

“It almost changed everything—from leaving poverty to building my career path, shaping my mindset, and giving me vision.”

A Conversation with Rany Pholly, graduate of Digital Divide Data

May Titthara

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May Titthara: Can you introduce yourself?

Rany Pholly: My name is Rany Pholly. Back then, DDD was connected to Passerelles Numériques Cambodia [PNC]. I was a PNC student in 2013. DDD offered funds to PNC. I studied with PNC for seven months, then in 2014 I moved to DDD. I stayed with DDD for three years before moving to a private company that imports IT products.

At DDD I worked on many projects. My first was a newspaper project and then Photoshop project. Later, I joined a project to support mobile companies like Smart and Cellcard. My last project was with the Khmer Rouge archives by inserting subtitles into Khmer Rouge documentary videos — DDD supported this project for free.

May Titthara: Can you share a bit about your background before joining PNC and DDD?

Rany Pholly: Before PNC, I was a high school student in Siem Reap. After high school, I didn't think I could continue my studies because of financial hardship. In the province, NGOs often came to our village to interview families and select students for scholarships. I applied to many scholarships and finally received one at PNC.

I thought if I could move to Phnom Penh, there would be more opportunities. In Siem Reap, most jobs were in hotels, restaurants, or hospitality — mainly service work.

My family situation was very difficult. My parents divorced, and I have four siblings. Because of the situation, my siblings quit school so that I could continue my study. We didn't have money for everyone's education. In the end, I was the only one in my family

who graduated from university. Later, in 2023, I even completed a Master's degree — thanks to my siblings' sacrifice.

May Titthara: So how did coming to Phnom Penh change you?

Rany Pholly: It changed me a lot. At first, I thought I would never get opportunities. I imagined I might end up migrating abroad or working in construction just to earn a little income.

But thanks to PNC and DDD, I found good opportunities, got decent jobs, and could earn a proper salary.

May Titthara: How have you contributed to changes in your family?

Rany Pholly: My family's livelihood improved a lot. We were a very poor family, living in a small hut. Now, we have a proper house. We are not rich, but we are average — enough food, more financial stability, and a decent home. Compared to before, it is a big change.

May Titthara: What skills and knowledge did you learn from DDD?

Rany Pholly: I gained soft skills that shaped my mindset to be more positive. I also learned computer basics — laptop, desktop, keyboard, monitor. When I was in Siem Reap, I knew nothing about computers. Now, my job depends on these skills. So what I gained from DDD is very useful for me today.

May Titthara: How have you applied these skills and knowledge in your current job?

Rany Pholly: For me, the most important is mindset. I don't know exactly what strategy DDD used, but the way they guided us was very effective. They taught me to be mature, to have long-term vision, and to move forward step by step to reach my goals.

In addition to mindset, I also learned computer and English skills. Another thing was the friendliness at DDD. People were soft, connected, supportive — it felt warm and safe. That motivated me to keep going.

May Titthara: I've heard from many alumni about DDD's motivational spirit. What exactly was it for you?

Rany Pholly: It wasn't something DDD taught as a subject. It was more like the culture. Almost everyone shared kindness, good behavior, and a positive attitude.

During my time, DDD supported us for four years of university. But they also encouraged us to explore outside opportunities. If we could find better jobs earlier, we could finish the support and move forward.

In my case, I got an outside opportunity, so I left after three years.

May Titthara: After leaving DDD, do you still keep in touch?

Rany Pholly: Yes. We still connect. DDD often organizes alumni meetups every three months, six months, or yearly, depending on available budget. For my batch, we also have a Facebook group chat, and we still keep in touch there.

May Titthara: How did the DDD program change your life?

Rany Pholly: It almost changed everything — from leaving poverty to building my career path, shaping my mindset, and giving me vision.

Before, my family wanted me to be a teacher, but I didn't want that. At DDD, they encouraged me to follow my passion, define my own goals, and build a path toward them. They helped me see my strengths and weaknesses, and what I should improve. Even choosing a university major, they guided me, because as a provincial student I had no idea what to study.

DDD gave me clarity and support. There was always a team ready to help when I needed it.

May Titthara: What do you consider your most successful achievement from DDD?

Rany Pholly: I would say management style. Each leader at DDD had their own unique style. I observed and learned from them. When I left, I got a management role where I led a team. I applied what I had learned — choosing the right approach for each situation.

May Titthara: What would you like to see DDD do differently in the next 5 or 10 years?

Rany Pholly: As alumni, we share a mission to give back to society. DDD's principle is to help capable young people who lack opportunity, especially the vulnerable groups. That mission is important.

I want to see DDD continue sharpening young people's mindset — to be ambitious, determined, and hardworking. That way they can reach their full potential.

May Titthara: Do you have any message for young people?

Rany Pholly: I have three core messages.

First, be ambitious with good faith. Have passion for personal development, be clear about your goals, and keep yourself motivated.

Second, be confident. Confidence comes from curiosity — wanting to know, learn, and understand. Don't just be curious; find answers. For me, I worked very hard. To be successful, we must work harder.

Third, manage your time. Time moves forward and doesn't wait. If you waste it, you delay your goals. For example, four years at university — if you delay even one year, you lose one year of progress. Overcome struggles and don't give up too easily. Sometimes in life we spend time, sometimes money, sometimes knowledge — but we must manage all of these well and stay flexible.

May Titthara: Any shortcomings about the DDD program?

Rany Pholly: During my time, the salary was too little. It was hard to survive. But I understood — the salary was small because DDD also covered school fees, provided capacity building, personal development, and health services. Still, the minimum salary was a challenge.

May Titthara: Anything else DDD should improve or do differently?

Rany Pholly: I want to see DDD grow bigger. I hope DDD expands its office to every province in Cambodia. That way, young people in the provinces can access the same opportunities.

The current outreach — school visits, brochures, social media — is not enough. If DDD had offices in each province, the impact would be much greater. Recruitment would be more effective, and the program could reach more vulnerable youth as their target.

May Titthara: Thank you.

May Titthara is an award-winning journalist based in Cambodia, recognized for his reporting on deforestation, land grabbing, economic land concessions, and forced evictions. Over his career, he has received numerous awards for breaking news coverage and human rights reporting. In addition to his journalism, he works as a media specialist with Internews Cambodia and serves as the executive director of the Cambodia Journalists Alliance, where he supports press freedom and professional development for local journalists.

** This interview has been edited and condensed.*