



POSITION PAPER ON EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Cambodia’s education sector NGOs, development partners, and government are working hard to improve education for the citizens of Cambodia. Education NGOs play a particularly crucial role in addressing gaps in education for disadvantaged groups -- the very poor, ethnic minorities, children with disabilities and those living in remote areas.

Education NGOs not only help to extend the reach of basic education in Cambodia; they also help to broaden the scope of intervention. In addition to formal education services, NGOs offer a wide range of programs that include health education, vocational/technical training, language education, community support, scholarships, gender issues and advocating for national policy reform.

NGO Education Partnership (NEP) is a membership organization whose 75 members are committed to helping Cambodia and the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) develop an education system which ensures "that all Cambodian children and youth have equal opportunity to quality education regardless of social status, geography, ethnicity, religion, language, gender or disabilities"¹. NEP supports this goal through research and capacity building work with education NGOs, and ongoing dialogue with government and development partners.

Joint Monitoring Indicators

The relevant Joint Monitoring Indicators (JMIs) for this sector are as follows:

TARGET	ACTIONS NEEDED	RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT INSTITUTION	TIME FRAME
3. Improved opportunities for primary education	1. Increase the net enrolment in primary school (total, and by sex)	MOEYS	Ongoing
	2. Increase the survival rate from grades 1 to 6	MOEYS	Ongoing

Monitored progress on Actions Needed / Analysis of Performance

3.1 Increase the net enrolment in primary school

The overall net enrolment ratio² in primary shows a general upward trend. This increase was particularly sharp in the early years of this millennium: from 83.8% in school year 2000/2001 to 91.3% in 2005/2006. While this positive trend is encouraging, the data reveal a slow-down in the annual growth over the last two years.

¹ Extract of NSDP 2006-2010 Section 4.85
² Education Statistics and Indicators, EMIS

Challenges and Recommendations

The National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) target is to reach 100% enrolment by 2010. However, the current speed of growth in net enrolment will not meet these projections unless further action is taken.

National primary enrolment statistics have come under criticism because they only offer a macro level perspective which does not reflect the much lower enrolment rates that are reported in remote areas and among disadvantaged groups, including children with disabilities, the very poor and ethnic minorities.

At the 2009 Education Congress, discuss priority actions needed to increase primary enrolment among vulnerable populations.

While data on gender are now more readily available, enrolment statistics for these other disadvantaged groups are not yet reported by the Education Management Information System (EMIS). Therefore it is not possible to obtain a full picture of primary level enrolment in Cambodia.

Produce statistics on enrolment and survival rates that reflect experience with children from disadvantaged groups and those living in remote areas.

3.2 Increase the survival rate from grades 1 to 6

The impact of low survival rates is a serious issue. When children leave school before completing a basic education, their future opportunities are limited. In 2006/2007, only 52.50% of students entering grade 1 had enrolled grade six of primary school.

Challenges and Recommendations

The NSDP target is to have all students completing grade 9 by 2010. Given the current rate of increase in survival rates, it is unlikely that this goal will be achieved unless significant action is in key areas including teacher recruitment, training and other quality issues, teacher compensation and school accessibility.

Children with disabilities have special access needs, and require specific learning conditions and the attention of a teacher. The 2007/2008 average pupil-teacher ratio of 49.3 and up to 51.7 in disadvantaged schools, presents additional challenges for these children.

Children who drop out are more likely to be from disadvantaged groups. The burden of these children is worsened when they are asked for informal payments by teachers whose salaries are low and or who receive full or partial payments infrequently.

At the 2009 Education Congress, discuss priority actions needed to increase primary survival rates, with a focus on special needs children and quality issues.

