

**Regional Research Paper**

# **Education Reform in Cambodia: Progress and Challenges in Basic Education**

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## **I. Introduction**

Cambodia aspires to reach the status of an upper-middle-income country by 2030 and a high income country by 2050.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the Royal Government is focusing on human resource development to ensure competitiveness in an increasingly open regional labor market<sup>2</sup> among the ASEAN countries. Since 1979, the education system in Cambodia can be divided into three stages<sup>3</sup>: from 1979-1987 general education covered 10 years (4+3+3); from 1987-1994 it was 11 years (5+3+3); and from 1994 to now general education has covered 12 years (6+3+3).

In recent times, education in Cambodia has made significant progress. But schools in remote areas still lack teachers and this has led to an education system of generally poor quality<sup>4</sup> in that while many students do not join classes, classes are nevertheless over-crowded. For this reason students are deterred from studying, they do not acquire knowledge, and many drop out of school at a young age.

Another issue in Cambodia is literacy among its labor force. The Cambodia Economic Survey 2010 revealed that about 18 percent of the labor force (aged 15-64) were either illiterate or had only basic literacy skills, while 35 percent had not completed primary education.<sup>5</sup>

A further challenge is that, according to the World Bank (2005), teachers' pay has, traditionally, been very low, leaving teachers unable to support their families without taking a second job to increase their income. Teachers in Cambodia at that stage earned only USD 35-40 per month in primary schools and USD 60 in upper secondary schools, while it was estimated that a teacher needed a minimum salary of USD 150 to support a typical Cambodian family with five members.<sup>6</sup> Thus, when the salary is below the sum needed, teachers need to take on other work and consequently have insufficient time to plan lessons or to correct students' homework.

However, in 2015, the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport (MoEYS) decided to increase the teacher's salary to USD 124.46 per month for primary school teachers and USD 186.62 for lower secondary teachers. This salary will subsequently be raised to USD 250 per month in accordance with MoEYS' promise of a further 20 percent increase.<sup>7</sup>

The education system does not yet provide learning for children and youths that is sufficient in terms of quality and relevance.<sup>8</sup> This is because some schools lack teachers, there are too many students per class, and there are insufficient materials, core textbooks and library resources. Furthermore, some teachers are absent during the harvest season, some schools are located far from the villages, children are often needed to join the workforce at a young age, the school drop-out rate is high, and school principals often have few leadership and finance management skills, a limited education background, and have, for example, never attended a management training course.

Given the needs of 'out-of-the-way' schools, the (still) low pay of teachers and the insufficient supply of core textbooks and learning materials, the basic requirements needed by schools in order to improve education quality are still not in place. Therefore, MoEYS has been undertaking some profound reforms, particularly during the past three years.

To address the problems outlined above MoEYS set four education strategy plans from 2000 until 2018.<sup>9</sup> First, the education strategy plan for 2000-2005 focused on enrolment in primary school by: 1. starting to cancel enrolment payments; 2. providing school funding using a formula that gave particular support to rural schools in poor areas; and 3. building primary schools across the whole country. Second, the education strategy plan for 2006-2010 shifted the focus to improving education in secondary schools by :1. building lower secondary schools in all communes and secondary schools in all districts; and 2.giving scholarships to poor students to enable them to complete grade 9.Third, the education strategy plan for 2009-2013 put a focus on improving internal efficiency by:1.Reducing repetition and drop-out rates ;and 2. Strengthening institutions for decentralization. Fourth, the education strategy plan for 2014-2018 focused on: 1. equality and the quality of education; 2. the response of education to the needs of the economy; and 3. effective management of MoEYS staff.

