

Case Study - April 2023

## Using a Different Kind of Violence: Violent Passion for Change

*"Of course, I am scared, but nobody else is going to fight the injustice."*



This is Ny Sodous. She has three children, one nephew and one grandchild. She has lived in village 23, Boeung Kak 2 commune for 26 years. She is an inspiration.

In 2007, Ny Sodous watched a film about obtaining land rights from authorities, and this lit a fire inside her. Since then, she has been fighting for this and so much more. After going in search of NGOs to network and train, Sodous had prepared herself well for her first challenge, which presented itself in 2012. The government were planning to forcefully evict her community to build a railway. Not only did she successfully prevent this, but she has also since secured land rights for over 90% of families in her community. She has done this through a determination to seek out knowledge and use it, whether for advocacy work or for uniting, empowering and mobilizing her community members. Even 11 hours spent in prison could not crush her spirit. Once released, she continued to attend workshops and seminars, and it was here that she met UPWD's Executive Director, who recognised Ny Sodous' community was in need and deserving of training and assistance. Her fight had begun to pay off.

UPWD's EU team first began their project (integrated Covid-19 response) in village 23 in 2020. Without Sodous, this would not have happened. Thanks to her, issues were raised and are now being solved. UPWD ran sessions educating members on the negative effects of domestic violence, advice on alternatives to conflict and how to manage situations if violence did occur. Sodous has also been trained as a counsellor and advises women on how they can combat violence or report it if things escalate. She has spent long hours studying her citizens and how the community functions, to tailor help as best she can. Of course, it is very difficult to hear about such pain and suffering, but she overcomes this through her passion to change behaviours. She described it as giving the violence back to the women; firing them up, empowering them to be strong and stand for their rights, for the sake of their mental health if nothing else. As a result of the workshops and her counsellor training, cases of domestic violence have decreased dramatically.

Sodous hopes the future brings more female politicians and leaders. She hopes for workshops teaching women to be strong and independent, with a hunger to advocate for their rights in a voice that speaks of equality and equity and is heard. She hopes for a society where women are not told it is their fault they have been violently beaten, where popular culture does not propagate the same messages, and where poor people have control of their own future. Sodous is certainly taking real action to make this society a reality. Encouraged and fuelled by UPWD's fighting spirit, she is a role model emitting strength.

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Her vision is one of global change, but her own inspiration lies closer to home; in a brighter future for her daughter, who told me she has already begun her own volunteering.

