

Casestudy of Mesa named “ Journey of Hope”

Background:

Mesa is a 12-year-old boy who lives with his farming family in Osra Lao Village, Odambang I Commune, Sangke District, Battambang Province. He is the only child in the family with an intellectual disability and cerebral palsy. **Mesa** was born at full term through a normal delivery and weighed approximately 3 kilograms at birth. During pregnancy, his mother attended four antenatal care visits at the local health center. She received iron supplements but stopped taking them because of body pain and did not seek further medical advice. She also fell once during pregnancy but did not return for a medical examination because she experienced no immediate complications. Due to poverty, she continued physically demanding work and was unable to maintain a nutritious diet throughout her pregnancy. These circumstances describe the family's living conditions and maternal health history but do not establish the cause of Mesa's disability. When Mesa was around eight months old, his aunt noticed that he was physically weak and floppy. His development was significantly delayed, and by the age of one and a half years, he was still unable to crawl, walk or speak. Recognizing these delays, his aunt advised the family find the support from Karuna Battambang Organization, where Mesa began receiving rehabilitation and special education services.



Mesa's father repaired and adapted a bicycle for him to encourage regular cycling, helping to strengthen Mesa's muscles, improve his balance and mobility, and increase his independence.

Challenges Faced by the Family:

Due to poverty, Mesa's family faced unstable employment and low income. His father worked in several temporary jobs, including construction, cooking, and metalwork. However, these jobs were irregular and provided only a limited income, which was insufficient to meet the family's daily needs. As a result, the family frequently experienced food shortages and struggled to provide adequate nutrition and other basic necessities. During Mesa's early childhood, his mother had limited knowledge and skills to support the development of a child with disabilities. Therefore, he received little structured support in developing communication, mobility, self-care, and early learning skills. His mother completed most daily activities for him, including bathing, washing his hair, brushing his teeth, trimming his nails, dressing, feeding, and assisting him with toileting, rather than teaching and encouraging him to perform these activities independently.

Challenges faced by Mesa:

When Mesa joined the project in 2016 and began receiving home-based support, he was very timid and fearful. During that time, his ages was 1 and half years. He cried frequently and felt uncomfortable interacting with people outside his family. He was unable to communicate verbally with his parents, teachers, or other people. At that time, A was also unable to crawl or walk independently due to his physical disability and moved from place to place by dragging himself on his buttocks. He was fully dependent on his mother for daily living activities, including bathing, brushing his teeth, washing his hair, dressing, and other personal care tasks. He was also unable to hold a spoon independently and required assistance during mealtimes.

The service provided by Karuna Battambang:

After joining the project, A received regular physiotherapy, home-based special education, and developmental support based on his Individualized Education Plan. The project coordinated with physiotherapy specialists and the Battambang Provincial Rehabilitation Centre (ICRC) to support his physical development and mobility. The Special Needs Teacher visited his home four times per month to strengthen his communication, mobility, fine motor, self-care, academic, and daily living skills. He was taught simple words, oral-motor exercises, body massage, range-of-motion exercises, spoon use, dressing, bathing, brushing his teeth, and independent toilet use. He also learned to recognize common objects, letters, numbers, simple words, and Cambodian currency. His mother received regular coaching and participated in quarterly parent meetings to strengthen her knowledge and help her continue the activities at home. The family also received food, a water filter, a cow, a latrine, school materials, clothing, a water tank, and emergency assistance during COVID-19 and flooding. In addition, the project supported the family through counselling, referrals, medical and transportation assistance, disability awareness activities, and recreational trips.



The Special Needs Teacher conducted regular home visits to monitor Mesa's progress and provide individualized teaching, rehabilitation guidance, and support to both Mesa and his family.



During the classroom activity, the teacher read a short text aloud, and Mesa listened carefully before writing down what he had heard. This activity helped strengthen his listening, comprehension, memory, and writing skills.

Most Significant Changes of Mesa:

According to project staff, after receiving project support for three and a half years, Mesa had made sufficient progress to enroll in school at the age of five. Since then, he has continued to receive home-based support, rehabilitation, and special education services. By the beginning of 2026, the project's assessment showed that Mesa had made significant progress in communication, physical improvement, confidence, self-care, mobility, and daily living skills. Mesa can now communicate using many words and simple

sentences, although his speech is not always clear. For example, he can say, "I am going to school" and "Dad, I need 2,000 Riel." He has become more confident when interacting with unfamiliar people and no longer cries or feels extremely shy around strangers. He is now able to bathe, wash his hair, brush his teeth, dress himself, and use the toilet independently. His mobility and fine motor skills have improved considerably, enabling him to walk longer distances with greater stability, grasp and hold objects, and ride a bicycle to school every day. **Mesa** also actively helps his family with household chores, including washing dishes, fetching water, filling the household water jar, washing his clothes, and carrying light objects. He can independently go to the local shop to buy basic household items, such as salt and sugar, when requested by his parents. As a result of his continued progress, Mesa is currently studying in Grade 5 and is able to participate more actively in school, family, and community life.



Mesa (on the right side of the photo) is reading a school lesson together with his classmate. This activity helps improve his reading skills, confidence, and social interaction with peers in the classroom.

Most significant Change of the family and community:

Through regular coaching from project staff, Mesa's mother learned how to support his communication, physiotherapy, self-care, schoolwork, and daily living skills at home. She now encourages him to complete exercises, personal care activities, and school lessons more independently. His parent also became more involved in parent meetings, disability rights awareness activities, school support, and cultural events, which increased her confidence in caring for and teaching their son. The family's living conditions also improved after receiving a cow from the project. The cow produced a calf, and the family later sold one animal to build a fence around their home. During an interview with Mrs. **Khout Vun**, a 32-year-old, a neighbor shared that Mesa had changed significantly and was now able to complete many household chores. Mr. **Veng Vuthy**, his teacher, also reported academic progress, noting that Mesa improved from 23rd out of 31 students in March to 22nd during the

first semester. He added that Mesa will graduate his education, develop useful skills, find meaningful employment, and become more independent in the future.