

The Royal Government of Cambodia has made significant progress in establishing legal foundations and a set of comprehensive policy frameworks to promote education for all in Cambodia. However, challenges remain with access to education, quality of education, and gaps in the implementation of many policies.

Key Recommendations:

World Vision calls for the Royal Government of Cambodia to:

- Develop an inter-ministerial legal framework for early childhood education (ECE) and expand support for wider coverage of ECE.
- Make quality education more inclusive and equitable for the most vulnerable children, including children with disability (CWD), by training teachers about inclusive education for all.
- Focus on improving the knowledge and skills of primary school teachers to effectively instruct children in basic literacy and mathematics through cooperation with INGOs for equivalency certification as part of the MOEYS's aim for upgrading teachers.
- Ensure that schools are safe environments for children through effective implementation of the *Policy on Child Protection in Schools (2016)* and the *Safe School Guidelines (2013)*.
- Improve responsiveness and accountability of local decision makers by fully supporting scale-up of the Social Accountability Framework (ISAF) as part of Cambodia's decentralization process.

Current State of Education in Cambodia

Rebuilding its national public educational system has been Cambodia's top priority since the nation emerged from the destructive Khmer Rouge period.¹ Constitution Articles 65 & 66 guarantee citizens' rights to standardized and quality education.² The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) has consistently and actively collaborated with relevant stakeholders, including development partners, communities and the private sector to develop the nation's public primary education system.³ The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has recently accelerated reform of the education sector that began in 2001.⁴ The result is that many laws, policies, action plans, and standards have been passed to increase access to and quality of education including: an annual *Education Strategic Plan (i.e. ESP 20014-2018)*, the *Law on Education (2007)*, *Child Friendly School Policy (2007)* and *Master Plan for CFS 2015-2018*, *Policy on Education for Children with Disabilities (2008)*, *National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development (2010)*, *Standards for Primary School Library (2011)*, *Teacher Policy (2013)*, *Teacher Policy Action Plan (2015)*, and *Policy on Child Protection in Schools (2016)*. While World Vision (WV) recognizes this progress, significant challenges remain in the areas of early

childhood education, access by all children to education, and the quality of that education.

• Early Childhood Education

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is recognized by the RGC as an important way to promote enrolment in primary school and as a means for building an educational foundation that will improve child learning outcomes, minimize early grade repetition rates, and reduce the likelihood of school drop-outs.⁵ Improvement in ECE is evidenced by the fact that 64.07% of 5-year olds participated in ECE in 2014-2015⁶ compared to 35% in 2008-2009.⁷ However, only about 20% of 3-year olds and 30% of 4-year olds accessed ECE in 2014-2015 so overall participation by children 3-5 years old is still low - especially for children in remote areas, ethnic minority children, children with disability, and children from poor families.⁸ Greater coverage requires more supporting regulations, increased RGC funding, and improved capacity for ECE service management and teacher instruction.⁹

- **Access to Education at Primary and Lower Secondary Schools**

Enrolment, attendance, and completion at primary and lower secondary school remain a challenge. As an example, the 2014-2015 Net Admission Rate (NAR) for girls in public and private primary schools combined was 95.4%, a decline of 4.6%.¹⁰ Despite high enrolment rates (98.2% in 2013-2014), the 2014 Demographic & Health Survey (DHS) found that of children aged 6-11 years of age, only 81% of females and 83% of males were currently attending primary school.¹¹ Further, the primary school completion rate in 2015 decreased to 80.62% from 84% in the previous year; and in 2015, 9 more districts than in 2014 had fewer than 80% of eligible children completing primary school.¹² Projections indicate that this downward trend will continue unless both access and quality components of education are addressed.¹³

Although children are entitled to nine years of free education in Cambodia, research in 2012 found that 53% of student and 67% of parent respondents said they incurred costs for items they expected to be the responsibility of schools and MoEYS.¹⁴ The cost is estimated to be about \$119/year/student,¹⁵ which is a push factors for school dropout, especially for poor households and families with multiple children in school.

- **Quality of Education**

The high primary level net enrollment and relatively high completion rates do not necessarily indicate quality nor does participation in formal education guarantee that children learn. The quality of Cambodia's primary education was scored at 2.9 out of 7 by the World Economic Forum (114th out of 140 countries).¹⁶ And – just 30% of children aged 3-5 are developmentally on track in literacy-numeracy.¹⁷ In a national EGRA (Early Grade Reading Assessment) in 2010, two-thirds of grade 1 students could not read a single familiar word, and almost half of grade 2 students similarly were unable to read any familiar words.¹⁸ A national grade 6 assessment in 2013 showed just 45.7% of students passing Khmer and 43.4% passing math.¹⁹

Poor literacy scores may be partially attributed to lack of access to reading materials as particularly

rural areas remain print-poor. A World Vision study in 2016 found that only around 25% of schools have sufficient books and reading resources according to the MoEYS standards set in 2011.²⁰

Compared to its neighbours, Cambodia has a very high pupil-teacher ratio, the worst in ASEAN at 47:1 (compared to Lao at 26:1, Vietnam at 19:1 and Myanmar at 28:1), which can negatively affect the quality of education.²¹ Additionally, only 58% of existing primary school teachers have completed grade 12, which restricts their ability to both handle professional tasks and improve pedagogical practice.²²

Official teaching hours in Cambodia are 684-760 hours in a school year,²³ a figure which is significantly lower than the international recommendation of 850-1000 hours per academic year.²⁴ The quality of education in Cambodia is further undermined by the informal loss of teaching hours: on average in 2013, 27% of teaching hours (50.5 days) were lost due to additional official school holidays, teacher absence, and shortened teaching sessions.²⁵

Gaps in Education Policy Implementation

Cambodia has a very comprehensive policy framework for children's education. However, there is a noticeable gap between policy and practice. For instance, though in place since 2007 CFS policy is still not fully implemented: basic facilities that enhance school access, such as toilets, handwashing points and clean running water are not improving.²⁶ Currently, almost 50% of schools lack a water supply and 30% lack toilets.²⁷ The absence of such facilities results in school dropout and absenteeism, especially for girls.

