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NGO EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

## The Impact of Preschools on Early Childhood Education in Cambodia

A Study of Six NGO-Sponsored Preschools in Battambang, Kampong Chhnang and Phnom Penh



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## ABBREVIATIONS

CNGO	Cambodian Non-governmental Organization
CIAI	Centro Italiano Aiuti all' Infanzia
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECED	Early Childhood Education Department
EFA	Education for All
ESSP	Education Sector Support Program
FTI	Fast Tract Initiative
JSC	Jesuit Service Cambodia
Kg Chhnang	Kampong Chhnang
KrY	Krousar Yoeung
MoEYS	Ministry of Education Youth and Sport
NH	New Humanity
NEP	NGO Education Partnership
NGO	Non-government Organization
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USD	United States Dollars
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas

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# **The Impact of Preschools on Early Childhood Education in Cambodia**

## **A Study of Six NGO-Sponsored Preschools in Battambang, Kampong Chhnang and Phnom Penh**

### **I. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Achieving free basic education for all children remains a challenge for the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), NGOs and civil society. While the national grade 1–6 primary school net enrolment ratio in 2007/2008 was 93.3%<sup>1</sup>, the dropout and repetition rates are very high among children in primary school and are among the underlying issues that impede progress made toward achievement of EFA goals.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is one of the 12 Education Sector Support Program (ESSP) recurrent priorities. ECE is recognized by the Royal Government of Cambodia as an important means of promoting enrolment rates, and reducing late enrolment in primary schools. It is also regarded as an important means of building an educational foundation for children that will help them achieve their study performance, minimize repetition rates in grade 1 and 2 and lessen the likelihood of school drop-outs caused by failure to pass exams.

Preschool is one component of the ECE program that allows children three to five years old to prepare themselves before primary school enrolment. It is available to families with children under the age of six, enabling families to take advantage of childhood care and education, and have more time to focus on income earning activities.

In 2005 Enfants et Développement conducted a study Integrated Approach to Early Childhood Development in Rural Communities of Krousar Yoeung. Chantal Rodier, explored the relationship between preschool attendance and primary school enrolment. She reported that the great majority of children enrolled in preschool centers have enrolled in primary school: 90% of five-year-old children who left the centers in 2003/2004 had enrolled into grade 1 in primary school. Of the girls who left the centers and were of school age, 83% enrolled in grade 1.

Most of the available preschool research has been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of preschool services supported by UNICEF, while the best practices and challenges of preschool supported by other NGOs have not yet been addressed.

Early Childhood Education is one priority of the Fast Track Initiative (FTI) which provides additional financing for basic education programs in developing countries with an education strategic plan. This component of the FTI program seeks to expand the availability and

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), Education Statistics and Indicators, 2007/2008

quality of formal and informal preschool services<sup>2</sup>. The Fast Track Initiative Catalytic Fund has allocated US \$4.7 million for the expansion of ECE in Cambodia.

The purpose of this research is to share with government, development partners, NGOs and the education community information on best practices and challenges of NGO-operated preschools. This research also seeks to identify the correlation between preschool and grade 1 students' learning and performance and provides an overview of NGO-sponsored preschool activities in selected provinces and the impact on students' families. It concludes with recommendations, including collaborative ways in which NGOs and government can support each other in the area of preschool education.

## **II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

This study's research objectives are to:

- 1) Understand the general context of NGO-sponsored preschools and their characteristics;
- 2) Identify the contributions of preschool to children's primary level education (grade1) and to their family members;
- 3) Determine factors which motivate parents to send children to preschool;
- 4) Determine barriers which prevent families from sending children to preschool; and
- 5) Identify the good practices and challenges faced by NGO-sponsored preschools.

### **Scope**

The study focuses specifically on preschools operated by NGOs. Within available time and resources, NEP focused on four NGOs (New Humanity, Centro Italiano Aiuti all'Infanzia, Puthi Komar and Don Bosco) implementing preschool activities in two provinces and one city: Battambang, Kampong Chhnang, and Phnom Penh.

### **Definition of Preschool**

In this study, preschool (also called nursery school) refers to a formal pre-education system for three to five year old children which introduces them to the classroom environment and helps them prepare for primary enrolment.

Preschool is different from other early childhood centers such as child care centers (also called day care centers). A preschool is a pre-scholastic institution, it has a strong instructional orientation in addition to the other care-giving services it offers the young child. This pre-education is intended not only to provide care, but also to give children the important knowledge and social skills they need in their daily life.

## **III. RESEARCH METHODS**

During the field research in Battambang, Kampong Chhnang and Phnom Penh, a total of six preschools in three districts and two Khans were investigated.

Two different sets of survey questionnaires were used to collect information from households with children between three to five years old. The households were divided into two groups:

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<sup>2</sup> Education For All - Fast Track Initiative Catalytic Fund Decision Memorandum, World Bank.

families who send their children to preschool (125 families), and families who do not send their children to preschool (127 families) for a total of 252 families.

In addition to the survey questionnaire, key informant interviews were conducted with preschool managers, preschool teachers, grade 1 teachers and primary school directors. The grade 1 teachers and primary school directors were from schools located in a shared compound with preschool or from the closest primary schools to the preschools of this study. Focus group discussions with commune councilors and elders were also conducted in the five communes.

Tests of the knowledge of grade 1 students in each of the participating primary schools (involving 50% who attended preschool and 50% who did not attend preschool) were also conducted to determine the similarities and differences in their capacity to learn and their study performance.

The table below depicts sources of information gathered in each province.

**Table 1: Respondents by Province**

Sources	Battambang		Kampong Chhnang	Phnom Penh		Total
	Battambang District	Sangker District	Boribor District	Khan Chamkarmorn	Khan Rusey Keo	
Families sending children to pre-school	25	24	24	27	25	125
Families who do not send children to preschool	25	25	25	27	25	127
Focus group discussions with local authority	1	1	1	1	0	4
Children in grade 1	10	10	10	7	9	46
Preschool teachers	1	1	1	1	3	7
Grade 1 teachers	2	2	2	2	1	9
Preschool managers	1	0	1	1	1	4
Primary school directors	1	1	1	1	1	5

## Research Team

The research team comprised:

- NEP's National Research Officer who was responsible for leading the project and all data collection, analysis and report preparation;
- Deputy Director of Early Childhood Education, MoEYS; and
- Chief Officer of Primary Education, MoEYS.

The two MoEYS team members helped create effective data gathering tools and questionnaires for households and key informant respondents. Their expertise and experience

in preschool and primary education were advantages in defining questions to ask that would work well in preschool, primary education, and household contexts.

Other key members of the research team were staff with host NEP member organizations and Rachel Lecointe who assisted with the analysis of findings and the preparation of this report and Phan Chan Hoeurn who helped conduct interviews and consolidate data.

### **Sample Size and Sampling Method**

The purposive sampling method<sup>3</sup> was used to target families with children ages three to five years old. The research team identified families sending their children to preschool through lists provided by NEP member NGOs. Families that did not send their children to preschool were identified through a walk-through of neighborhoods by research team members who asked them if they wanted to participate in the study.

To ensure a mixed sample and avoid correlation between families, the study was conducted in areas with a unique characteristic:

- Phnom Penh, with a heavy population density;
- Battambang, a border community (close to the Thai border); and
- Kampong Chhnang, for rural area context.

The sample size was of 252 respondent families units.

## **IV. KEY FINDINGS**

### **4.1 General Context for Preschool**

Cambodian culture has traditionally kept very young children at home and relied on older children to look after them. In rural areas especially, where the alternative of keeping children in child care centers is limited and where parents are very busy with livelihood activities, older children are more frequently enrolled late in grade 1, and often drop out or miss class to look after the younger children.

Preschools are intended to improve grade 1 enrolment rates, and reduce late enrolment and repetition rates in grade 1.

The four main groups implementing formal preschool services are:

- The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS);
- Commune councils under the Ministry of the Interior;
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and
- Private sector

NGOs play a particularly important role in bridging the gap between supply and demand for preschool in Cambodia. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) offers

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<sup>3</sup> The Purposive or Judgmental Sampling procedure is one that involves a sample selected deliberately by the researcher because an individual or group has certain characteristics that are typical or representative of the population. (Source: CCC, 2006, Conducting A Small Research Study, Ten Steps to Analysis, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Cambodia)

preschool service throughout Cambodia, but mainly in towns, while NGOs focus on the rural areas lacking preschool services and, in areas with larger numbers of vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Preschools run by commune councils, frequently known as community preschools, also operate in the rural and remote areas. Private sector preschools (known as private preschools) operate in high population density areas and target high and medium income families. Table 2 provides an overview of state, private and community school sponsorship.

**Table 2: Sponsorship of Preschools and Number of Pupils**

Provinces	Government Preschool				Private Preschool				Community Preschool <sup>4</sup>			
	# School	# Class	Total Children	Female Children	# School	# Class	Total Children	Female Children	# School	# Class	Total Children	Female Children
Battambang	115	192	5188	2666	1	1	24	9	14	32	847	443
Kg Chhnang	56	110	3400	1753	4	17	338	171	5 <sup>5</sup>	5	129	75
Phnom Penh	66	153	4772	2254	34	174	5112	2749	10	18	265	137
Whole Kingdom	1524	2548	77899	38796	100	361	9565	4937	1017	1152	23456	12336

Source: ECED, Statistics Second Semester 2006/200, Cambodia

NEP host organization staff explained that their NGO chose to implement preschool in areas with many three to five year old children, but insufficient or no preschool services. This reinforces the important role of NGOs in bridging the gap to help meet the need for preschool, particularly in rural or remote areas.

The three main sources of information, local authorities, teachers and villagers, in the studied areas value pre-school education as a means of supporting a crucial stage of child education. Children have been compared to a white cloth that will become a different color depending on our best attempts to paint. In this sense, they stress that the role of early childhood education is to encourage children to participate in the wider society. They believe that early childhood education will have a strong influence on the future behavior and performance of children. Given the important stage of physical and mental development during early childhood, they understand the importance of providing young children with good care and basic knowledge.

