



# Creating A New Generation of Schools in Cambodia

Discussion Paper: Experimenting in New Governance Structures to Create High Quality Education Models

KAMPUCHEAN ACTION FOR PRIMARY EDUCATION

**Final Draft**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Purpose of the Present Document

The present document has been developed as a Discussion Paper to assist the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS) and its development partners in reviewing the available experience in country about the use of Public Private Partnership (PPP) principles to improve school governance and create schools with maximal (as opposed to minimum) standards of educational quality. Improved school governance is seen as a key means through which to create and sustain high quality educational models, similar to what the country is seeing in the private sector but which has been elusive in the public sector. This paper focuses on the experience of Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE), a local NGO, in its efforts to develop a viable model of governance in collaboration with the MoEYS that is highly experimental and which departs from usual practice with respect to how public schools are managed and financed. This is explained in more detail below.

The need for a *new generation* of schools that utilize new models of governance and provide high educational quality in the public sector has become increasingly urgent with the rapid profusion of private schools at both primary and secondary school level. Although such schools were in the past the primary domain of the expatriate community and high level officials, they have now become increasingly accessible to Cambodia's growing middle class. These developments have resulted in an exodus of middle class children from public schools to the private sector, threatening to create a two tiered education system, which will greatly exacerbate class differences in Cambodian society. A recent study of these developments, for example, found that several khans in Phnom Penh have so far lost between 30% to 50% of their enrolment to the private sector;<sup>1</sup> similar trends are also now occurring in several provincial capitals such as Kampong Cham where town enrolment rates have recently dropped to as low as 73%.<sup>2</sup> To help government respond to these trends, KAPE established the Beacon School Initiative (BSI) as a major experiment to increase the role of Non-state Actors (NSAs) in the public sector using PPP principles. While still on-going, BSI may offer many useful insights to the government in its efforts to replicate this new governance model in other locations, especially Phnom Penh, and develop mechanisms to sustain its financing through a proposed *Social Equity Fund*.

### 1.2 Establishment of the Beacon School Initiative as a Means to Promote Public Private Partnership in the Public Education Sector

The Beacon School Initiative or BSI has been supported by KAPE, the Oaktree Foundation, USAID, and several other donors since 2011. The project was piloted in two secondary schools and a basic education school in Kampong Cham Province. This initiative was designed to address quality and governance issues in the education sector that have eluded resolution by earlier development projects. As noted above, a key element in this initiative is a greater role for the 'private' sector in managing schools while at the same time maintaining strong links with the 'public' sector, hence its definition as an initiative building on the idea of *Public-Private Partnership (PPP)*.

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<sup>1</sup> KAPE (2013) *Enrollment Trends in Phnom Penh: A Needs Assessment*, Phnom Penh: Save the Children.

<sup>2</sup> EMIS (2013) *Education Indicators and Statistics*, Phnom Penh: MoEYS.

Earlier efforts to improve educational quality in Cambodia have all promoted a development model known as the ‘child friendly school,’ which is currently a key policy of Cambodia’s Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS). BSI also works within the policy framework of MoEYS’ child friendly school policy but in a way where the private sector (i.e., KAPE as a Non-state Actor) has more influence on management and accountability. This is in contrast to past efforts that have worked entirely within the public school system where accountability provisions have generally been weak. Within such contexts, it has been very difficult for development agents like KAPE to influence management to achieve high performance standards, because ultimately school managers have traditionally not been held accountable for their performance. Such patterns are now deeply engrained in the education system along with dysfunctional behaviors involving ‘unofficial’ fees by teachers, which impact particularly severely on the poorest classes. Since these payments do not go into a rationalized regulatory framework (as they do in a private school), they have very little impact on a school’s educational quality. While earlier CFS-focused projects have achieved some level of success with respect to certain issues such as improving access and infrastructure, most have reached a ‘glass ceiling’ in terms of educational quality.

### 1.3 Attitudes towards Public Private Partnerships

Whereas the state has historically been hostile to the idea of private education in many developing countries in the East Asia Pacific Region (EAPR), this seems to be changing. Many countries in the region are re-aligning the public-private dynamic in their education systems to one where the state increasingly provides a regulatory framework while the private sector plays a greater role in direct service delivery. These trends are being encouraged by large development institutions such as UNICEF and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), both of which institutions organized a major regional workshop on PPP in 2010, where it was observed that:

... more countries are recognizing the existence of the non-state sector and the utility of using non-state providers (NSPs) for advancing national education goals and priorities. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) with NSPs can take many forms and the goal often is the same — expanding quality education for all while reducing costs. In PPPs, the public sector defines the scope of outputs, while the private sector is in charge of delivering on them. (UNICEF-ADB, 2010).<sup>3</sup>

Thus, **the receptivity of governments in the region to PPP arrangements appears to be increasing.** This is no less true in Cambodia where both local education authorities and members of the national Ministry have cautiously expressed an interest in working with KAPE to develop a PPP model that dramatically increases educational quality in the public system. This willingness has in many cases entailed significant risks in terms of how the public reacts to them. These risks have been shared jointly by government and KAPE.

