Ms. Chul Sreymom was born in 1980 in Thmey Village, Kandorl Dom Commune, Samrong Torng District, Kampong Speu Province. She is currently a union activist with the Cambodian Alliance Trade Union at Sangwoo garment factory in Kampong Speu Province. She is the second child among five in a farming family. In 1987, Ms. Sreymom joined Sampov Primary School in Kandorl Dom commune and continued to Sokpage high school in Chbarmorn district (currently Chbarmorn) in Kampong Speu.

She decided to end her studies in 1998, in ninth grade, to get a job to support her family and help her older brother continue his studies.

Sreymom started her first job in 1999 as a garment factory worker in Toul Sangke, Phnom Penh, for which she was able to earn only $35 USD per month. Working conditions were very difficult, because there was neither a union nor any workers campaigning for workers’ rights.

“Working conditions in 1999 were difficult; it was hard to get permission to do anything.”

In 2000, Ms. Sreymom moved to work at PCCS at Teuk Thla, where the wage had increased to $45 USD, and working conditions were better. At that time, she joined the Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia, then became a union representative in the factory, enabling her to join many protests for workers’ rights and working conditions. She worked there until 2010, when the factory transferred to Malaysia. After the shutdown of PCCS, she tried to submit job applications to various factories, but none of them recruited her because of her activism. She was ultimately hired at Sangwoo, where she continues to work today. Ms. Sreymom recalls:

“I applied for a job at many factories, but they rejected my request. Then, I applied to Sangwoo, and they accepted me.”
In 2013, Ms. Sreymom became a member and activist at the Cambodian Alliance Trade Union, because she thinks that this union is willing to serve workers’ interests well. Through the Cambodian Alliance Trade Union, Ms. Sreymom was able to get legal knowledge via training courses, and she has participated in protests in Phnom Penh and the provinces in order to bring about better working conditions. She thinks that the conditions of workers in the industrial sector are not that different from the past, even though the current minimum wage has increased to $140 USD. However, she says, if you compare this to the price of products and daily expenses, it is not that different from when she started her first job with a $35 USD wage. She added that workers face high risks with their transportation, which requires many people to fit in a truck, and they face frequent traffic accidents. Ms. Sreymom says that it is obvious that there is not much freedom of expression for workers, and they cannot exercise their full rights to protest. She says freedom of association for unions will also shrink if the Trade Union Law is adopted.¹

Because the industrial sector has grown so much in the Cambodian economy, she requests that the government raise the minimum wage for garment workers, reflecting the current market price of products, which she claims based on a study by unions found to be between $177 to $207 USD.

¹ The Trade Union Law passed the National Assembly on 4 April 2016.