#### 4.1.1 Prevalence of Preschool

Of the three areas studied, Battambang is the province with the highest prevalence of community preschool (48%). It is also a province with a high repatriated population of individuals who left Cambodia after the collapse of the Pol Pot regime, followed by war and a strong climate of insecurity. Two NGOs are currently implementing preschool programs in four districts of this province:

- Puthi Komar is a Cambodian NGO running three preschool centers. Two are in Battambang district (separate from government primary school) and one is in Sangker district (preschool center located in the government primary school).

<sup>4</sup> Community preschools in this table include preschools run by commune council and NGOs

<sup>5</sup> ECED statistics report five community preschools in Kg Chhnang in 2006/2007 but New Humanity alone has operated five preschools in the province since 2005 which suggests that the number of community preschools operating is higher than the number of community preschools registered in the Provincial Education Department. However, the Department mentions 10 community preschools operating in this province in a more recent report (2007/2008).

- Jesuit Service Cambodia (JSC) is an International NGO running preschools in Rattanak Mondol district.

#### **4.1.2 Preschool Teachers**

##### **Instruction Experience**

Six of the seven teachers interviewed in this study were young women under 30 years old. Two were local people living in the community while the other five were living in other parts of the district. These six teachers had neither a preschool teaching background nor formal pedagogy training before being recruited. Only one teacher had experience in teaching at a daycare center. Two respondents had experience in teacher voluntary work with an NGO. Six of these seven teachers had finished grade 12, five held a High School Certificate, however, one teacher said that she had failed the High School Exam.

##### **Teacher Training**

Most of the preschool teachers interviewed reported that they had received some, but limited, training course for their professional work.

Preschools teachers from New Humanity (in Kampong Chhnang) and Centro Italiano Aiuti all'Infanzia (CIAI in Phnom Penh) said they had received a three-month pedagogy training offered by Krousar Yoeung (KrY), a well-known and experienced Cambodian NGO working in the preschool sector. Teachers from Puthi Komar Organization received three-week pedagogy training and a refresher course from their senior colleagues within the organization. Preschool teachers at Don Bosco (in Phnom Penh) attended a formal two-year pedagogy training offered by MoEYS at the Preschool Teacher Training Center.

##### **Motivation**

Preschool teachers claimed their motivation to teach in preschool was due to two key factors:

- 1) they are interested in children; and
- 2) jobs are accessible to those who have finished high school and do not require specific skills.

##### **Salary**

The salary ranges for teachers working in NGO preschools are often low compared to other NGO junior professional staff<sup>6</sup>. While NGO teacher salaries are higher than those of government preschool teachers, the sustainability of NGO preschool teachers' income depends on the sustainability of funding for each NGO preschool program. Therefore their jobs may not be as secure.

One respondent said she received 30 US dollars per month when she started her career as a preschool teacher and now (after one year) earns 34 US dollars per month. Two other

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<sup>6</sup> The difference in salaries can be over 100%. However, it should be noted that although the work of preschool teacher does not require secondary or university graduation as is the case for NGO junior professional staff, preschool teaching is challenging, and hard work involving innovation and patience.

respondents reported that they were paid 60 US dollars per month, but teach two shifts (in the morning and afternoon) each day.

Table 3 presents the salary ranges of preschool teachers and of NGO professional staff.

**Table 3: Comparison of the Salary Ranges of Preschool Teachers and Other NGO Junior Professional Staff**

Descriptions	Average monthly salary	Other benefits
NGO preschool teacher	\$30-120	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ New year's bonus</li> <li>◆ Medical care</li> <li>◆ Staff development training</li> </ul>
State preschool teacher	\$27-30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Maternity financial support</li> <li>◆ Capacity building/ Pedagogy training</li> </ul>
Other NGO junior professional staff	\$100-250 <sup>7</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ New year bonus</li> <li>◆ Medical care</li> <li>◆ Staff development training</li> </ul>

#### **4.1.3 Characteristics of Preschool Students**

The NGO preschools studied in this research are committed to actions that generate beneficial effects and help reduce burdens for poor and vulnerable families. Preschools in rural areas such as those in Kompong Chhnang and Battambang's semi-rural area give high priority to poor families and believe that food nutrition is a particularly important requirement for the children.

The CIAI preschool at Boeng Trabek (Sangkat of Phnom Penh) focuses on children-at-risk. The major concerns for this population are nutrition, hygiene and sanitation.

Don Bosco at Toek Thla in Phnom Penh has established its school in a migrant workers community, e.g garment factory workers and motodup drivers. It is committed to supporting child development and helping parents of this community earn more money.

#### **Ages of Preschool Children**

Among the 125 respondent families that send their children to preschool, 86% send one child, and 14% send two children. The majority of the preschool pupils in these families are five years old, however some preschools have agreed to keep over-aged pupils in their center.

New Humanity accepts only five year-old children in its preschools. Puthi Komar and CIAI accept children from 3 to 5 years. Don Bosco operates with separate classes (lower class, medium class and higher class) where the children are enrolled according to their ages.

<sup>7</sup> CCC Survey of Salary and Benefits for National staff of International and Cambodian NGOs, October 2007. The ranges of salary of NGO junior professional staff vary according to annual budgets. This range applies to NGOs with annual budgets of less than or equal to \$100,000.

**Table 4: Ages of Preschool Children**

Age	Number of children	%
3 years old	17	12
4 years old	30	21
5 years old	80	56
6 years old	15	11
Total	142	100

As Table 4 shows, of the 142 children, 15 six-year-old children remain in preschool instead of being enrolled in grade 1. While this illustrates the persistence of late enrolment in grade 1, it is not clear whether these figures represent a broader trend.

#### ***4.1.4 Preschool Organization***

##### **School Hours**

All preschools in the studied areas are open five days a week and follow all national holidays. Four of the six preschools allow children to attend class four hours a day: New Humanity (NH) in Kampong Chhnang opens in the morning from 7:00 am to 11:00 am, Puthi Komar in Battambang and Centro Italiano Aiuti all’Infanzia (CIAI) in Phnom Penh maintain a double shift – a class in the morning from 7:00am to 11:00am and one in the afternoon from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Only Don Bosco Foundation in Phnom Penh offers the children a whole day class from 8:00 am to 3:35 pm with a three-hour lunch break in the school from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm.

##### **Classroom Activities and Impact on Learning Capacity**

Classroom activities were very similar among the studied preschools: games, art work, sports and formal studying. The games the children played were different from one school to another, depending on the toys and materials available; art work involved learning how to color pictures. The formal instruction activities consisted of studying pre-writing, pre-mathematic, life skills (civics and hygiene for example) and moral principles. These components are all intended to serve as a bridge for children to enter primary school.

Grade 1 teachers reported that most of children from preschool were able to write the Khmer alphabet.

##### **Learning Methodology**

The research team observed that each NGO had developed a specific methodology based on its available resources and its own teaching strategy. Some NGOs such as CIAI, New Humanity and Puthi Komar said that they use community preschool curriculum as a guide book, but simplify or modify it to fit their needs, resources and teaching strategy.

Puthi Komar in Battambang uses a method of playing games as a way to develop each child’s intelligence. Based on a psycho-pedagogic approach, the organization believes children like

to play a lot and that “free play” with toys and games (exercise, symbolic, assembling and rule games) stimulates their mental, emotional and intellectual development.

Don Bosco uses a teaching method and resources exported from successful experiences they had in other countries such as Thailand. However, they have planned to modify their teaching method and strategy from school year 2008/2009 and align it with MoEYS's curriculum.

#### **4.1.5 *Preschool Fees***

All preschools studied, except Don Bosco offer preschool services at no monetary cost to families. Host NGOs are responsible for all preschool operation expenditures.

Don Bosco collects small monthly fees. The amount is variable, depending on the financial capacity of the household. For the poorest families, the fees vary from three to eight USD per month. The better-off families pay more to the school. One respondent mentioned she pays an 20 USD per month; this amount was the highest in the sample. The table below shows the range of monthly fees paid by families sending their children to preschool.

**Table 5: Fees Paid to Preschool**

<b>Preschool fees</b>	<b># of respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
8 US dollars	18	72
3 US dollars	2	8
4 US dollars	1	4
5 US dollars	1	4
6 US dollars	1	4
10 US dollars	1	4
20 US dollars	1	4

#### **4.1.6 *Awareness of Preschool Services***

NGOs play a key role in not only providing preschool services, but also providing information and encouraging poor families to consider early childhood education. The majority of respondents who were aware of NGOs preschool service first received the information through the host NGO itself.

Information on preschool services seemed well-disseminated among the communities in the areas studied. Most respondents were aware of the service through at least one source of information. All families sending their children to preschool and a large percentage (89%) of families who do not send their children to preschool were aware of NGO preschool service in their community.

The respondents not sending children to preschool who were not aware of this service (representing 11%) indicated that they weren't participating in community meetings and thus had never received any preschool promotion from host NGOs. Table 6 shows different sources from which families came to know about preschool.

**Table 6: Sources of Preschool Information for Families**

Sources of information	# families which send children to preschool	# families which do not send children to preschool	Total
Through NGOs	73	65	138
Through villagers	45	29	64
Through local authority	38	29	67
Through government official	10	3	13
Through their relatives	6	2	8
Through their children	-	6	6
Advertisement/newspaper	1	5	6

#### ***4.1.7 Location of Preschools***

It is interesting to examine the location of the preschool in relation to the location of the primary school, and the correlation with grade 1 enrolment. The preschools involved in this study were in different locations: inside the primary school site, and separate from the primary school compound. Of the six preschools visited, three were located inside a primary school compound, two in centers for child remediation<sup>8</sup>, and one was in a separate preschool building.

According to this study's findings, the location of preschool relative to the primary school site did not influence grade 1 enrolment. Whether the preschool was located either outside or inside the primary compound, the enrolment rate in grade 1 still remained high among the preschool pupils. Preschool teachers also felt that the location seemed to have no impact on the enrolment rate. However, having the preschool on the same site as the primary school was said to facilitate preschool teachers' ability to follow-up on their students' primary level enrolment.