Figures achieved during the first year of reform in 2014 showed the pass rate for grade 12 students increased by 25.7 percent. The second reform in 2015 achieved a pass rate at grade 12 that was up by 55.8 percent. And, following the third reform in 2016, the pass rate for the same grade grew by 62 percent.<sup>10</sup> As a result, in 2014, only 11 students earned a grade A, in 2015 that figure was 108, and in 2016 it had risen to 405.<sup>11</sup>

This paper will describe the progress and the challenges in primary and secondary school reform in Cambodia, and the key research questions will focus on:

1. What are the achievements in primary and secondary school reform?
2. What are the challenges in primary and secondary school reform?

The methods used in this paper are a literature review, document review and consultations with senior researchers and education experts.

## **II. Key Progress Indicators and Challenges in Basic Education**

Basic education focuses on primary and lower secondary education, and spans grades 1 to 9.<sup>12</sup> The key indicators in basic education are the rates for student enrolment, student drop-out and student grade repetition, as well as the relationship between the teacher and student.

## a. Student Enrolment

At this basic level students study basic skills such as reading and writing, along with subjects that contribute to their appreciation of culture and art, and their physical and emotional well-being. Specifically, the subjects studied at this level are Khmer, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education, English and 'special activities'. The enrolment figures and, according to MoEYS, the quality of primary and secondary school education have improved a little<sup>13</sup>, but the level of achievement of students who study these basic subjects is unclear as there is no national assessment test conducted at grade 9. In Cambodia, despite having made good progress from a very low base, some provinces are still falling below the expected norms. Of particular concern are the outcomes for secondary education where enrolment and completion rates for lower secondary are markedly less than expected.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 1. The student enrolment rates 2010-2016**

	2010-2011		2012-2013		2014-2015		2015-2016	
	Total	Girls	Total	Girls	Total	Girls	Total	Girls
Primary School	2,191,192	1,043,382	2,173,384	1,022,893	2,012,175	970,999	2,010,673	971,812
Lower Secondary School	560,868	270,458	534,710	263,369	546,678	275,137	558,464	285,399

Source: Education Statistics and Indicator 2010-2016, Moeys

In 2015-2016, the number of students enrolled in primary school in the whole country was 2,010,673 (93.9 percent) in total of whom 971,812 (98.4 percent of the relevant female age group) were girls. This number represented a decrease of 180,519 compared with the 2010-2011 figure of 2,191,192 in total, of whom 1,043,382 were girls. In lower secondary school, the student enrolment figure was 558,464 in total, of whom girls accounted for 285,399. These numbers were also lower than those for the school year 2010-2011 by 2,404.

The Net Enrolment Rate in primary school for the year 2015-2016 was 93.9 percent - for girls 98.4 percent -, and in the year 2014-2015 the overall student enrolment increased to 94.5 percent, with a slight decrease of 97.9 percent for girls. The Gross Enrolment Rate in lower secondary education was 53.8 percent, which rose to a total of 56.5 percent when private schools were included.<sup>15</sup>

The number of students in private primary schools in 2015-2016 was 95,230 including 46,853 girls (49.2 percent of the total). Net admission rate was 95.9 percent, 95.4 percent for girls, a decrease of 3.5 percent.

The Gender Parity Index (GPI) of gross enrolment rates in lower secondary school increased every year for the years shown, indicating that the gap between the enrolment rates of girls and boys was narrowing, and growth was over 0.34 percent. This means that the gross enrolment rate rose from 0.68 percent in the school year 2002- 2003 to 1.02 percent in the year 2012-2013. This growth of the GPI (and the better figures for girls enrolment) was of substantial significance and the main reason is that MoEYS was giving scholarships to female students.<sup>16</sup>

The main reason why the student enrolment rate dropped in 2016 is that the school-age population decreased to about 290,824 students of whom 141,581 were girls. This number is less than the school-age population in 2011, which was 320,695 in total (155,336 girls). In rural areas in 2016, the school-age population was 270,006 of whom 24,616 were girls, while the school-age population in rural areas in 2011 was 226,854 of whom 110,904 were girls. Similarly, the number of school-age students in urban areas in 2016 was 56,188, of whom 27,189 were girls, but in 2011 that number was 50,689 of whom 24,616 were girls. In summary, the school-age population in Cambodia in 2016 dropped across the whole country, in both urban and rural areas.