Although the time does indeed seem right for the introduction of an educational development model that uses a PPP approach, KAPE has approached this task with full knowledge that such concepts are new to Cambodia, where the public and private education systems have generally been kept quite separate. Even among development specialists, many con-

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<sup>3</sup> *Delivering Education Services to the Poor – What Role for the Non-state Sector?*, Position Paper prepared for UNICEF-ADB Workshop on ‘The Role of Non-state Providers in Delivering Basic Social Services for Children,’ Manila, April 2010.

cepts relating to PPP are still quite fluid so that there are often different definitions of what public-private partnership means in different contexts. For example, many development practitioners reject the idea that NGOs are 'private' entities since they are usually non-profit institutions operating in the public sector. Others, including KAPE's technical team, believe that any organization that is 'non-state' in its orientation may count as a private entity. Nevertheless, **the newness and dynamic nature of this approach in development circles suggests that BSI has been breaking new ground in the Cambodian education sector and that it is expanding our knowledge of educational development in new ways that have not happened before.** Donor support of this initiative has, therefore, greatly added to Cambodia's ability to develop itself as well as achieve concrete improvements in educational quality in selected schools. These characteristics justify the title of the initiative as one, which seeks to act as a 'beacon' for future development in the education sector.

## 2. PROBLEM ANALYSIS UNDERLYING THE BEACON SCHOOL INITIATIVE

### 2.1 General Issues Undermining Educational Quality

The background description provided above makes clear that there has been a strong need to bring some focus back to educational quality. This need provided the primary rationale for a small but intensively focused project like BSI that moved beyond the development models earlier developed. There is also a desire to help CFS activities to break free of some of the chronic problems within the public school system that undermine educational quality initiatives. These problems, which are common to public schools in other countries, include (i) low levels of *performance accountability* to both communities and district education officials; (ii) *poor career path definition* for individuals with high professional standards (with consequent effects on motivation); and (iii) *low remuneration levels*. In comparison to private schools in Cambodia where paying parents demand high standards, the public schools in Cambodia are becoming the last and only resort of a growing underclass, particularly in urban areas.

Acknowledging the need for radical approaches to improve educational quality is nothing new in Cambodia and both international and national educators have been discussing this for a long time already. There is a growing consensus in some circles, however, that strategies focusing exclusively on the public schools without reference to the private sector is less and less a tenable strategy to make major improvements in educational quality. This is in large part because the lack of good governance within the public education sector has long been a missing prerequisite for effective development (see below). That is, the public sector lacks a strong tradition of holding teachers and school directors accountable for the effectiveness of educational service delivery, except in the most egregious circumstances.

Private schools have been growing in number in Cambodia, not only in Phnom Penh but also in many provincial capitals such as Kampong Cham. For the first time in Cambodia's history, the general population now has an alternative to the public schools, at least in urban areas. However, private schools generally lack equitable access to the rural and urban poor and have few links with the public sector, in any case.<sup>4</sup> Although there has been considerable

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<sup>4</sup> KAPE (2013) *Enrollment Trends in Phnom Penh: A Needs Assessment*, Phnom Penh: Save the Children.

movement forward in the public education sector with improvements in infrastructure, curricula, and the increased availability of material resources, the lack of good governance, particularly among school directors and teachers, has meant that the utilization of these inputs, provided at considerable expense by donors, has been highly inefficient. This situation has greatly undermined educational quality in the sector.

## 2.2 Accountability Issues

Poor governance mainly manifests itself as a *lack of accountability* for performance, leading to very high tolerance levels for unprofessional or even incompetent behavior. It is difficult to hold teachers, school directors, and other key education personnel to a performance standard when there are few rewards for professional behavior and few sanctions when dereliction occurs. The upshot of this situation means that material inputs are frequently underutilized or not utilized at all. There are many common examples of such outcomes. For example, many teachers feel they are under no compulsion to use new methodologies in which they have been trained or to use learning aids that have been provided for learning; refurbished libraries remain locked and inaccessible to students; water systems are not maintained and eventually fall into disuse from neglect; or IT facilities quickly fall into disrepair from lack of maintenance or use. These are but some of the problems that development projects have encountered in the sector over the years. To be sure, there are individuals and schools who do demonstrate high professional standards, but this usually occurs in spite of, not because of any strictures imposed by the educational system. Herein lies a key problem to implementing any national CFS program; that is, the wide variability among educational personnel in terms of adhering to professional standards and the inability of the public education system to enforce standards greatly undermines meaningful development.

