



## Dr Reasmey Tan

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I am originally from Siem Reap. I got my bachelor's degree in 1999. At that time, **about 20 years ago**, women would stay in their hometown after finishing their study. Some would go to Phnom Penh to take entrance exams but many parents were afraid for their daughters' safety. My elder sister, for example, stopped studying after high school because my mother did not want her to go to Phnom Penh. Daughters were not encouraged to go far from home. **Parents would prefer their sons to continue to pursue higher degrees, given daughters, after getting a family, were expected to stay home while husbands have to earn income for their family.**

**Nowadays parents are more willing to let their children pursue higher education.** They understand the importance of education and knowledge and tend not to differentiate between sons and daughters. The decision to support a child's education is more based on their success in school and willingness to continue.

**Still, in the countryside, girls face many challenges. Parents worry about their daughters' safety if they don't have relatives living in the city where their daughters expect to study. One of the biggest concerns is the risk of sexual violence. Finding safe accommodation is one of the challenges for girls to continue their studies.** Personally I believe when girls can gather, they are safer, and a group of women together are safer.

Fortunately, for myself it wasn't hard to convince my parents to let me continue studying after high school. They were very proud of me and happy that I had the opportunity to go to the

city. In my family, we were seven siblings, I am the only one who holds a PhD, one of my brothers graduated with a bachelor's degree.

When I came to Phnom Penh after high school to pursue a higher degree, my mom initially wanted me to stay at my grandfather's cousin's house, but we didn't feel very welcome. Then, I stayed a few days at my mother's cousin's house at Kirirom but her house was not near Chey Thavy's school. Later, I stayed with my brother-in law's cousins, who lived near the Institute of Technology of Cambodia (ITC) with their mom. They were not rich but very kind. Their house had 6 siblings, and I helped them by selling food at their restaurant. I also had time to study and that was how I passed the entrance exam for an associate degree at ITC. **My mother was worried because I had no close relatives in Phnom Penh to stay with.** My mom asked me to go back to live in my hometown, it was Pchum Ben festival, then I told my classmates : "Maybe you won't see me come back. If I don't return, please inform the teachers I quit studies." **Fortunately, one of my relatives stepped in and convinced my mother to let me continue my studies.** After returning back to the city, I learned about the student dormitory. Since I was a girl from the province, I was allowed to stay there with senior students. I stayed for six years, paying only for food, electricity and water were covered. At that time there were fewer girls, the school tuition fee did not apply for girls, it was free. Now, female students have to pay, but less than male students, women pay USD 450 per school year compared to USD 600 for men. Because I obtained a good grade when I finished my associates degree, I was allowed to continue my bachelor's degree.

Later after I graduated from my bachelor's degree, I received a scholarship and went to De La Salle University in Manila, Philippines, for two years (2005-2007) to study master's degree. I didn't feel scared at that time as I lived in the room with a group of women. My parents were less worried because I got funds from a scholarship and stayed in with safe people. Then my professor from Japan encouraged me to continue till PhD level. I contacted director general of ITC in Phnom Penh to confirm the opportunity, and after some back and forth, I got the green light. I stayed in Japan until 2011 and completed my PhD there. **Scholarships and monthly allowances played a crucial role in supporting my education,** especially since my parents only supported me financially up to the bachelor's level. **I could never have imagined becoming a woman scientist without a scholarship.**

Since my return in Cambodia, I've become the lecturer-researcher, then head of Food Technology and Nutrition Research Unit, and now deputy director of Research and Innovation Center at ITC and have been working there for over 14 years. I accepted the interview with Geres because I like to challenge myself and be more visible on social media. Many Cambodians know me online, I enjoy being a role model as a Woman in Science. I always encourage girls to pursue their education and study abroad.

Today, many students want to study abroad in countries like Japan, the Czech Republic, Thailand, etc. as degrees from there are seen as more valuable. When I was studying, ITC didn't offer a PhD, but now it does. However, **without financial incentives or tuition coverage, it's difficult to attract students.** Programs like JICA can support research, but they often don't provide aid for master's students. While students used to receive tuition support or

allowances as research assistants, the upcoming projects will no longer provide these benefits, making it more challenging.

We need to promote gender balance in leadership. I **believe having both men and women as directors at ITC is important because they bring different strengths.** Nowadays, students choose more social science than scientific subjects as the exam is easier, sometimes they just choose social science to successfully pass the exam. **Promoting science education more actively could help attract more women to these fields.** For instance, communicating more about role models like Dr. Kinnalet [CAP Cee project manager] can help women students realize their own potential in STEM fields.