This study's findings indicate that enrolment in grade 1 is not influenced by the proximity of the preschool to the primary school.

#### ***4.1.8 Advantages and Disadvantages of a Preschool and Primary Common Site***

Two main advantages of a common site were described by preschool teachers and directors:

- 1) It is easier for preschool teachers to follow up enrolment in grade 1 as they work in the same school compound.
- 2) Preschool children get to know some friends and teachers of grade 1, and then they feel more confident to communicate and interact in the class.

However, one major disadvantage was raised by preschool teachers. When the pupils are offered their daily meals, they are frequently surrounded by primary school children. This makes the teachers feel uncomfortable because they can feed only preschool children. For

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<sup>8</sup> A center for child remediation is one that offers remedial lessons to children facing difficulty in school.

this reason, a preschool teacher in the Boribor district of Kampong Chhnang province has stated a preference to have preschool separate from the primary school compound.

#### ***4.1.9 Government Assistance to NGO-operated Preschools***

Local authorities in the study areas provide active support to the NGO-operated preschools. All preschools studied receive support in different forms, including: provision of premises (in the cases studied, the local authorities either found and loaned the land, or asked for a classroom in the primary schools), support from local authorities to address issues related to children's absenteeism and families, provision of background information on the community, and dissemination of information about preschool services and operations.

Some NGOs that own their center -- Don Bosco in Toek Thla, CIAI in Boeng Trabek and Puthi Komar in Chamkar Samrong – have required support from the local authority, mainly for the purpose of preschool information dissemination.

NGOs that do not own any land or centers have asked for help to find a location, or classrooms and other forms of assistance. The extent of the support depends on the capacity of the authority.

In Andong Roveang village of Anchanh Rong commune, a New Humanity (NH) kindergarten is located in a building belonging to the commune.

In 2003 the commune council allowed NH to use this abandoned building (a former health center built in the sixties). NH repaired the building and used it as a community center. Now it contains a daycare center for people with disabilities and a kindergarten and other activities on occasion, when needed.

Local authorities helped disseminate information on the preschool and explained to the villagers the non-financial contribution required from families sending their children to the school: to provide rice or help to cook the children's meals.

In Pros Pech Changvar, the Commune leader supported negotiations between NH and the Primary School Director to obtain a classroom for preschool class in the primary school building. This classroom is in the newest building of the school and in very good condition. In this commune, government played an active role in providing assistance to NGO.

The commune chief in Anglong Vil, Battambang, has helped Puthi Komar to build its preschool inside Anglong Vil primary school and has also helped disseminate preschool information among villagers. He is willing to support this organization as much as possible.

## 4.2 Background Information on Families Interviewed

### 4.2.1 General Characteristics of Families

This section outlines the general characteristics and dominant tendencies of the 252 households interviewed.

Respondents in Battambang and Kampong Chhnang were rural villagers. In Boeng Trabek and Phnom Penh, respondents were from disadvantaged communities, and in Toek Thla the majority of respondent families were migrants and factory workers.

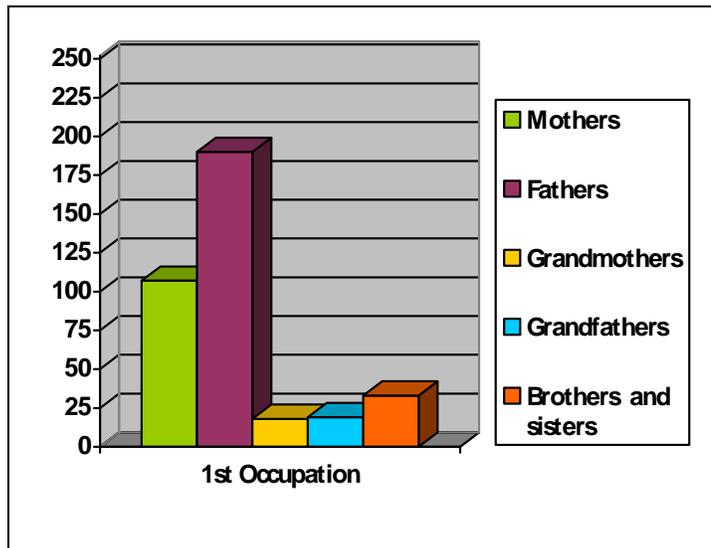
The families usually comprised four to five members (77% families sending to preschool and 65% of families not sending). In 152 families (60% of the sample), the older children were enrolled in primary school.

The traditional Khmer family is an extended one and was often described by respondents as one comprising parents, children and grandparents, and sometimes cousins and aunts or uncles.

### 4.2.2 Family Occupation

The head of the household, described as the father in most cases, assumes the primary income generation activity of the family, but he is helped by the other family members.

**Figure 1: Responsibility for Primary Source of Income**



The most recurrent primary occupational activities cited were farming and owning a business. The table below defines the nature of the first occupation in respondents' families.

**Table 7: Main Occupation in the Families Interviewed**

Main occupation	Families sending children to preschool	Families not sending children to preschool	Total	%
Farmer	32	31	63	25%
Farming (Chamkar <sup>9</sup> )	4	5	9	4%
Seller	26	29	55	22%
Worker	11	24	35	14%
Motodup	18	16	34	13%
Government employee	19	13	32	13%
Business employee	9	9	18	7%
Non-government employee	3	-	3	1%
Migrant worker (in Thailand)	3	-	3	1%
Total	n <sub>1</sub> =125	n <sub>2</sub> =127	n=252	100%

#### 4.2.3 Responsibility for Child Care

Research findings show that the person with primary responsibility for child care is the mother. Respondents explained that the task of taking care of a small child (aged three to five years) was a collective responsibility among family members, but the mother was seen as the key person in charge for 217 of the 252 respondents. In the absence of a mother, the father, grandmother or another immediate relative assumed this role. The research team found responsibility for care giving was, by order of priority: the mother, the father, sisters, brothers, and the grandparents.

**Table 8: Family Members Responsible for Taking Care of Small Children**

Care givers among family members	Households sending to preschool (n <sub>1</sub> =125)	Households not sending to preschool (n <sub>2</sub> =127)	Total (n=252)
Mother	103	114	217
Father	71	78	149
Grandmother	42	32	74
Sister/brother	16	38	54
Grandfather	18	8	26
Aunt/uncle	8	8	16
House keeper	4	1	5

Older children from families not involved with preschool were expected to participate in raising children more so than in families sending children to preschool where the grandparents were more likely to assume this responsibility. In families that weren't sending children to preschool, brothers and sisters were expected to take care of their younger siblings, participate in household tasks and also go to school.

#### 4.2.4 Home Teaching

The majority of children aged three to five years old of interviewed families, were taught/educated by their families' members at home. One hundred and five families (84%)

<sup>9</sup> Chamkar is a Khmer word referring to an orchard or a farm of fruit trees in the forest.

that send their children to preschool reported that they teach their children prior to preschool learning. The below table represent basic things families introduced to their children.

**Table 9: Topics that Families Teach Their Children at Home**

<b>Descriptions</b>	<b># of households that send children to preschool</b>	<b># of households that do not send children to preschool</b>
Numeracy skills	98	86
Hygiene	86	74
Good manners	77	43
Khmer language	73	65
Moral principles	72	50
Story telling	55	35
Housekeeping	49	36
Colour	47	19
Factors supporting emotional development	35	21
Thinking skills	25	14
Khmer culture	23	13

According to respondents, children not sent to preschool but benefiting from their parents' home teaching were given lessons only once in a while. Two major obstacles to sustained home study for the child were the parents' very heavy work and household schedule, and the lack of teaching experience and competency.

#### ***4.2.5 Decision-Making on Sending Children to Preschool***

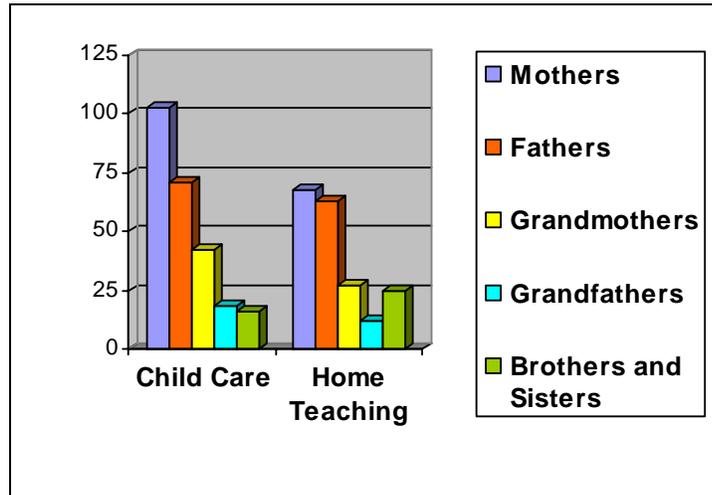
As the key person responsible for taking care of small children, the mother was described by 47% of respondents as the most influential decision maker concerning whether a child would be sent to preschool. The father was said to have the decision-making power to send to preschool in 21% of the cases and 16% of respondents said it was a joint decision involving mother and father.

#### ***4.2.6 Reliance on Older Children***

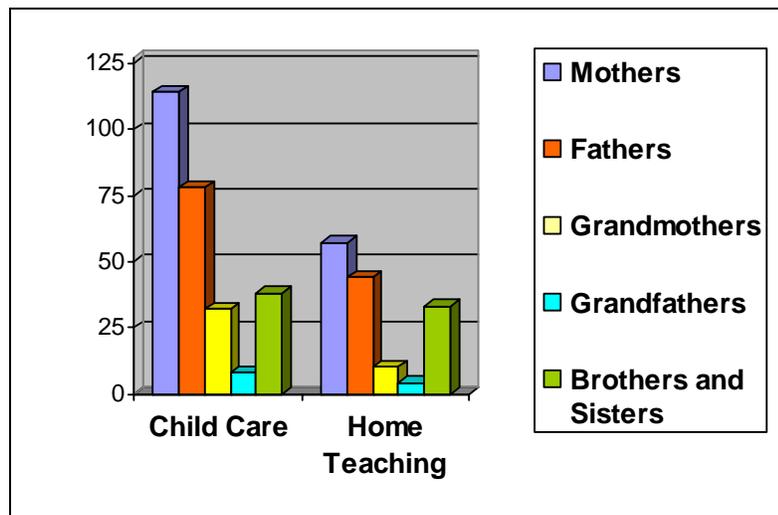
In all families, brothers and sisters were expected to take part in any activity where there was a need for help. Research findings reported that brothers and sisters were expected to help with the primary and secondary occupations of the family and also in the care and education of their smaller brothers or/and sisters. The reliance on older brothers and sisters is stronger in families where small children stay home than in those where the child attends preschool.