## 2.3 Career Paths and Inadequate Remuneration

Related to the above is the issue of *career paths* for those individuals in the public sector who do demonstrate good professional behavior. In short, there are few such paths for the best teachers and school directors in Cambodia's public education system. Thus, a clear system of continuous rewards (e.g., scholarships for further study, ready access to ICT equipment such as laptops, and opportunities for advancement) that acknowledge professional behavior is desperately needed to ensure continued motivation and quality in target schools. In combination with *low (and sometimes irregular) levels of remuneration* as well as weak accountability structures within the education system, the absence of career path rewards contributes to low professional standards throughout the education system.



*Teacher conference to follow up on career path planning and reflection logbooks*

## 2.4 The Need to Create a New Generation of Schools with 'Maximal' Standards

The Beacon School Initiative has struggled with the notion of the 'minimum standard' as the central paradigm, which is so often fundamental to many development projects. That is, many development projects that nominally seek to increase educational quality by bringing schools to a minimum standard inadvertently ensure that schools adhere to the 'lowest' standard allowable by law. That is, the quest for a minimum standard is a kind of trap that prevents many schools in the public education system from achieving a 'high' educational standard. Thus, BSI has made a tactical decision to focus on 'maximal' as opposed to minimum standards and has made investments accordingly. In aiming for a maximal standard, the project has made an implicit assumption that though this model cannot be replicated everywhere, it can nevertheless be replicated in many places with the proper resourcing and management. The project rejects the idea that a model that cannot be replicated everywhere does not merit support and instead proposes the idea of *multiple development tracks* that ensure that at least some public schools can achieve an outstanding educational standard. Schools that can achieve such standards can act as a ***New Generation School*** that provides high quality standards to children of all social classes and not just the privileged few who attend private schools.

### 3. A GRAND EXPERIMENT IN ESTABLISHING AN EXPERIMENTAL FEE STRUCTURE TO SUSTAIN EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND ROOT OUT CORRUPTION

#### 3.1 The First Step: Establishing a Model of 'Maximal' Quality

**Stimulating Demand:** The BSI Project anticipated from the very beginning that parental financial support would likely be a key strategy for sustaining any new governance model linked to high educational standards. The thriving expansion of private schools is evidence that many parents are more than willing to pay for high quality educational services. Thus, the project sought first to establish a high educational standard in all of its schools as the very first step in its implementation. One of the schools chosen for this effort was a 'dying' school located in the provincial town. Built to accommodate up to 800 children, its enrolment had dwindled to only 50 children due to the abysmal educational standards in evidence there. The school was indeed on the verge of closure. The other two schools were average schools of a much larger size. One of these was located in a semi-urban area while the other was quite rural.

#### **Establishment of New Governance Structures and Teacher Recruitment:**

The project began the process of investment not only by making significant investments in infrastructure, furniture, and equipment but in the way that schools were managed. An *Oversight Board* comprised of POE members and KAPE staff was created to ensure the accountability of school officers for the performance of their school. In addition, school directors received salary supplements with strict conditions for performance from KAPE. This *mixed management model* has been closely linked with a system of performance-based top-up payments for school directors that is contingent on accountability to the Oversight Board. In the case of the Demonstration School, new teachers were recruited competitively and transparently with the Oversight Board acting as the interview committee. Since the Personnel Department of the POE is also a member of the Board, the Board was greatly facilitated in these efforts. This method of teacher recruitment marked a dramatic departure from the normal practice of opaque appointments to one of merit-based selection. New teachers were recruited with a view to their interest in professional development. Teachers' willingness to forego 'rien kua' fees in



*Before and After: The Demonstration School before and after its conversion into a New Generation School*

exchange for a salary supplement was also assessed during interviews. Unfortunately, the project was not able to make similar changes in staffing at the other two schools since they were largely pre-existing schools with a teaching force (of high variability in terms of their professional standards) already in place.

### **Career Path Development**

**for Teachers:** Though teachers received performance-based payments for the completion of special tasks that they performed, it was equally important that newly recruited teachers place a high value not only on monetary incentives but on their perceived self-value as professionals. Scholarships and laptops were provided to teachers to increase their motivation as teachers as well as their professional capacity.

The project organized monthly conferencing with

teachers to set professional development goals and to review these goals on a regular basis. Teachers who expressed a willingness to do more (e.g., lead subject clubs, organize field trips, etc), received more in terms of access to performance-based pay incentives.