Additionally, recent research shows that schools are not necessarily safe places for children. An astounding 73% of students (76% of boys, 70% of girls) report experiencing at least one form of violence in school. Half of the students, both girls and boys, rated their school (including classrooms and playground) as 'unsafe' or 'somewhat unsafe'.²⁸ In addition, more than one quarter of girls 13-17 years who reported being abused, say that first incident of childhood sexual abuse occurred at school.²⁹ All of this adds to the urgency for MoEYS

to fully implement the recently adopted *Policy on Child Protection in Schools*.

Finally, policy on education for children with disabilities has been enacted since 2008; however, children with disabilities, especially severe disabilities, still have limited access to education. This is due to lack of teacher capacity, teaching resources or adaptation equipment or accessible buildings.³⁰ It is estimated that as many as 25% of children with a disability never access any form of education.³¹

In response to education issues in Cambodia, World Vision calls on the Royal Government of Cambodia to address issues of access and quality of education by:

- Developing an inter-ministerial legal framework for ECE with primary responsibility under MoEYS; and allocate recurring costs in the MoEYS budget. Then, expanding ECE coverage with focus on disadvantaged areas.

- Equipping teachers with training on inclusive education concepts and pedagogical methods to support students with disabilities in educational settings.
- Collaborating with NGOs to develop instruction for teachers in early grades, about how to teach children to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills.
- Ensuring that schools are safe environments for children through effective implementation of the *Policy on Child Protection in Schools (2016)*; and focusing on training for teachers in positive forms of discipline; as well as improved implementation of the *Dimension 3 Safe School Guidelines (2013)* under the MoEYS *Child Friendly School Policy (2007)* frame.
- Improving responsiveness and accountability of local decision makers by fully supporting scale-up of Implementation of the Social Accountability Framework (ISAF) as part of Cambodia's decentralization process.

¹ UNICEF. *Education*. Available at <http://www.unicef.org/cambodia/3.Education.pdf>.

² RGC. *Constitution of Cambodia (amended in 1999)*.

³ MoEYS (2014). *National Education for All Committee: The National Education for All 2015 Review Report*.

⁴ UNICEF. *Education*. Available at <http://www.unicef.org/cambodia/3.Education.pdf>.

⁵ NEP (2008). *The Impact of Preschool on Early Childhood Education in Cambodia: A Study of Six NGO-Sponsored Preschools in Battambang, Kampong Chhnang and Phnom Penh*.

⁶ MoEYS (2016). *Education Congress – (Report on) MoEYS performance in the academic year 2014-2015 and goals for the academic year 2015-2016*.

⁷ MoEYS. *Early Childhood Education*. Available at <http://www.moeys.gov.kh/en/early-childhood-education.html>. See also ESWG (2015). *Joint Government-Development Partners Cambodia Education Sector Review*.

⁸ MoEYS (2016). *Education Congress – p. 18*.

⁹ MoEYS (2015). *The National Education for All: 2015 Review Report*.

¹⁰ MoEYS (2016). *Education Congress document*.

¹¹ National Institute of Statistics, Directorate General for Health, and ICF International (2015). *Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey (CDHS) 2014*.

¹² MoEYS (2016). *Education Congress report*.

¹³ ESWG (2015). *Joint Government-Development Partners Cambodia Education Sector Review*.

¹⁴ NEP (2012). *Promoting Rights in Schools: The State of Children's Rights in Cambodian Primary Schools*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ WEF (2015). *Global Competitiveness Report, World Economic Forum*, available at <http://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-report-2015-2016/economies/#economy=KHM>

¹⁷ CDHS (2014).

¹⁸ USAID (2015). *Data for Education Programming in Asia and Middle East: Assessment of Early Grade Reading in the Education Sector in Cambodia*.

¹⁹ MoEYS (2015). *Results of Grade Six Student Achievement from the National Assessment in 2013*.

²⁰ World Vision (2016). *Current Situation & Use of Primary School Libraries: A snapshot across 5 provinces in Cambodia*.

²¹ UNDP (2015). *Human Development Report 2015*.

²² CDRI (2015). *Cambodia Education 2015 - Employment and Empowerment*.

²³ MoEYS (2004). *Policy for Curriculum Development (2005-2009)*.

²⁴ NEP (2015). *Teaching Hours in Primary Schools in Cambodia*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ See UNESCO, VSO, NEP (2014). *Right to Education in Cambodia: Community Level Research as well as ESWG (2015). Joint Government-Development Partners Cambodia Education Sector Review*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) & Plan International (2014). *Are Schools Safe and Gender Equal Spaces: Finding from a Baseline Study of School Related Gender-based Violence in Five Countries in Asia*.

²⁹ Ministry of Women's Affairs, UNICEF Cambodia, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014). *Findings from Cambodia's Violence Against Children Survey 2013*.

³⁰ Plan International (2014). *Vulnerable and Marginalised Children's Access to, Learning and Participation in School: Understanding the Challenges*.

³¹ NGOCRC (2013). *UPR Submission on Cambodian Child Rights*.