The figures below offer a graphic comparison of the involvement of family members in care and education activities between the two groups of families.

**Figure 2: Individuals Responsible for Child Care and Education among Families Sending Children to Preschool (125 families)**



**Figure 3: Individuals Responsible for Child Care and Education among Families Not Sending Children to Preschool (127 families)**

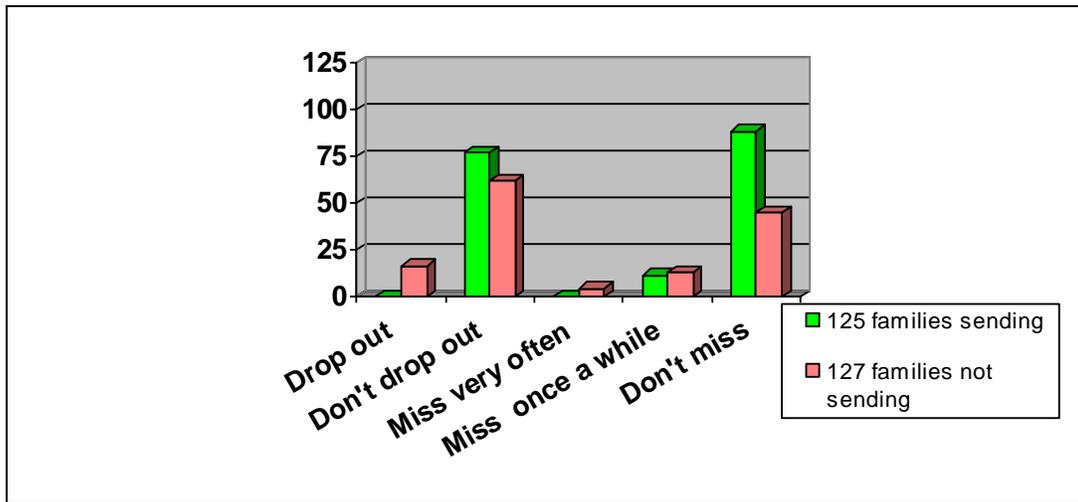


The involvement of older children in the care of their young siblings has a serious impact on their schooling. In 16.5% of families where younger children stay home, older brothers and sisters drop out of school to look after them, and for 18.1% of families, they miss class for the same reason.

No families with children in preschool mentioned older brothers and sisters dropping out or missing class frequently due to caring or education of the youngest children. The reliance on their participation wasn't as great because of the parenting and instructional activities offered by the preschool.

Figure 4 depicts the impact of child care and education on older sibling primary school attendance.

**Figure 4: Comparison of School Drop Outs and Missed Classes for Child Care Reasons between Preschool and Non-preschool Families**



#### 4.2.7 Expectations of Families Sending to Preschool

The families stated their long-term expectations when sending their child to preschool: that the child become a good child and have a better future. They also wanted their child to acquire knowledge that would help him/her interact in the family.

They appreciated preschool services because they believe that their child can gain considerable advantages such as basic knowledge, discipline, culture, food and study materials. In the table below, respondents' expectations are listed.

**Table 10: Families' Expectations When Sending Children to Preschool**

Expectations	# of respondents
Children will acquire knowledge	112
Children will be able to engage themselves in society and adapt to learning environment (gain confidence)	22
Children will have good moral principles and manners	18
Teacher will look after and educate the children	13
Children will receive assistances (food, clothes and study materials)	13
Family will have time to do other work	7
Reduce children's time spent going out	5
Children will have friends to play with	5
Other (understand school discipline, will be safe in the school, will be able to read and write...etc)	4

This table shows that some families have ambitious expectations that preschool services may not be able to meet (such as learning how to read and write before grade 1). Although most respondents were aware of preschool services, some didn't fully understand the purpose of these services and the nature of instruction suitable for early childhood needs.

### 4.3 Impact of Preschool Service on Children

#### 4.3.1 Impact on Self-Development

Preschool services clearly had an impact on the children in the areas studied. Unlike daycare centers, preschool was seen as a place to provide pre-education, where children could learn how to interact more effectively, gaining considerable benefits and experiences for their personal development.

Families acknowledged they had seen changes in their child's behavior, and believed changes were due to increased knowledge and personal development which they attributed to the education the child received in preschool. The benefits they mentioned included self-confidence, learning behavior and improved study habits.

Table 10 lists the most important benefits respondents claimed the child had gained during and following preschool. Table 11 lists the improvement in personal behavior they observed.

**Table 11: Benefits Children Gained from Attending Preschool**

<b>Benefits and experiences children got</b>	<b># of respondents</b>
Children learned about hygiene	117
Children got learning experience	110
Children got friends to play with	109
Children became more confident to interact with the surrounding environment	105
Children got some food	83
<i>N=125</i>	

**Table 12: Improvement Children Showed after Attending Preschool**

<b>Improvement children made</b>	<b># of respondents</b>
Children listened more to their parents	124
Children improved their hygiene habits	121
Children showed greater respect to the elderly	115
Children were able to communicate better	102
Children are more able to get along with others	94
<i>N=125</i>	

Most respondents felt the expectations they had when sending their children to preschool were strongly met. Indeed, 74 % of respondents experiencing preschool indicated a high satisfaction in preschool services.

#### 4.3.2 Impact on Grade 1 Study Performance

Differences in knowledge and comprehension between students attending preschool and those who didn't were tested. The tests were given to two groups of 23 grade 1 students each (preschool and non-preschool). A comparison of the results showed preschool children provided better answers than those who never went to preschool. This finding was demonstrated in tests involving mathematics, Khmer literacy, science and general knowledge.

The following outlines results involving the 23 children who went to preschool (defined as “Group A”) and the 23 children who didn’t (“Group B”).

### Test of Mathematics Knowledge

Children from Group A (preschool) provided more accurate answers in mathematics calculations (addition and subtraction of numbers) than children from Group B (non-preschool). The table below summarizes the results of the mathematics test.

**Table 13: Results of Mathematics Test**

Answers	First Exercise		Second Exercise			
	Addition	Subtraction	Addition		Subtraction	
			First	Second	First	Second

GROUP A (pupils coming from preschool)			n <sub>A</sub> =23			
Right	22	20	22	22	22	22
Wrong	1	2	1	1	1	1
Cannot answer	0	1	0	0	0	0
Total	23	23	23	23	23	23

GROUP B (pupils who never went to preschool)			n <sub>B</sub> =23			
Right	16	14	16	19	16	13
Wrong	7	7	7	4	5	8
Cannot answer	0	2	0	0	2	2
Total	23	23	23	23	23	23

### Test of Khmer Literacy

Children from Group A (preschool) had a slightly better knowledge in Khmer literacy than children from Group B (non-preschool). Of the 23 Group A children, 19 were able to write correctly the word "SOR" (meaning "lock" in English) while 17 of the 23 from Group B could provide the correct answer. Similarly, in reading short sentences, children in Group A were more fluent than children in Group B.

The table below shows the results of the reading test.

**Table 14: Results of Reading Test among Cohorts**

Group	Group A			Group B		
	Fluent	Not fluent	Cannot read	Fluent	Not fluent	Cannot read
Short sentences						
First sentence	12	4	7	8	5	10
Second sentence	7	9	7	5	9	9
Third sentence	12	4	7	6	9	8

### Test of Scientific Knowledge

Similar to the cases above, children in Group A (preschool) were able to provide more logical and precise answers during the scientific knowledge test than children in Group B (non-preschool). The children were asked to guess, when soaking stone and polystyrene, which one would float and which one would sink, or if both would float, or if both would sink. In Group A, 21 of 23 children were able to give the correct answer (stone is sinking and polystyrene is floating), while 18 among 23 in Group B could not provide the correct answer.

### Personal Hygiene

Another question concerned the advantages of taking a bath. Of 23 children in Group A (preschool), 22 were able to give a precise answer with the reasons that included: “to clean their body for hygiene purpose”, “body wash avoids bad smell”, “hydrate their body and make it colder because humans need water”. One child responded positively but couldn’t be precise in his explanations.

Of 23 children in Group B (non-preschool), 11 were able to give precise answers and explanations similar to children from Group A, however, nine children from Group B were not clear and three were unable to answer to the question.

The results of these tests illustrate the superior ability of grade 1 children coming from preschool to express themselves and organize their ideas.

### Test of General Knowledge

A test of general knowledge demonstrated that children with Group A (preschool) were more often and more able to identify the names of aquatic plants, domestic and wild animals; a few pupils explained they had learnt those names when they were in preschool.

### Overall Test Results

The pupils coming from preschool who participated in the tests of knowledge were chosen in the different study areas. Table 14 summarizes the locations of their primary schools.

**Table 15: Number Preschool-experienced Grade 1 Respondents by Location**

Primary School	Number of respondents
Pothivong (Chamkar Samrong)	5
Anlong Vil	4
Pros Pich Changvar	5
Hun Neang Boeng Trabek	4
Don Bosco Toek Thla	5
<i>Total</i>	23

Interestingly, when comparing the results of preschool-experienced respondents according to their location, differences were noticed in Khmer Literacy performance. Respondents from urban center (Don Bosco Toek Thla and Hun Neang Boeng Trabek primary school in Phnom Penh) showed a better ability to read short sentences and write Khmer words. Many students from rural areas (Pros Pich Changvar in Kampong Chhnang and Chamkar Samrong in Battambang) could not read short sentences and were among those who could not write the Khmer word in the writing test.