**Use of Technology:** The use of technology in education, combined with constructivist learning principles, has also figured prominently as a means to improve the quality of teaching and learning. This has entailed the establishment of ICT labs, a media center with access to a television screen and tablets, ready access to laptops and LCD projectors, and library workstations linked to the internet. Teachers have received capacity-building in how to use these facilities in their teaching including the use of PowerPoint for lesson presentations, Word for lesson plan creation, and film documentaries as an extension of the teaching process. These uses of technology have not only improved teaching but have acted as a major motivator for students and improved perceptions of schools by parents and community members.

**The Role of a New School Architecture in School Upgrading:** Another key element of BSI's effort to improve educational standards relates to the decision to move away from the old conventional school design that has been used in the education system since the French colonial period. The use of innovative architecture is increasingly common in many countries to improve the aesthetics of the learning environment and such changes are sorely overdue in Cambodian schools, which are more often than not dreary and squalid. BSI schools have employed extensive use of glass, tonal contrasts in building materials, indoor gardens, and study alcoves to enhance learning environments. These investments greatly improve the inherent aesthetics of school environments and have proven to be cheaper



*Establishment of a Media Center: Students watch a film documentary as part of their lesson*



than many nearby buildings of standard design built by international development banks. Thus, the creative use of architecture has been a key strategy to improve the physical desirability of schools and the motivation of both students and teachers to be there. Indeed, many teachers have indicated that they find the school surroundings to be more pleasant than their home environments and are often found there on weekends and after hours.



***New Architectural Designs to Enhance Learning Environments:*** A new building making extensive use of glass and indoor gardens contrasts sharply with unimaginative conventional school designs

### 3.2 Sustaining the New Model

**The Challenge:** After three years of operation, local perceptions of educational quality in at least two of the project's supported schools have improved dramatically. However, sustaining this model has been a challenge since PB and SIG funds are clearly not enough to maintain the standard provided; nor are these sources of income provided regularly enough and with enough flexibility to do so. In 2014, KAPE launched a grand experiment in the *Demonstration School* in Kampong Cham Town to sustain the model with parental support by making a firm commitment to root out all vestiges of corrupt practice endemic in the education system. These promises were linked to high educational standards created earlier as a pre-condition of voluntary user fees paid by middle class parents. Pending the results of this experiment at the Demonstration School, similar negotiations will be undertaken at other BSI schools.

#### **Making a Commitment to Good Governance as a Pre-Condition of Introducing Voluntary User Fees:**

Early in September 2014, the Demonstration School created a manifesto that makes a commitment to parents to provide high quality educational services in a new governance structure (see below). This manifesto was circulated widely throughout the community, presented to parents coming to register, and



***Stronger than Anticipated Demand from Parents:*** A group of parents complete the registration process at the Demonstration School where a new experimental governance and fee structure has been introduced.

disseminated through the project's social media network. As part of the negotiation process with the community the school promised the following:

- 1) Teachers agreed to allow the school to abolish all *rien kua*<sup>5</sup> fees (in exchange for a fixed supplement and opportunities for paid task work).
- 2) The practice of (forced) selling of cakes to students in the classroom is abolished
- 3) The practice of exam paper fees is abolished
- 4) Students will have access to high quality facilities including science labs, ICT labs, a media center, ICT in education teaching methodologies, and a canteen service.
- 5) Parents will be informed of student absences that are not excused (as is currently the practice in most private schools).
- 6) The school will report to an oversight board comprised of POEYS officials and KAPE and provide trimester reports on how funds are used (mainly to top up teacher salaries and fund special task work for clubs, counseling services, etc).

### What we provide . . .

**Educational Facilities**

- ICT Lab for Students in Grades 4 to 10
- State of the art Science Education Lab
- Library & Media Center with access to Mobile Learning Devices for Grades 1 to 3
- Experimental Classrooms for Early Grade Literacy
- Playgrounds and Sports Facilities
- Student Canteen
- Art Room Facilities

**Teaching Methods and Programming**

At the Demonstration School, our teachers use the newest instructional methods to teach your children including Cooperative Learning, Project Method, and Constructivist Learning.