Key actions/strategies from the NSDP

The relevant messages of the NSDP for enrolment and survival rates at the primary school level include:

Section	Message
4. 88	Ensure easy and equitable access to education for vulnerable and disadvantaged children, e.g. girls, the poor, those from ethnic minorities and children with disabilities.
4. 89	Encourage enrolment and attendance of poor children in primary and lower secondary schools
4. 91	Increase the coverage of preschool children attending early childhood education programs in schools, communities and homes.
4. 91	Increase the number of primary and lower-secondary schools, especially in remote and underserved areas.
4. 91	Provide teachers with improved incentives by upgrading their qualification with professional development and pay special attention to increasing their salaries and disbursing funds on time.
4. 91	Ensure quality of education through improved provision of educational materials, equipment, libraries and laboratories, and through development of quality standards for all levels with a national assessment system.
4. 91	Assure adequate allocation and timely release of current budgets for education especially for basic education.
4. 91	Increase gender parity in primary and lower secondary schools by facilitating attendance of girls.

4.88 Ensure easy and equitable access to education for vulnerable and disadvantaged children, e.g. girls, the poor, those from ethnic minorities and children with disabilities.

Low primary level enrolment and survival rates are particularly evident in border areas and districts with high numbers of remote schools and ethnic minorities, In these areas, the high incidence of poverty makes it difficult for families and children to access education services. Payments required from parents by teachers represent the most important barrier to poor students' attendance to school.

Scholarships are an important means of enhancing school enrolment and participation of poor families.

Increase availability and broaden distribution of scholarships for poor students.

Some progress has been made in the past year on the issue of children with disabilities. The Ministry of Education Youth and Sport has adopted a Policy on Education for Children with Disabilities and issued a circular approving the employment of government teachers by NGOs to teach children with disabilities.

MoEYS has included references to children with disabilities in the Teacher Professional Standard and agreed to provide a classroom in a government primary school for children with severe intellectual disabilities in Phnom Penh. A new teacher training manual on Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities is being developed by MoEYS with the DAC and supported by UNICEF.

Much remains to be done if most children with disabilities are to attend school alongside their peers. This includes full implementation of the Policy on Education for Children with Disabilities. The Disability Action Council recommends that MoEYS:

- Disseminate teacher training on inclusive education, Braille and sign language;
- Clarify the rights of persons with disabilities to become teachers;
- Provide simple guidelines to teachers on identification of children with disabilities and completion of the student register;
- Make specific policy and provisions for children with severe and intellectual disabilities, and
- Include children with disabilities in the proposed national scholarship scheme.

Many ethnic minority students struggle during their first years in school because they are not familiar with the national language. Learning to read and write in a language that that is not one's own is a very difficult task.

Bilingual education is one solution to the problem. The opportunity to learn to read and write and to learn life skills and academic knowledge in the language that the students understand best is crucial for the future academic success and for generating interest towards lifelong education.

Make funding available for bilingual education at the primary level in areas with significant ethnic minority population, particularly for the training of indigenous teachers.

4.91 Increase the coverage of preschool children attending early childhood education programs

The number of children benefiting from early childhood education through preschool is increasing. In 2006/2007, 1,524 preschools were registered by EMIS; in 2007/2008 110 new schools have been registered.

EMIS statistics show that 79,585 students were registered in preschools in 2007/2008, reflecting an increase of 1,686 new students over 77,899 in 2006/2007. This reflects an encouraging sustained increase over the past five years.

Recent preschool research by NEP³ reports on the positive contribution of early education to admission and repetition rate in grade 1. The research illustrates that preschool also has a positive impact on older sibling primary level attendance due to fewer child care obligations.

The major obstacles to enrolment of children in preschool are access to preschool, specifically the ability of a family to bring small children to preschool, and the capacity of the classrooms to receive students⁴.

³ The Impact of Preschools on Early Childhood Education in Cambodia (NEP, 2008)

⁴ The Impact of Preschool on Early Childhood Education in Cambodia (NEP, 2008)

Increase access to preschool through more schools, particularly in rural and remote areas.

The capacity of the Preschool Teacher Training Centres also needs to be increased to provide training opportunities for NGO preschool teachers and to ensure that the new classes have well-trained teachers.

4. 91 Increase the number of primary and lower-secondary schools

The number of primary schools has increased from 6,277 in 2005/2006 to 6,476 in 2007/2008. The data show that more schools are built in remote areas each year than in urban centers where the need is not as great.

It is important to note that school construction alone is not a measure of success because not all schools operate on a full-time, daily basis and the current shortage of trained teachers continues to be a significant problem in Cambodia.