However, the general trend of the results show a difference in the performances of Group A and Group B. Regardless of location, former preschool pupils (Group A) presented a greater ability to express themselves and a more expansive knowledge.

The case study in the box below presents a comparison between children from preschool and children who never went to preschool, as described by a grade 1 teacher from Pros Pich Changvar primary school in Boribor District of Kampong Chhnang Province.

### **Case Study in Pros Pich Changvar Primary School, 2007/2008 School Year**

A grade 1 teacher of Pros Pich Changvar Primary school has distinguished some differences between students coming from preschool and students who never went to preschool in her class. She teaches 37 students: 22 didn't go to preschool; the other 15 come from the preschool based inside the primary compound.

Generally, her preschool students are characterized by their better performances in learning, moral principles and manners application, discipline, solidarity and hygiene habits.

#### **Learning performance:**

Most of her students from preschool get good results in their studies (7-8 marks).

For example, the promotion rate among children coming from preschool is considerably higher than it is for the children who never attended preschool (20% difference): of 15 children from preschool, 14 (93%) will be promoted to grade 2, while of the 22 others, only 16 (73%) will be promoted to grade 2. Besides, the students from preschool can write nicely and with care Khmer alphabet as they were trained before.

#### **Moral principles and good manners:**

Her students from preschool show better understanding and application of moral principles and good manners. Most of them seem used to signs of respect to teachers and elderly. For example, they always greet her and greet their parents also when they leave or arrive. Some of the students who have never attended preschool keep quiet or run away when they meet a teacher. They don't really know how to respect elders and are not used yet to school order.

#### **Discipline:**

Most preschool children have a good discipline: they sit politely in the classroom, and they can stand calmly in line when they show their respect to the national anthem before starting class. Unlike these students, a few students who don't come from preschool express impolite manners, cause disorder and are very restless during the national anthem.

#### **Solidarity:**

Her preschool students like to build friendships with the other children. They can integrate easily in a team and are in solidarity with their friends. Usually they play with other children without ever fighting. Whereas, children never attend preschool seem have no experience in making friends, more often they have conflict with others.

#### **Hygiene:**

The teacher mentioned students who came from preschool show good hygiene habits as they were trained about sanitation and hygiene in preschool. For example, preschool children did not dirty their clothes too much in the school. The other aspect of hygiene is cleaning their hand before eating, a common practice among preschool-experienced children. Such a habit less frequently found among children without preschool experience.

### ***4.3.3 Impact on Grade 1 Enrolment***

All interviewed preschool teachers and managers mentioned that most of their students were enrolled in grade 1 after they had finished preschool; the ones who didn't were not very numerous and had actually migrated with their family to another place. The NGOs studied made a commitment to ensure a close follow-up on their pupils' enrolment in primary school.

Research findings indicate that the high preschool student enrolment rate in areas served by NGO preschools studied is strongly influenced by the quality of the follow-up students receive from their teachers.

### ***4.3.4 Impact on Grade 1 Repetition***

Preschool seems to facilitate successful learning for children in grade 1. Responses from grade 1 teachers showed that the repetition rate in their classes among former preschool students was lower than for children who never went to preschool. Among the nine grade 1 teachers interviewed, eight mentioned that over 90% of their current students from preschool would be promoted to grade 2. One teacher reported that all of her former preschool pupils will be promoted.

## **4.4 Factors That Encourage Families to Send Their Children to Preschool**

The interviewers asked families sending their child to preschool to explain the reasons for their decision. Four major factors emerged from these interviews.

### ***4.4.1 Value Given to Quality of Early Childhood Education***

Respondents saw early childhood education as an important stage in their child's development. They said that "children's brains are very fresh, so they will easily absorb and follow what we teach them".

Of 125 respondents who send their children to preschool, 109 (87%) have ranked early childhood education as very important whereas the other 16 (13%) have ranked it as simply important for children. Only one respondent thought preschool was not important: she explained that she thought it was too much to ask such a small child to learn.

Respondents explained they were concerned not just about giving the child education but about giving the child a better learning opportunity. Among 125 respondents, 69.5% recognized they had very poor or a medium capacity to teach and limited knowledge of learning methodologies; 99.2% of them said teaching in the school was the better option. They acknowledged preschool teachers had better pedagogy skills and general knowledge to offer their children. The quality of knowledge received by their child was important to them.

The table below lists the advantages of preschool over home school, according to families.

**Table 16: Advantages of Preschool Teaching Compared to Home Teaching (according to families)**

<b>Comparative advantage</b>	<b># of respondents</b>
Preschools teachers have better knowledge and pedagogy skills than parents	72
Preschools have clear learning schedule and more learning hours	33
Preschools have adequate study materials	13
Children listen more to teachers than to parents	10
Since learning at preschool children respect elders	6
Children have friends at preschool	5
Children benefit from better education	3
<i>N= 124</i>	

These findings show that families that send their children to NGO preschools decided not to rely on the knowledge they have to educate their child because they feel it is not enough. They value the experience of preschool teachers.

#### **4.4.2 Expectations of Parents Fulfilled**

Another encouraging factor is the appreciation of respondents concerning preschool centers as a reliable service and a relevant choice for the family.

Respondents mentioned their satisfaction with support given their children in terms of learning, caring, playing, and building friendship and relational abilities. Their expectations (child being taking care of, being fed, receiving better quality education, play and make friends) were strongly met in most cases (73.6%).

**Table 17: Level of Satisfaction of Households Compared with Their Expectations**

<b>Level of satisfaction</b>	<b># of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Expectations strongly met	92	73.6
Expectations somewhat met	33	26.4
Total	125	100

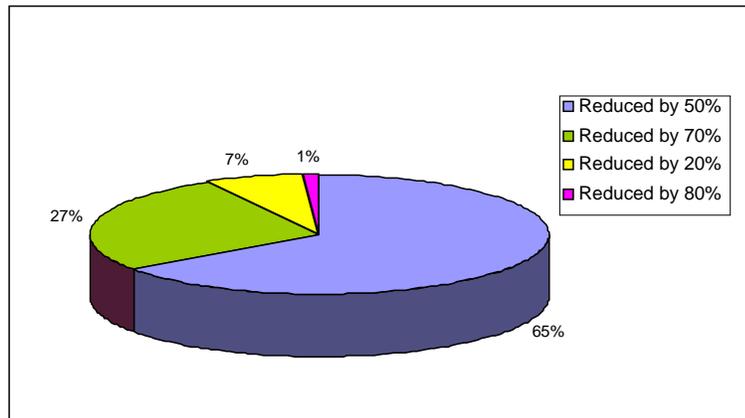
#### **4.4.3 More Time**

The need to reduce the time spent taking care of and educating small children was described as another encouraging factor.

Over 90% of respondents acknowledged their time for taking care of and educating the child had been reduced by 50% or more since the child entered preschool. They added that the time gained can be used by parents to “work more and get more money”, and that the older siblings were able to concentrate more on their own lessons.

Figure 6 represents the reduction of time required for child care and education among families sending children to preschool.

**Figure 5: Reduction of Time in Care Giving and Education of Small Children**



#### **4.4.4 Change in Child's Behaviour**

Respondents identified “major changes in their children’s habits” as a benefit. They described:

- a greater inclination on the child’s part to listen to parents more often;
- an improvement in hygiene habits; and
- greater respect for the elderly and a better ability to communicate.

These factors motivate them to continue sending the child to preschool and to send other siblings when they are old enough to attend.

Besides these factors, other encouraging factors were mentioned: the child can receive assistance, e.g. food, clothes and study material, have friends to play with, and the child is protected in a safe place.

#### **4.5 Factors That Discourage Families from Sending Their Child to Preschool**

Families that don’t send their child to preschool were asked the reasons for their decision.

Respondents identified two main reasons for their reluctance:

- accessibility of the school (in terms of location and availability of classes); and
- sending children to school before the age of six because families perceive their children to be too young.

These and a number of other reasons were cited as obstacles to enrolment in preschool.

##### **4.5.1 Location**

The team found the distribution of preschools in the districts studied a challenge for some villagers. The consequence is an inequity in the accessibility of the school to some families: 61.6% of interviewees said the preschool is more than 1 km from their house and of this group, 27.7% said they would have to walk more than 2 km to get to the preschool. By

comparison, only 16% of families sending to preschool said they felt the school is very far from their house.

#### **4.5.2 The Class Is Full**

School capacity was sometimes an issue. Some children were forced to stay home because the demand exceeded the capacity of the school and its resources. The managers of all preschools studied stated that their center couldn't accommodate the demand for all eligible children in the community served.

#### **4.5.3 No One to Bring the Child to School**

This problem was mentioned most often (52 times), mainly by families living far from the preschool (Sangker district), those who lived in insecure neighborhoods (Boeng Trabek), and those who lived in repatriate resettlements (Chamkar Samrong).

#### **4.5.4 The Child Is Too Young**

Another barrier mentioned by the families related to their perception of schooling age. They felt a child under six was too young to be involved in a scholastic institute, and added they didn't really know about the activities the preschool offered.

Table 18 below examines all reasons cited by respondents for not sending their children to preschool.

**Table 18: Reasons Families Don't Send Children to Preschool**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b># of respondents</b>
No one to bring small children to preschool	52
Children are too young	40
Preschool is very far	33
Was not aware of preschool service	13
Worry about children playing or make friend with a bad person	12
The class is full	12
Do not trust preschool teacher	10
Family doesn't have enough money for school fee	10
Children afraid to stay without family	9
Children got sick	8
Worry about children contact with diseases	6

#### **4.6 Good Practices Observed**

The preschools studied seemed generally appreciated by the communities. Often with support of the communities, preschools had developed strong processes to ensure their services supported food nutrition, access to learning, and close follow up of the child's attendance by teachers.

#### 4.6.1 Nutrition Activities

In addition to caring and learning, preschool also offers children food (snack or lunch or both). In the studied NGOs, food was carefully prepared and cooked on preschool premises. The nature of the ingredients and the composition of the meals were chosen to follow the instructions of the Ministry of Health's Food and Nutrition Program.