We also provide support for Subject Clubs in Science, Writing, History, Film and other Subjects

**Other Services:**

• Optional lessons in Chinese	• Mushroom Cultivation
• Career Counseling	• Hydroponic Gardening
• Fish & Frog Raising	• Field Trips
	• Working with Australian youth




### Our Commitment to your Children . . .

**We promise that . . .**

- We will not allow teachers to charge *rien kua* fees that are mandatory for passing
- We will not allow teachers to sell cakes and snacks in the classroom
- We will keep you informed of your child's learning and when they are absent from school
- We promise that we will treat all children equally and place the highest priority on their learning
- We will not charge for test papers during examinations
- We will not use corporal punishment to maintain discipline

**To maintain our educational standards, we ask assistance from parents as follows:**

- A voluntary user fee of \$65/year (\$32.50 per semester) to supplement the salaries of teachers and maintain the school and its facilities (for new students ONLY)
- Attend regular parent meetings where we report on school issues and how we use income from all sources.

### Our Commitment to Help the Poor

The Demonstration School will admit about 140 new students in 2014-15. We will keep 50% of these places as free seats for parents who cannot afford to pay, pending a household visit to verify income.



***A Manifesto and a Promise:*** The Demonstration School makes a public promise to the community for quality and governance.

**Introducing Voluntary User Fees and the Negotiations Needed To Do So:** The decision to introduce a fee structure has not been taken lightly and has entailed high-level discussions with the Ministry to receive guidance on how to introduce such fees, particularly with

<sup>5</sup> Private tutoring that is mandatory for promotion.

regards to parental negotiations. Based on these discussions, the Ministry authorized KAPE to initiate discussions with parents and teachers about the new governance structures and the possibility of voluntary fees, as a means to sustain the high educational standards developed. If the parents agreed to these voluntary contributions and if negotiations with teachers also yielded agreement to stop the practice of unofficial fees, then KAPE could move forward with plans to introduce the proposed fee structure.

Accordingly, the agency launched negotiations with middle class parents about their ability and willingness to support the school through such a voluntary fee structure as a means to replace donor funding, which will start to be phased out over the next two years. This new system was only applied to new students enrolling at the Demonstration School so that already enrolled students (mostly from poor backgrounds) were not affected. For new intakes, between 30% to 50% of new seats were reserved for those who are poor and for whom no fees would apply (pending a means-test). The project has been very cautious about the introduction of this new fee structure and also first discussed the matter carefully with the Provincial Office of Education during a Board Meeting in September 2014. Following these discussions and with Ministry endorsement as noted above, a special, unique and unprecedented plan for voluntary financial contributions from middle class parents was finally announced publicly on 15 September 2014 for new intakes at the Demonstration School. Fees were set at a very reasonable \$65/year or \$32.50 per semester. This compares with \$400/year at local private schools and similarly high amounts in 'unofficial' fees charged at other local public schools. In exchange for this fee, the school has committed to abolishing the unregulated system of unofficial fees that is endemic in other state schools. A manifesto such as the one shown above was shared with parents during discussions about this voluntary user fee.

**Applying the New Fee Structure to New Intakes Only:** Since most of the students that registered at the Demonstration School in earlier years were from a poor background, the school has maintained conditions of 'free' enrolment, choosing to introduce a voluntary user fee system to new intakes only, as noted above. The Board reviewed the physical capacity of the Demonstration School at both primary and lower secondary level to set new intake quotas with school management. This included 50 new students at primary level and 90 students for lower secondary. The school was, therefore, able to accommodate 140 new students of which 70 would be reserved for poor children whose families have no ability to pay fees. In general, the school seeks to maintain a student-teacher ratio of 36:1.

Within less than two weeks after implementation of the school enrollment process, however, there were 161 new students requesting enrollment (86 lower secondary and 75 primary), greatly taxing the existing capacity of the school, and requiring some flexibility in the student-teacher ratio guidelines. This rush to enroll students at the Demonstration School attests to the very changed perceptions of the school by the local community who had in the past shunned the school. Even more surprisingly, 112 of the parents requesting entry voluntarily agreed to provide a financial contribution of 65 USD. This means that almost 70% of the new intake is from middle class families, which is much more than originally anticipated. Parents willing and able to make a voluntary contribution were also asked to sign a declaration affirming their willingness to pay the fee and that they have done so without coercion. For parents who requested not to pay, a means-test has been administered by the

School Support Committee to validate their inability to make a similar contribution. No one was turned away from the school and admission was based on a *first come, first served* basis.

**Preliminary Outcomes:** From what is described above, middle class parents have clearly shown very strong interest in the Demonstration School’s new policy to abolish the unofficial fee system by introducing a transparent and voluntary user fee. In addition, about 10% of the new enrolment came from students previously enrolled in surrounding private schools, thereby helping the state school system to push back against private sector encroachment. Parents have expressed a strong interest in attending a school that not only offers high quality education but also a new governance structure that is reasonable, transparent, and more equitable. Neither KAPE nor the POE received any complaints about the new system, validating the Ministry’s decision and KAPE’s to take a political risk in introducing this revolutionary new governance structure designed to root out endemic corruption in the school system. Under this system, the poor can access a system of high quality public education and *truly* pay nothing for it (unlike the current system which is officially free but where everyone pays, rich or poor).

