all of the children worked with their parents on rice farms, so I decided to offer free evening lessons to children in the village, under a large tree. Although I couldn't remember

everything I had learned and had no paper or books, I was able to teach the children about life outside the village and some local stories.

I was then invited by the village chief to meet with representatives from an educational charity, United World Schools. In 2014, with support from the community, the charity built a school. I was chosen to be trained as a community teacher, during which I learned to read and count in Khmer. They also introduced us to teachers who had been to university and grown up in towns and cities.

We were much slower than them during training, but by the end we had become friends and they soon moved to our village.

The school is a large wooden building on the outskirts of the village. We have 10 teachers and about 200 pupils in six year groups, roughly divided by age rather than stage. This is because the older children had no access to a primary education, so they learn with the younger ones. I normally teach Years 3 and 4, who are typically aged 8-12, alongside a national teacher.

Every school day begins with maths. Some children find the subject hard, but love to

draw out the numbers on the blackboard or play counting games. Most days end with my favourite lesson, art. After class, many take their pictures home or hang them on the walls.

Since the school opened, our village has been transformed. The provision of the first toilets in the village has enabled us to start teaching children about sanitation. This has improved health throughout the community and you now see people cleaning their hands and boiling water before drinking it.

I can hardly believe how different life is now. Many children want to go to secondary school and some might even go to university. My daughter tells me that she wants to become a teacher like me. I hope she can. ●

### Your day

Do you want to tell the world's teachers about your working day, the unique circumstances in which you teach or the brilliance of your class? If so, email [chloe.darracott-cankovic@tesglobal.com](mailto:chloe.darracott-cankovic@tesglobal.com). We will give your school £100 if your story is published.