Continue current efforts to build new schools and provide incentives for teachers to teach in remote areas.

4.91 Provide teachers with improved incentives by upgrading their qualification with professional development and pay special attention to increasing their salaries and disbursing funds on time.

The delivery of quality education requires well-trained, properly-resourced and motivated teachers. The findings of the recent *Valuing Teachers* research, a VSO-funded study undertaken in cooperation with NEP, reports that the greatest de-motivating factor for public school teachers is the low salary.

Reallocate education staff funding to allow for fair salaries for teachers to help reduce the practice of informal school fees.

Performance-related pay is an incentive to encourage teachers to improve their teaching practice. However, there appear to be inconsistencies and inequities in the administration of this practice. In some provinces, between 10% and 15% of teachers receive these awards each year but in others there is no knowledge of the scheme.

Establish standards and mechanisms to ensure that performance merit awards are made in a transparent and accountable way.

4.91 Ensure quality of education through improved provision of educational materials, equipment, libraries and laboratories, and through development of quality standards for all levels with a national assessment system.

The MoEYS' Teacher Training Department has gained approval for the Teacher Standards Framework which contains standards that will serve as a measure of performance of teaching practices that can be observed and evaluated. They are organized around four domains: professional knowledge, professional practice, professional learning and professional ethics.

These standards should be seen as minimum or essential knowledge, values and skills to be covered. The Framework also strongly advocates the development of a positive attitude amongst teachers towards habitual assessment practices and assessors as being vital to effective learning.

Apply national standards and criteria across all primary level schools to help normalize assessment and improve monitoring and evaluation.

4.91. Assure adequate allocation and timely release of current budgets for education, especially for basic education.

Education Indicators, MoEYS, report that in 2007, MoEYS received 19.2% of the total budget, the highest budget allocation of any government ministry, higher than the 2006 allocation of 18.3%. However, in 2008, the budget allocation to the education sector was 18.1% of the total budget.

A recent step towards support for Cambodia's achievement of EFA goals involved the Fast Track Initiative (FTI) budget of USD 57.4 million. This budget will be used to support three main education components: ECCD expansion (USD 4.7M), Improving Primary Education Access and Quality (USD 50.7M) and Institutional Development and Capacity Building (USD 2.0M).

Closely monitor and evaluate ECCD expansion to support improved primary education access and quality.

4.91. Increase gender parity in primary and lower secondary schools by facilitating attendance of girls.

The proportion of girls enrolled at the primary level has shown marked improvement over last seven years. It should be noted that the proportion of girls enrolled in primary schools has increased in remote areas.

Table 1: Proportion of Female Students Enrolled

Level	Whole Kingdom		Remote Area	
	2000/2001	2007/2008	2000/2001	2007/ 2008
Primary	46.2%	47.4%	45.1%	47.1%
Lower secondary	37%	46.6%	35.6%	47.1%
Upper secondary	31.8%	40.9%	0	37.6%

Source: EMIS, Education Statistics and Indicators (figures converted into percentages based on EMIS statistics)

Continue to increase awareness of the value of school enrolment of girls among communities and family

Important issues not covered by JMIs or NSDP

The practice of informal school fees to supplement teachers' low salaries places a heavy burden on family incomes, particularly for the very poor and other disadvantaged groups. *As long as this practice continues, Cambodia will not realize a meaningful increase in enrolment and survival rates in all parts of the country.*

The Royal Government of Cambodia has acknowledged the problem of informal school fees by ruling in Cambodia's *Education Law* that this practice is illegal. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport has committed to the abolishment of informal school fees by 2008 in its Education Strategic Plan (ESP).

Provide teachers with a fair income that reflects the cost of living and inflation so that they do not need to supplement their salaries through informal school fees.

Finally, corruption is seen by teachers as a major de-motivating factor⁵. This affects the quality of education given students and, in turn, influences survival rates.

Make the passing of the *Anti-Corruption Law* a top priority.

Action on these recommendations is urgently needed to help the Royal Government of Cambodia and MoEYS reduce barriers to education for all. The impact on primary level enrolment and survival will be significant.

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⁵ Valuing Teachers (NEP, 2008)