### 3.3 Costing of the Model and Future Sustainability

It took KAPE about 3 and a half years to establish an educational model of high quality that is generally well-respected by the local community in Kampong Cham. The final two years of the project are now focusing on efforts to sustain this model since official support from the education system (mainly PB funds and SIG grants) is clearly not enough to do so and donor support will end in 2016. This means organizing similar negotiations with parents and teachers in the other schools, based on the experience of the Demonstration School.

An analysis of recurrent costs to provide educational services of high quality at the Demonstration School has resulted in estimates of approximately \$25,000 per year for a school of 23 teachers with intensive inputs. This includes costs to support primary school teachers at the school who now teach for six hours per day, as per the international standard. This also includes expenditures for top-up payments for performance-based pay for teachers, a supplement for the school director’s salary of \$200/month, security, maintenance, and a school grant of \$3,000/year to fund activities that promote educational quality. The breakdown of these costs is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1: Breakdown of Key Recurrent Expenditures and Current Income Sources at the Demonstration School**

Key Annual Expenditures	Percentage Breakdown	Income Sources	Percentage Breakdown
Performance-based Pay	73%	Parental Contributions	31%
School Activity Grant	10%	Canteen Income	6%
Security	7%	Other School Income	3%
Management Costs	9%	Private Sector Donations	8%
Maintenance	1%	School Endowment Fund	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	Project Sources/KAPE Internal Funds	48%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Clearly, the greatest source of expenditure is for Performance-based Payments (73%) as a means to abolish teachers’ need to charge unofficial fees as well as increase the school day

from 4 hours to 6 hours of instruction for primary school children. So far the costs of the new model still exceed income from the recently introduced voluntary fee structure and other sources of income with deficits currently made up by KAPE internal resources and the BSI Project. Efforts to sustain the model have so far succeeded in covering 52% of the total costs. Parental contributions make up the largest share of current income (31%) along with other measures such as an *Endowment Fund*<sup>6</sup> that KAPE recently established with a donation from *Apple Corporation*. Nevertheless, KAPE expects that with additional new intakes, enhanced income generation, and hoped for subsidies from a *Social Equity Fund* under consideration by the Ministry, the school should be able to sustain its model of providing high quality education to the poorest of the poor for free through the state system. The Minister of Education has suggested that a proposed *Social Equity Fund* would be accessible by any school that is able to abolish the unofficial fee structure that so badly impacts the poor and make significant improvements in educational quality. A task force is being created to determine the nature of such a framework, as noted earlier.

#### 4. LESSONS LEARNED FROM BSI IMPLEMENTATION

As a result of the success of the Beacon School Initiative, the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport as well as a number of donors are interested in replicating and expanding the model. Before doing so, however, there are a number of important lessons learned that can help avoid expensive mistakes and increase efficiencies. Some of the key lessons in this regard are summarized below:

1. **School Selection:** BSI chose to work in three locations that included two pre-existing schools and a dying school that had to be re-established (essentially an entirely new school). There are many limitations of working in pre-existing schools because there is much less flexibility in replacing teachers and school directors. In addition, working with earlier appointed teachers ensures that there will be great variability in teachers' motivation and ability levels, which is problematic for implementing performance-based pay incentives. Pre-existing schools, therefore, present many constraints in terms of what can be accomplished whereas a new school or a contracting/dying school offers much more flexibility. In the case of BSI, the most dramatic success was witnessed at the Demonstration School, which was essentially a new school; another pre-existing school with a very strong school director and a number of very strong teachers resulted in moderate success while a third pre-existing school with poor leadership and a divisive group of teachers resulted in the least success of the three schools. Thus, establishing the proposed model in pre-existing schools will experience the most constraints.
2. **Demographic Location:** Sustainability of the BSI model requires support from middle class parents through a voluntary contribution structure. The greatest potential for sustainability of the model, therefore, requires a mixed demographic setting in an urban or semi-urban area that is adjacent to rural communities. An entirely rural setting would mean that it would not be possible to sustain the model easily through local support.
3. **School Size:** The highest chance for successful replication can be found in small to mod-

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<sup>6</sup> Apple donated \$20,000 to KAPE to establish an Endowment that will be put into low risk investments that should generate a return on base capital of 5-10% per annum.

erate sized schools with 25 teachers or less. Smaller sized schools make it much easier to build depth into one's programming, reduces monitoring requirements, and makes the size the needed investment more manageable. When one works in a setting of more than 30 teachers, monitoring will be very labor intensive while investment costs will be very high, especially for performance-based payments.