Some schools such as Don Bosco and CIAI were very strict about food selling outside the centers. They didn't allow the sellers to provide food inside the compound. Don Bosco encouraged the children to buy food from its cafeteria and not from outside as the school considered it was not of good standard of hygiene.

#### 4.6.2 Close Follow-up of Child's Attendance and Primary School Enrolment

Regular attendance is required in all schools studied. If a student misses class frequently, the teacher approaches the parents to encourage them send their child more regularly.

Each year, the teachers send primary schools a list of children who have finished preschool. They actively collaborate with primary schools to ensure that those students enroll in grade 1.

#### 4.6.3 Gender Equity

The NGO-operated preschools studied actively promote the EFA goal concerning gender equity. They provide favorable conditions for girls to enroll in preschool (some give priority to girls' enrolment; others establish gender quotas for an equal number of girls and boys in the school). As a result, the proportion of girls in the preschools is higher than of boys. This is likely to ensure a positive forecast of these girls' future enrolment in grade 1.

Don Bosco plans to establish new quotas favorable to girls, hoping to obtain a larger population of female than male students.

Table 19 summarizes the gender balance among the preschools studied.

**Table 19: Proportion of Girls and Boys in Preschool**

Preschool	Location	Number of Students				
		Girls	%	Boys	%	Total
Chamkar Samrong	Puthi Komar, Battambang	41	48	43	52	84
Anlong Vil	Puthi Komar, Battambang	21	53	18	47	39
Anchanh Rong	New Humanity, Kg Chhnang	17	68	8	32	25
Pros Pich Changvar	New Humanity, Kg Chhnang	13	46	15	54	28
Teok Thla (lower class)	Don Bosco, Phnom Penh	23	51	22	49	45
Boeng Trabek	CIAI, Phnom Penh	27	45	33	55	60
<b>Total</b>		<b>142</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>281</b>

#### 4.6.4 Learning and Quality

Many respondents have mentioned that preschool help educate children to become good persons. From preschool class observations and information from grade 1 teachers, the research team observed that most preschool students have a good attitude, and demonstrate modesty, good moral principles and good manners. They show respect to their teachers and to elders by doing respectful gestures that follow the Khmer cultural etiquette (bend down before adults when they are in their way) and when they meet visitors at school or when they arrive home they express politely the formal and most respectful greeting (Chum Reab Sour, Chum Reab Lia).

The respondents believe that preschool establishes a foundation for children to enter to grade 1, e.g. knowing how to use a pen and pencil and, in some cases, write the alphabet.

#### 4.7 Challenges Faced by NGO-Supported Preschools

Some common difficulties encountered by NGOs-sponsored preschools involve school space, child attendance, and lack of study materials. Some preschools face more difficulties than others, while some challenges seem also unique to a particular preschool.

This is an example of challenges faced by an NGO preschool:

##### **Problems Faced By Chamkar Samrong Youth Center of Puthi Komar, Battambang**

The following problems were described by the preschool teachers and the Centre's manager.

Chamkar Samrong Youth Center of Puthi Komar operates with 78 children. This center runs a double shift to accommodate 45 children in the morning and 33 in the afternoon. The center is small and children of different ages (three, four and five years) study together. It is located in an area which experiences seasonal migration.

It is very difficult for teachers to arrange and simplify their lessons and activities to accommodate all the students in the class. When upper-class curriculum lessons are taught, three year-old children cannot follow and when lower class lessons are taught, five year-old children catch up faster than three year olds. The centre is crowded and noisy, requiring teachers to speak loudly.

The preschool manager speaks of some problems linked to limited space and too many children. During the coolest season the classes are held outside the classroom (but still in the Center).

Besides premises problems, the Center also suffers from high absenteeism. The children cannot come regularly to preschool, as their families seasonally migrate (mostly to the Cambodian-Thai border) or are busy with rice harvest or chamkar farming and bring the child with them to the fields.

The solution applied by Puthi Kumar staff to face this challenge was to share this information with the local authority and encourage families to send their child more often.

As outlined in the case history above, Puthi Kumar preschool in Anlong Vil also suffers from limited space and high absenteeism.

New Humanity in Kampong Chnang has problems in recruiting local preschool teachers, e.g. teachers coming from the village or commune where the preschool is located. Generally (but not always) at the district level it is not too difficult.

Respondents from Don Bosco indicated that the greatest difficulties occurred mostly during the preschool start-up: difficulties in managing teachers, e.g. the oldest teachers were not always flexible and could be very difficult to train, and very limited support from parents, especially illiterate parents. However, they identified a challenge in provision of materials for the children and felt it would be helpful to get more support from MoEYS to obtain games, toys and study materials.

CIAI faces challenges mainly with classroom management. The preschool teacher and the manager raised the challenge of providing care, teaching and educating the pupils at the same time. As there is only one teacher in the center, the manager explained it is very difficult to find an experienced replacement when she is on leave or on vacation.

## **V. OBSERVATIONS**

This study has offered a general context of NGO-operated preschools' experience, identified some best practices and challenges and opportunities facing all stakeholders. It has focused on the experience of NGO-supported preschools in addressing the needs for early childhood care and education services in Cambodia.

The research reported on families experiencing preschool in an effort to understand the contribution of NGO-operated preschool services to the promotion of education among the family members and the improvement of their livelihood and the impact on primary level enrolment and student performance.

### **Encouraging Factors**

The findings identified four main factors that have encouraged families to enroll and keep their children in preschool. Families:

1. Perceive that there is great value to quality teaching and thus prefer preschool teaching over home schooling;
2. Believe NGO preschools can fulfill their expectations: that the child become a good child and have a better future, and to acquire knowledge that will help him/her interact in the family.
3. Feel preschool services can save time spent on child care and education; and
4. Observe improvements in their child's behavior.

### **Barriers to Entry**

This research also studied families who chose not to experience preschool to try to understand the reasons for their decision. The respondents identified two main sources of reluctance to send their children to preschool:

1. Inaccessibility of the preschool; and
2. Resistance to sending a child to school before the age of six because families perceive their child to be too young.

## **Advantages and Disadvantages of a Preschool and Primary Common Compound**

The findings of this research addressed the advantages and disadvantages of a common site for preschool and primary schools.

A shared compound seemed to facilitate cooperation among primary school teachers and preschool teachers and ensured superior grade 1 enrolment follow-up. A second advantage cited was that the common site helps the preschool children gain confidence because it familiarizes preschool students with primary students and primary level teachers.

Only one major disadvantage concerned the nutrition services offered preschool students. In a shared compound, primary students see preschool pupils being offered food which they don't have access to. This situation is particularly disturbing for the preschool teachers distributing the meals.

## **VI. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following conclusions and recommendations are intended for consideration and action by all key stakeholders who are committed to improving the availability and quality of early childhood education in Cambodia.

### **Impact on Grade 1 Enrolment & Repetition**

NGO preschools are committed to close follow-up on their students' grade 1 enrollment. The result is that nearly all preschool students of the studied organizations are enrolled in grade 1 after leaving preschool, and most who don't attend are children who have moved to other provinces.

Findings show that preschool facilitates students' improved learning processes in grade 1 which enables them to be promoted without major difficulties. In fact, the grade 1 teachers interviewed reported that the repetition rate among their preschool students was nil.

*Recommendation: That additional preschools be established and effectively supported by MoEYS, development partners and NGOs to support improved enrolment and survival rates at the primary level.*

### **Benefits to Children's Education and to Families**

This research has identified the value of preschool to children and their families, namely that:

- Preschool students' grade 1 performance is better than those without preschool, as demonstrated by the results of tests of knowledge (mathematics, Khmer writing and reading, science and general knowledge).
- Tests and teacher and family feedback demonstrate a more expansive knowledge among preschool-experienced children as well as a greater ability to express themselves and coordinate their ideas.
- Children receive benefits of many kinds, including self-development and basic knowledge that help them achieve good study habits and academic performance.

- Parents have more time to earn a livelihood.
- Older siblings are in a better position to attend school and study, instead of caring for younger children. Families observe that these older children are less likely to miss classes or drop out as a result.

*Recommendation: That these benefits be clearly communicated to families at the local level.*

### **Remote Areas**

This study illustrates the disadvantaged position of remote areas, particularly with regard to access to early childhood care and education services. These areas face a number of challenges:

1. Availability of preschools is very low;
2. Accessibility to preschools is very limited;
3. The possibility of hiring teachers from the communities is small because of low rates of secondary education among vulnerable populations; and
4. The persistence of late enrolment in primary schools, as demonstrated by the recurrent presence of over-aged pupils in preschools in rural areas.

*Recommendation: That MoEYS closely examine these issues and collaborate with local authorities, communities and all organizations (including NGOs) operating preschools, to address these issues.*

### **Teacher Training & Support**

The preschool teachers interviewed showed a strong motivation to teach and take care of their pupils. They mentioned how they loved to play with their students and take time to decorate the classroom, find games and create exercises to draw the child's attention and stimulate interest.

However, the teaching materials available and the training received were extremely limited in most instances. Most preschool teachers interviewed had received short training courses on pedagogy and teaching tools. This presented challenges in the classroom. In one instance, this challenge was addressed through a collaboration involving KrY and MoEYS where, on occasion, a very limited number of teachers were offered formal training.

*Recommendation: That MoEYS increase availability of preschool teacher training and materials for NGO-operated preschool teachers.*

### **Standards**

Each NGO studied employs its own methodology in planning and delivering preschool services. As a result, there is a diversity of preschool methodologies and curricula in existence. Some NGOs studied use community preschool curriculum as a base and adapt to their own methodology. There appears to be a need for coordination of standards supporting a national preschool strategy.

Though enrolment in grade 1 is strongly supported by the preschools, late enrolment is not always discouraged. Some preschools in the study areas agreed to keep over-aged pupils in their center while others were very strict on the age of their students. This finding reveals that late enrolment in grade 1 of primary is a secondary concern for some NGOs and a priority concern for others.

