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Blogging for democracy

Whether she is writing her blog, delivering motivational speeches, or connecting NGOs with innovative technologies, Kounila Keo is a consistent inspiration for the burgeoning youth of Cambodia. In a country where two thirds of the population are under 25, this is a critical audience to capture. With her messages of independence, critical thinking and the importance of being accountable for your own fate, she is able to connect with a youth in a country that receives widespread criticism for its corruption and shrinking democratic space, “I was afraid when I first started blogging, but now I know that fear is just a state of mind”.

What do you think have been the most important factors that have helped you get where you are today?

When I have a difficulty I tell myself – never accept the status quo. I believe that when you are born poor and ignorant, you don’t have to die that way. I did lots of self-study – without a self-study one can never be educated. I don’t

like sitting and waiting for opportunities. One has to seek them by yourself. I also like associating myself with people so I can learn from them and do great things as they do.

What were some of the biggest obstacles you faced in reaching where you are today?

As many young Cambodians, I have had the responsibility to give back to my family since I started studying at a university. I don’t think it is a social pressure, I am happy I could support them. We are not a very well-to-do family but it is a family that I am proud of. I also don’t blame anyone for the lack of opportunities that we had at the beginning because I believe that you need to step up and seek those opportunities by yourself. For example, when I did not have money to buy expensive magazines about technologies, I asked my friend from India who I met via instant messaging and he taught me a lot about programming.

Who inspired or influenced you to be who you are today?

Nobody has ever inspired me as much as my mom did. She was in her adolescence during the Khmer Rouge era and had lots of dreams, such as to become a doctor and to travel, but all her dreams were destroyed. Despite this she kept a great passion for self-education, curiosity and enormous strength.

Being a woman, has that affected your road to where you are today, and how?

I think being a woman is great – you can do lots of things that men can’t do and this certainly isn’t restricted to having children. Women are capable of working extremely hard but they are often too modest about themselves. In journalism, being a woman can sometimes be difficult because



Kounila Keo uses

information and communication technology to amplify the voices of young.

some people don't want to speak with you and they just hang up the phone. Still, I believe that being a woman is great and women should celebrate being women.

What do you believe is your greatest contribution, to society/community?

I believe that if you yourself do things because you want to and you do it well, it can eventually benefit others. When I started blogging I did not know that it caught other people's attention as well. Then they started coming to me and they were asking for workshops and media started picking up stories from my blog. In 2012 I organized a Blogfestival and we got nearly 200 participants from all around South East Asia.

What is your message for other women/girls who may be inspired by your journey and achievements?

Ask yourself if you are happy with what you are doing and with how things are. And if not, do not accept the status quo and do something about it. I also really like this sentence: Do something that makes you surprised or proud every day. This way you can always challenge yourself.