4. **Local Support:** KAPE received very strong support from the Provincial Office of Education in Kampong Cham, which provided active engagement through the Oversight Board. This enabled the effective exercise of accountability mechanisms that led to needed changes in target schools, particularly with respect to the selection of school managers and new teacher recruitment. Indeed, it is important that the Personnel Department be represented on the Board, as their involvement is essential in making the necessary decisions regarding appointments of teachers.
5. **Establishing High Educational Standards as the First Step:** It is difficult to generate support from middle class families for a Beacon School at the first step, particularly if the school being assisted is a dying school or a brand new school. Initial efforts, therefore, need to focus on establishing a quality 'brand' during the first step of implementation. Once this has been achieved, it is easier to achieve buy-in and eventual financial support from the local families who can do so, thereby by achieving some degree of sustained operation.
6. **Governance as the Key:** The key feature of the Beacon School Initiative that ensured its success was not the intensive investments made in equipment, training, or infrastructure, though these are no doubt important. Such investments have been made by other projects with more limited success. Rather, the key element in the project's design relates to its efforts to change the culture of poor accountability in the public schools. This entailed several measures including the establishment of an Oversight Board, providing salary supplements to school directors by the NSA with strict conditions of accountability, linking supplemental teacher payments to performance, asking school administrators and teachers to sign contracts, publicizing school promises for improved governance through a manifesto for parents, and other measures. Without these measures, investments in educational quality could not have been implemented as successfully as they were.
7. **Realizing the Dangers of Performance-based Pay:** The BSI Project generated many useful experiences regarding the use of PbP. If not administered properly, PbP can be a demotivating force in a school, accomplishing the opposite of what it intends. It can also ignite jealousies and divisions among teachers. BSI has developed useful capacity-building documentation that discusses how to implement PbP systems effectively. This documentation focuses on three key principles, namely that PbP allocations must be *fair, transparent, and enforced*. All teachers need to know the conditions under which PbP supplements can be applied for and what tasks can result in extra pay; school managers need to ensure that their decisions to allocate PbP are justified and impartial; and school managers need to ensure that payments do not occur when teachers have not performed the agreed tasks. Many school directors often prefer a path of least resistance to avoid any conflict with teachers; however, when administering PbP systems, it is essential that school managers are fair but firm in enforcing the conditions of payment or non-payment as the case may be.

## 5. INTRODUCING A SOCIAL EQUITY FUND TO ENHANCE THE VIABILITY OF NEW GENERATION SCHOOLS AND THEIR REPLICATION

### 5.1 The Broad Outlines of a Social Equity Fund

The Ministry is currently considering the development of a *Social Equity Fund* to help sustain high quality educational models with new governance structures such as the one described above. The establishment and administration of such a national fund, however, requires further discussion. It is imperative that such a fund should only be made available to schools that can meet the high educational standards agreed upon. These standards may include both 'required criteria' and those that are 'preferred' but not necessarily all criteria would be required. At the center of these standards should be governance structures that ensure rooting out the system of unofficial fees and opaque administrative practices. This means that teachers at any applying school must agree to stop the practice of '*rien kua*' fees that are linked with promotion decisions as well as other dysfunctional unofficial fees that discourage equitable access. In exchange, the school would provide supplements to teachers that may be either fixed or task-based or (preferably) a combination of both. This should be a key requirement for fund access. Continuous enforcement of such criteria would need to be reviewed regularly and possible suspension of access would occur in cases of non-compliance.

A suggested summary of possible eligibility criteria for accessing a Social Equity Fund is provided in Figure 1 below. A national committee such as the one recently created by the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, known as the *National School Review Committee* would review applying schools to determine their eligibility for SEF access. This committee would apply eligibility criteria relating to both governance and quality much as the *Committee for Cooperation in Cambodia (CCC)* enforces compliance with Good Practices and Professional (GPP) standards for NGOs through a rigorous certification process. Indeed, the CCC model may offer an excellent example of how a similar national committee within the Ministry might be set up to review school eligibility for SEF access. In this respect, CCC maintains separate committees for review of criteria and actual certification. The Ministry may also want to consider establishing separate committees that certify eligibility for applying to the SEF and a separate committee that actually makes a determination of whether an award should be provided or not to prevent any possible conflict of interest. Indeed, the independence of both committees would likely be an essential requirement to ensure that decision-making is impartial and rational.