*Recommendation: That all organizations delivering preschool services discuss standards of methodology and improved coordination of curricula for preschool service delivery in Cambodia, possibly in support of a national strategy.*

*Recommendation: That greater attention be paid to the issue of over-aged students in preschool and that action be taken to encourage more timely enrolment in grade 1.*

### **Role of Government**

The inclusion of early childhood care and education in MoEYS' 12 Education Sector Support Program (2006 – 2010) recurrent program priorities has encouraged NGOs and development partners to invest resources in preschool activities. The Fast Track Initiative Catalytic Fund is supporting this recurrent program priority through the allocation of US \$4.7 million for the expansion of ECE in Cambodia.

Local authorities are actively offering important support to NGO preschools. This support includes the dissemination of information among the communities and provision of premises. Active assistance from MoEYS was rarely mentioned by respondents. Mentions included the provision of a classroom inside primary compound and teacher training support offered on a limited basis.

*Recommendation: That MoEYS increase collaborate more actively with NGO preschools.*

### **Role of NGOs**

NGOs are implementing preschool programs to bridge the gap of early care and education services in rural areas and marginalized communities where the lack of or total absence of preschool services remain a challenge to be overcome. Research findings illustrate the critically important role of NGO-sponsored preschools in facing this challenge.

This study's findings also illustrate the crucial contribution of NGO-sponsored preschools in promoting child education in Cambodia. All NGO-operated preschools studied maintained high standards of follow-up to ensure preschool student enrolment in grade 1.

Indeed, the preschool managers interviewed explained all the children finishing preschool in their school, except those who had migrated with their families in other places, were enrolled in grade 1 of a primary school and that most of them were successful in their studies.

*Recommendation: That MoEYS examine gaps in preschool service delivery in remote and disadvantaged communities and take action to address these gaps.*

*Recommendation: That NGO-operated preschools share their best practices with government and community preschools to promote the establishment of more preschools, and effective follow-up strategies aimed at increased grade 1 enrolment, particularly in remote and disadvantaged communities.*

## **Collaboration**

Close collaboration between NGOs, primary schools and local authorities enables to put in place favorable conditions for NGO-supported preschools' operation and ensure a continuous improvement and sustainable contributions to the early education sector.

Collaboration with local authorities has enabled NGOs to obtain premises and disseminate information among villagers. Collaboration between teachers from preschool and teachers from primary has resulted in a strong transition from preschool to grade 1.

These findings illustrate the importance of all stakeholders working together more closely to ensure higher and more consistent standards of pre-education and the availability of preschools in all regions.

*Recommendation: That communities, local authorities and MoEYS, and all organizations (including NGOs) continue to encourage close collaboration in support of early childhood care and education centers.*

## **Gender Equity**

This research identified incentives to encourage gender equity among preschool pupils. The promotion of girls' early education is being actively encouraged. The proportion of girls in preschool was higher than boy supports increased enrolment by girls at the primary level.

*Recommendation: That all preschools continue to focus on gender equity in early childhood education to increase the number of girl students enrolling in grade 1, particularly in remote and disadvantaged communities.*

NEP hopes that this study's findings, conclusions and recommendations support planning, dialogue and action, for more **widespread, high quality** and **accessible** preschool education for all in Cambodia.

## **VII. APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: Research Team

Appendix 2: Survey Questionnaire for Households Sending Children to Preschool

Appendix 3: Survey Questionnaire for Households Not Sending Children to Preschool

Appendix 4: References

Preschool study interview outlines for preschool managers, primary school directors, preschool teachers, Grade 1 teachers and commune council members, and one set of questionnaires to test Grade 1 students can be obtained by calling NEP's office at (855) 023 224 774 or by going to NEP's web site: [www.nepcambodia.org](http://www.nepcambodia.org).

## Research Team

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1	Ang Sopha	F	NEP	Phnom Penh
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15	Em Cheas	M	NH	Kampong Chhnang
16	Oem Chak	M	NH	Kampong Chhnang

**Preschool Study  
Survey Questionnaire  
For Households Sending Children to Preschool**

Name of interviewer:-----

Sex:-----

Name of interviewee:-----

Date of interview:-----

My name is.....I participate with NEP in a research on “Preschool”. I meet you today to explore with you some information on early childhood education (for three to five year-old children). Therefore, I'm asking for some of your time (about one or one and a half hour), to discuss on this matter.

Instruction: [Note to interviewer: Tick only one answer per question, exceptions will be indicated. Tick “Other” only when the answer is not in the pre-coded answers].

1.01 Interviewee code:----- (leave it blank. NEP will fill in later)

1.02 Province:

 Battambang Kompong Chhnang Phnom Penh

1.03 District

 Battambang Sangker Boribor Ressey Keo Chamkarmorn Other-----

1.04 Commune

 Chamkar Samrong Toek Thla Boeng Trabek Other:(Specify)-----

1.05 Village:(Specify)-----

**I. Background information**

1.06 How long have your family been living in this village?

-----years

/

----- months

1.07 What is the relationship of the head of household to the preschool student?

*(Tick off only one answer)* Grandfather Grandmother Mother Father Other: (Specify)-----

1.08 Family members

a. Total members	b. Female	c. Male
------------------	-----------	---------

1.09 How many children under 6 years do you have?

a) 3 years:-----person(s)      Sex: ----- Male ----- Female

b) 4 years:-----person(s)      Sex: ----- Male ----- Female

c) 5 years:-----person(s)      Sex: ----- Male ----- Female

1.10 Is there any disable children in your family?

 Yes No

1.11 If yes, what are their ages?

Age:----- years

Sex: ----- Male ----- Female

Age:----- years

Sex: ----- Male ----- Female

1.12 If yes in 1.10, are they in preschool? ----- Why?-----

-----  
-----

1.13 The relationship of interviewee to the small children? *(Please tick off only one)*

Grandfather

Grandmother

Mother

Father

Brother/sister

Other:(Specify)-----

1.14 What is your family's primary occupation? *(Tick off only one)*

Government employee

Business owner/Seller

Business employee

Motodup

Farmer

Other:(Specify) -----

1.15 Who help to do this work? *(Tick all that are mentioned)*

Grandfather

Grandmother

Mother

Father

Brother/sister

Other:(Specify)-----

1.16 What is your family's secondary occupation? *(Tick off only one)*

Government employee

Business owner

Business employee

Motodup

Farmer

Other: (Specify)-----

1.17 Who help to do this work? *(Tick all that are mentioned)*

Grandfather

Grandmother

Mother

Father

Brother/sister

Other:(Specify)-----

1.18 Who takes care of your small children? *(Tick all that are mentioned)*

Grandparents

Mother

Father

Sister/Brother

Housekeeper

Other: (Specify)-----

1.19 Do you have children studying in primary or secondary school?

- Yes       No

1.20 At what grade level are they studying now? Grade-----

**II. Preschool Awareness**

2.01 How did you know there was a preschool available in your village? (*Tick all that are mentioned*)

- Through the NGO
- Through local authority
- Government
- Newspaper
- Other: (Specify)-----

2.02 How many children have you sent to preschool? (*Check all that are mentioned*)

- Age:-----      Sex:----Male -----Female  
Age:-----      Sex:----Male -----Female

2.03 How long have they been attending preschool?

-----  
-----  
-----

2.04 In your family who has power to send children to preschool? (*Tick only one answer*)

- Grandfather
- Grandmother
- Mother
- Father
- Other: (Specify)-----

2.05 What level of education has the person who decided to send the children to preschool? (*Tick only one*)

- Never went to school
- Attended primary school
- Finished primary school
- Attended lower secondary school
- Attended upper secondary school

2.06 What benefits did you think you could obtain by sending your children to preschool? I AM NOT SURE IT IS WHAT YOU MEANT

-----  
-----

2.07 Have your expectations been met?

- Strongly met
- Somewhat met
- Have not been met at all

2.08 Do your children go to preschool regularly, e.g. daily?

- Yes       No

2.09 If not, why?-----  
-----  
-----

- 2.10 How many days a week do your children go to preschool?
- Two days a week
  - Three days a week
  - Four days a week
  - Five days a week
  - Other: (specify)-----

- 2.11 Who is responsible for bringing the children to pre-school? *(Tick all that are mentioned)*
- Grandparents
  - Mother
  - Father
  - Sister/Brother
  - Housekeeper
  - Other:(Specify)-----

- 2.12 Is taking children to pre-school a burden for your family? (Check only one)
- Big burden
  - Normal
  - Other: (Specify)-----

- 2.13 Do you have to pay in order to keep your children at preschool?
- Yes             No

2.14 If yes, how much do you have to pay per month?-----

- 2.15 If not, why? *(Tick all answers mentioned)*
- Preschool is free for everybody
  - Preschool is free for poor families
  - Other:(Specify)-----

- 2.16. Apart from school fees, is there another type of contribution your family offers preschool?
- Vegetable
  - Rice
  - Teacher's salary
  - Wood to build the preschool center
  - No contribution
  - Other: (specify)-----

### **III. Contribution of Preschool to family**

- 3.01 What advantages do your children gain from attending preschool? *(Tick all that apply)*
- Get experience in learning
  - Learn hygiene
  - Get some food
  - Have friends to play with
  - More confident to interact with surrounding environment
  - Other: (Specify)-----

3.02 From your observations, what progress did your children show since they're going to preschool?  
(Tick all that are mentioned)

- Respect elderly more
- Listen to parents more
- Able to get along with others better
- Improved in hygiene habits
- Able to communicate better
- Other: (Specify)-----

3.03 What are the benefits of the preschool for your family? (Tick all mentioned)

- Parents have time to do other work
- Reduce parents' time in teaching children
- Elder sister have more time to study
- Other: (Specify)-----

3.04 After sending your children to preschool, how much have your time dedicated to care giving and education been reduced? (Tick only one)

- Reduce time for taking care and educating children by 20%
- Reduce time for taking care and educating children by 50%
- Reduce time for taking care and educating children by 70%
- Other: (Specify)-----

3-05 What are the difficulties your children face in preschool? eg. Contact with diseases.

