

“DDD gave me more than just skills—it changed my mindset.”

A Conversation with Siem Hemvon, graduate of Digital Divide Data

May Titthara
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May Titthara: Can you introduce yourself and tell us how you first got to know DDD?

Siem Hemvon: I’m from Kampong Speu. I found out about DDD through my aunt who used to work there. She told me about it, so I applied. I had to wait for about a month before they called me for an interview. During the interview, they asked about my family background because, back then, my family was very poor.

I started at DDD by joining the three-month Base Training program. After that, I began working as an associate. The training was really comprehensive—it covered hard skills like computers and English, and also soft skills like communication, behavior, and attitude.

May Titthara: How did the training change you?

Siem Hemvon: I improved a lot. Before, I was just a girl who knew nothing about computers, nothing about hard or soft skills. I didn’t even have a goal in my life. But after the training, I gained confidence. I improved especially in computer skills and English.

When I was living in the province, I only knew that if someone had computer and English skills, they could get a good job. I used to see people like that, and they looked cool, so I wanted to be like them. The first time I touched a computer was when I started

training at DDD. I was so happy—it felt like my dream came true. I also got to meet many new people there.

After two years, I received a better opportunity outside, one that matched my university major. Now I'm working as an accountant at a private airline company.

May Titthara: How useful are the skills you learned from DDD in your current career?

Siem Hemvon: Very useful. Since leaving DDD, I've already changed jobs three or four times. And in every job, I've applied the skills I learned there—computer, English, communication, work attitude, and how to interact in society.

May Titthara: Looking back, what would you say is your biggest achievement from the DDD program?

Siem Hemvon: For me, it's English. At DDD, they organized a public speaking competition. I took the chance and won second place. That experience gave me the courage to join other competitions too. Later, I joined the debate club and other contests at school.

DDD gave me the bravery to step outside my comfort zone. I used to be afraid, with no self-confidence, not even daring to speak in front of people. But then I found myself standing on stage, competing. That was a big change for me, and I'm very proud of it.

May Titthara: How do you see DDD as an institution?

Siem Hemvon: I think DDD has helped so many Cambodian youths, especially those who had no chance to study at university. They provide scholarships, which become turning points in many students' lives. This is also important for the country—because national development depends on the quality of human resources. Knowledge is power, and DDD helps build that.

On a personal level, DDD also helped my family. Before, life was very difficult and challenging. After I joined DDD, our livelihood improved a lot.

May Titthara: How about Cambodian society more broadly?

Siem Hemvon: DDD has had a big impact in Cambodian society. They provide scholarships, salaries, and skills to vulnerable groups and young people with limited opportunities. That changes lives, not just for individuals but also for communities.

May Titthara: Do you see any areas where DDD could improve?

Siem Hemvon: Working at DDD was great, but one thing is that we can't just stay as associates for long. At some point, we need to go outside and find other jobs. That's what helps us grow further. I hope DDD can get more funding in the future so they can continue expanding and help even more people.

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

Siem Hemvon: Yes. I want to tell young people: make the most of the time, experience, and opportunities that DDD provides. Study hard and work hard. Not everyone is lucky enough to get such opportunities, so don't waste them. We need to develop ourselves first if we want to develop our country.

May Titthara: What does DDD mean to you now?

Siem Hemvon: Even though I already left, DDD still feels like home. It's like moving out from my parents' house—I still go back to visit during alumni meetups. What connects us is that we all came from similar backgrounds and struggles, so we understand each other. At DDD, we worked together openly and supported each other. Unlike the outside world, there was no competition among us.

May Titthara: How do you compare soft skills training at DDD versus at university?

Siem Hemvon: The environment is different. At university, students come from all kinds of backgrounds—rich and poor. But at DDD, most of us came from similar situations, so it felt more like family. Like interacting with brothers and sisters.

May Titthara: Last question, how would your life be different without DDD?

Siem Hemvon: Without DDD, I probably would have worked part-time in a coffee shop as a barista, just to support my studies. I don't think I'd have professional computer skills like today. Maybe I'd still be doing small jobs without a clear career. I studied accounting at school and now I have even completed my Master's degree.

DDD gave me more than just skills—it changed my mindset. I became more humanitarian, not only thinking about money or personal benefit. That was the real transformation for me.

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.*