Once a school had successfully achieved agreed eligibility criteria for SEF access, they would also be given the authority to open negotiations with parents to introduce voluntary fees, similar to the way that this has been done by the Demonstration School in Kampong Cham. Parental agreement and possible endorsement by a civil society partner would be essential, however, to certify that the fees have been introduced with the agreement of parents and that poor students have not been turned away from enrolling at the school. Indeed, the fees foregone by poor families would be reimbursed to the school from the Social Equity Fund. Such provisions would act as an incentive to attract poor students to the school as well, since the more poor students who enroll, the more funds that a school could access from the SEF.

**Figure 1: Suggested Criteria for Social Equity Fund Access:**

Schools with the following characteristics will be eligible for SEF funds to promote access by the poor to an international standard of education. Schools must meet 100% of Required Criteria and 50% of Preferred Criteria. Compliance with stated criteria will be certified by the recently created MoEYS School Management Review Committee headed by H.E. Nath Bun Roewn.

Definitions for each Service Criteria are provided in a later section of this document.

Educational Service Criteria	Criteria Status		Remarks
	Required	Preferred	
1. Rien Kua fees (linked to promotion) abolished	√		
2. Practices of mandatory student purchases of teacher goods (e.g., cakes, study papers, etc) in classrooms abolished	√		
3. 6-hour School Day as per international standards	√		For primary level
4. Evidence that Student Council is active and engaged in school management	√		Standardized criteria required
5. Evidence that School Support Committee is active and engaged in school management	√		Standardized criteria required
6. Evidence of regular school-parent meetings (minimum twice per year)	√		
7. Evidence of student-centered methodology in at least 50% of classes.		√	Standardized criteria required
8. Teaching aid availability with evidence of high user rates	√		
9. High rates of textbook availability (1 book per child for all core subjects)		√	
10. Student-Teacher Ratio of 40:1 or less		√	
11. Evidence of ICT in education (e.g., digital literacy, use of tablets for learning, etc)		√	Standardized criteria required
12. Evidence of life skills programming using newly approved MoEYS curricular documents		√	Standardized criteria required
13. Evidence of career counseling services		√	Standardized criteria required
14. Evidence of girls' counseling services			Standardized criteria required
15. Evidence of use of newly approved Reading Benchmarks for Grades 1-2		√	Standardized criteria required
16. Extracurricular activities (e.g. Subject Clubs, Sports, Art, etc)		√	
17. High standards of building maintenance and hygiene	√		
18. High standards of toilet hygiene	√		
19. Evidence of support for poor students (e.g., school mapping, scholarships, etc)		√	
20. Operational science lab with high user rates (secondary level only)		√	Standardized criteria required
21. Operational library with high user rates	√		Standardized criteria required
22. Playground/Sports facilities availability		√	
23. Availability of free remedial classes for learners with special needs		√	
24. Canteen service for students that promotes high standards of nutrition at reasonable prices		√	
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	



## 5.2 Role of Development Partners in Supporting A Social Equity Fund

Development Partners would have an important role to play in making a Social Equity Fund work since it is unlikely that many schools could achieve the educational quality and governance structures required without external outside support. Such support would be especially important in the early stages of school development where investments in training, equipment, and infrastructure would be required. Again, the role that some donors such as USAID have played in helping local NGOs build their capacity to a point where they are eligible for application to CCC for GPP certification may provide a good model for donors to consider. Such models might be useful in terms of determining the investments needed and how these investments could lead to school certification and access to SEF funding. Some suggestions for development partner support are provided in Box 1.

A well-defined development pathway resourced by donors would also ensure the sustainability of donor investments since schools maintaining their certification would be able to access a continu-

ally replenished equity fund from the government side while middle class contributions from the private side would further enhance localized resourcing. It is essential, however, for the National Review Committee as the certifying body to maintain strict adherence to eligibility criteria by schools and also be willing to make difficult political decisions to withdraw certification when required. Again the willingness of CCC to withdraw certification to NGOs that fail to re-qualify after periodic reviews provides a good profile in courage for the government to follow.<sup>7</sup>

### Box 1: Technical Support Needed from Development Partners to Establish a Social Equity Fund

- Development of goals and operating procedures for a committee certifying eligibility
- Development of goals and operating procedures for a committee that will make awards from an SEF.
- Development of Standardized Criteria Definitions for SEF eligibility and how they will be measured.
- Investments in materials, equipment, and infrastructure to support improved teaching and learning environments in nominated schools.
- Technical support for improved governance and teaching & learning environments
- Development of Guidelines for the use of SEF funds received
- Creation of provincial oversight boards with membership from at least one to two civil society organizations one of which must be an SSC.
- Performance-based Pay Guidelines

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<sup>7</sup> CCC renews NGO certification every 3 years and has in some cases withheld certification when NGOs no longer comply with eligibility criteria.