-----  
-----  
-----

3.06 What are your concerns when you children attend preschool? (Tick all that are mentioned)

- Playing dangerous games
- Playing too much
- Have friends of bad influence
- No toilets
- Contact with diseases
- Hard to get into classroom, e.g. steep stairs
- Not worry at all
- Other: (Specify)-----

3.07 What are the difficulties faced when sending the children to preschool? (Check all that apply)

- Preschool is far from home
- Need someone to take children to preschool and bring them back
- Need to contribute money to preschool
- Other: (Specify)-----

3.08 How far is your house from the pre-school?-----

3.09 What else do you want preschool to offer to your children?-----  
-----

3.10 Before sending your children to preschool, did your family use to teach them home?

- Yes
- No

3.11 If yes, who was responsible for teaching your small children? (Tick all that are mentioned)

- Grandfather
- Grandmother
- Mother
- Father
- Sister/brother
- Other: (specify)-----

3.12 If yes, what did you teach home? (Tick all that apply)

- Body hygiene
- Clean the house
- Moral
- Colors
- Culture
- Ethic
- Count Numbers
- Tell stories to children
- Khmer Language
- Emotional development
- Thinking
- Other:.....

3.13 What do you think about your family's capacity to teach your children? (Check only one)

- Have enough capacity to teach children
- Have medium capacity to teach children
- Poor capacity to teach children

3.14 What are the difficulties in teaching small children home? (Check all that apply)

- No teaching skills
- Limited knowledge
- Very busy at home
- No difficulty
- Other: (Specify)-----

3.15 How does preschool help you overcome these difficulties?

-----  
-----  
-----

3.16 After sending your small children to pre-school, how often do you continue educating them home? (Tick only one)

- More than before
- The same as before
- Less than before
- Stop teaching children at home

3.17 Why?-----

-----  
-----

3.18 If you compare children who learnt in pre-school to children who are taught home, what would you say? (Tick only one)

- Learning home is better
- Learning at pre-school is better
- It is of the same worth
- Don't know

3.19 Why do you think so?-----  
-----  
-----

3-20 Before you sent your children to preschool, did your older children need to drop out from school in order to look after their smaller brothers and sisters?

- Yes
- No

3.21 If not, did your older children have to miss classes in order to look after their younger brothers and sisters? (*Tick only one*)

- Frequently
- Once a while
- Never miss class

3.22 Since you're sending the children to pre-school, do the older children have to dropout to look after them?

- Yes
- No

3.23 If not, do they have to miss classes in order to look after their smaller brothers and sisters? (*Tick only one*)

- Very often
- Once awhile
- No

3.24 According to you how important for the children is early childhood education? (*Check only one*)

- Very important
- Important
- Not so important
- Not important

3.25 Why do you so?-----  
-----  
-----

3.26 Is your son's education more important to you than your daughter's? (*Tick only one*)

- Education of son is more important
- Education of son and daughter is equally important
- Daughter's education is more important

3.27 Why do you think so?-----  
-----  
-----

3.28 Will you continue sending your children to preschool?

- Yes
- No

3.29 If not, why?-----  
-----

3.30 Did you ask your children what they've learnt in preschool each day?

Yes       No

3.31 What are the weaknesses or/and limitations of pre-school according to you?-----

-----

3.32 How could those weaknesses/limitations be settled?

-----

3.33 What would be your message to families who don't their children to preschool?

-----

3.34 What are your suggestions to government, local authority and NGOs in order to improve early childhood education services?

-----

-----

**Preschool Study  
Survey Questionnaire  
For Households Not Sending Children to Preschool**

Name of interviewer:-----

Sex:-----

Name of interviewee:-----

Date of interview:-----

**Introduction:**

My name is.....I participate with NEP in a research on “Preschool”. I meet you today to explore with you some information on early childhood education (for three to five year-old children). Therefore, I'm asking for some of your time (about one or one and a half hour), to discuss on this matter.

[*Note to interviewer: Tick only one answer per question, exceptions will be indicated. Tick “Other” only when the answer is not in the pre-coded answers*].

1.12 Interviewee code:----- (*leave it blank. NEP will fill in later*)

1.13 Province:

 Battambang Kompong Chhnang Phnom Penh

1.14 District

 Battambang Sangker Boribor Ressey Keo Chamkarmorn Other:(Specify) -----

1.15 Commune

 Chamkar Samrong Toek Thla Boeng Trabek Other :(Specify)-----

1.16 Village:(Specify)-----

**II. Background information**

1.17 How long have your family been living in this village?

-----years

/

----- months

1.18 What is the relationship of the head of household to the preschool student?

*(Tick off only one answer)* Grandfather Grandmother Mother Father Other: (Specify)-----

1.19 Family members

a. Total members	b. Female	c. Male
------------------	-----------	---------

1.20 How many children under 6 years do you have?

a) 3 years:-----person(s)

Sex: ----- Male ----- Female

b) 4 years:-----person(s)

Sex: ----- Male ----- Female

c) 5 years:-----person(s)

Sex: ----- Male ----- Female

1.21 Is there any disable children in your family?

- Yes  No

1.22 If yes, what are their ages?

Age:----- years

Sex: ----- Male ----- Female

Age:----- years

Sex: ----- Male ----- Female

1.12 If yes in 1.10, are they in preschool? ----- Why?-----  
-----  
-----

1.13 The relationship of interviewee to the small children? *(Please tick off only one)*

- Grandfather  Grandmother  
 Father  Mother  
 Brother/sister  Other:(Specify)-----

1.14 What is your family's primary occupation? *(Tick off only one)*

- Government employee  Business owner/Seller  
 Business employee  Motodup  
 Farmer  Chamkar farming  
 Other:(Specify) -----

2.15 Who help to do this work? *(Tick all that are mentioned)*

- Grandfather  Grandmother  
 Father  Mother  
 Brother/sister  Other:(Specify)-----

2.16 What is your family's secondary occupation? *(Tick off only one)*

- Government employee  Business owner/Seller  
 Business employee  Motodup  
 Farmer  Chamkar farming  
 Other:(Specify) -----

2.17 Who help to do this work? *(Tick all that are mentioned)*

- Grandfather  Grandmother  
 Father  Mother  
 Brother/sister  Other:(Specify)-----

1.18 Who takes care of your small children? *(Tick all that are mentioned)*

- Grandfather  Grandmother  
 Mother  Father  
 Sister/Brother  Housekeeper  
 Other: (Specify)-----

1.19 Do you have children studying in primary or secondary school?

- Yes  No

1.20 At what grade level are they studying now? Grade-----

## II. Preschool Awareness

2.01 Do you know there is a preschool available in your village?

- Yes  No

2.02 If yes, how did you know?

- Through NGO
- Village/commune chief
- Government official
- Newspaper
- Other: (Specify)-----

2.03 If No, why ? *(please describe)* -----  
-----  
-----

2.04 Why don't you send your children to preschool?

- Preschool is located very far from home
- There is no one to bring the children to preschool
- Do not trust teachers of preschool
- Afraid the children contract a disease from their friends
- Afraid the children make friends/play with children with bad influence
- Do not know about the preschool services in the community
- Other: (specify) -----

2.05 In your family who make decision whether to send children to preschool or not? *(tick only one)*

- Grandfather
- Grandmother
- Father
- Mother
- Other: (Specify)-----

2.06 Education of person who make decision to send children to preschool?

- Never attend the school
- Attend primary school
- Finish primary school
- Attend upper secondary school
- Other: (Specify)-----

2.07 How far is your house from the school?  
-----

2.08 Do you plan to send your children to preschool in the future?

- Yes
- No

2.09 If yes, what are your expectations if you send your children to preschool? *(please tick all mentioned)*

- Have teacher to take care of the children
- Have teacher to teach the children
- Children have some food to eat
- Children make some friends
- Other:(specify) -----

2.10 If No, Why? *(please describe)*-----  
-----

2.11 How do you perceive preschool? *(Please describe)*  
-----  
-----

### III Early Childhood Education

3.01 Do you teach your small children at home?

- Yes
- No

3.02 If yes, who is responsible for teaching the children? *(Tick all that are mentioned)*

- Grandfather
- Grandmother
- Father
- Mother
- Sister/brother
- Other: (specify)-----

3.03 If yes, what did you teach home? *(Tick all that apply)*

- Body hygiene
- Clean the house
- Moral
- Colors
- Culture
- Ethic
- Count Numbers
- Tell stories to children
- Khmer Language
- Emotional development
- Thinking
- Other:-----

3.04 How often did you teach your children? *(Tick only one)*

- Everyday
- Almost everyday
- One a while

3.05 What do you think about your family's capacity to teach your children? *(Tick only one)*

- Have enough capacity to teach children
- Have medium capacity to teach children
- Poor capacity to teach children

3.06 What are the difficulties in teaching small children home? *(Check all that apply)*

- No teaching skills
- Limited knowledge
- Very busy at home
- No difficulty
- Other: (Specify)-----

3.07 How does preschool help you overcome these difficulties?

-----  
-----  
-----

3.08 If you compare children who learnt in pre-school to children who are taught home, what would you say? *(Tick only one)*

- Learning home is better
- Learning at pre-school is better
- It is of the same worth
- Don't know

3.09 Why do you think so?-----

-----  
-----

3.10 According to you how important for the children is early childhood education? *(Check only one)*

- Very important
- Important
- Not so important
- Not important

3.11 Why do you think so?-----  
-----  
-----

3.12 Is your son's education more important to you than your daughter's? (*Tick only one*)

- Education of son is more important
- Education of son and daughter is equally important
- Daughter's education is more important

3.13 Why do you so?-----  
-----  
-----

3.14 Did your older children need to drop out from school in order to look after their smaller brothers and sisters?

- Yes
- No

3.15 If not, did your older children have to miss classes in order to look after their younger brothers and sisters? (*Tick only one*)

- Frequently
- Once a while
- Never miss class

3.16 What are your suggestions to government, local authority and NGO in order to improve early child education in your community?

-----  
-----  
-----

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