#### **b. Student drop-out rates**

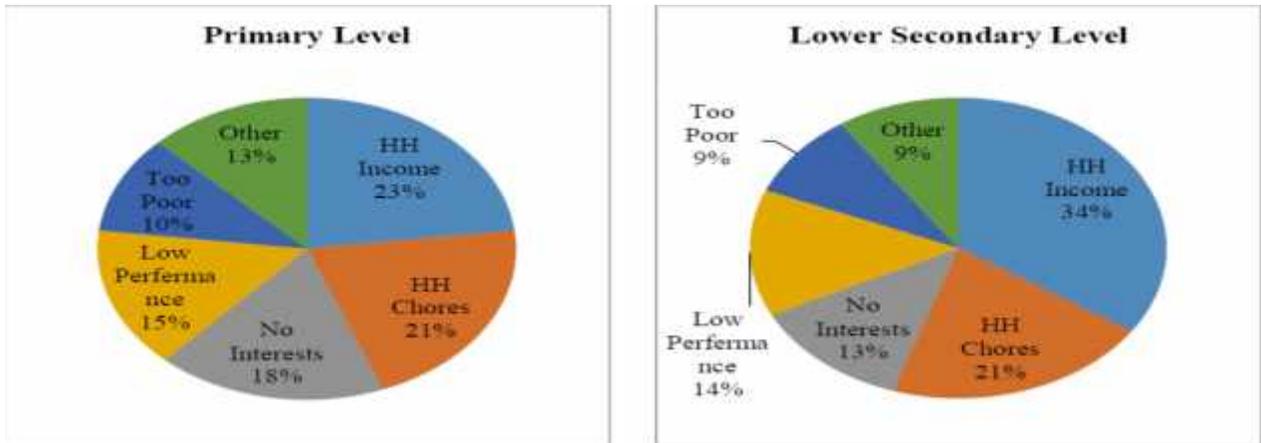
In 2015-2016, the drop-out rate in lower secondary schools was 19.2 percent, while in 2014-2015 it was 21 percent. In primary education in 2015-2016 it was 6.2 percent, overall, and 7.2 percent for girls. In the school year 2014-2015 there was an 8.3 percent student dropout rate overall, 7.2 percent for girls.<sup>17</sup>

Looking at the drop-out percentage rates in primary and lower secondary schools from 2003 to 2012, in 2009, the student drop-out rate at primary school level was the highest at almost 8 percent for both males and females. In lower secondary schools, the highest student drop-out rate occurred in the year 2011. Of particular note, the drop-out rates for female students are higher at both school levels. Drop-out rates in the last few years show a slight decrease overall.<sup>18</sup>

In respect of the student drop-out rates in the year 2012 to 2013 in primary schools in all provinces, the statistics from EMIS (Education Management Information System) show that drop-out rates in Cambodia are relatively high in coastal and plateau regions. At the primary level, eight provinces had two-digit drop-out rates, including Koh Kong, Stung Treng, and Ratanakiri, which were the top three with drop-out rates in the academic year 2012-2013 of more than 50 percent. Overall, female drop-out rates were higher in most provinces, regardless of their geographical locations.<sup>19</sup>

Drop-out rates in urban areas are lower than those in rural areas: the drop-out rate at primary level in urban areas is only 7.8 percent compared with 10.9 percent in rural areas. Similarly, the drop-out rate at lower secondary school level in urban areas is only 14.3 percent compared with 23.2 percent in rural areas. Such geographical differences may be explained by differences in the number of poor people, a disproportionate number of whom tend to live in rural areas.

**Figure 1. Reasons for School Drop-out**



Source: Author’s calculation from CSES 2003-2012

The pie charts in Figure 1 show that, at primary level, the main reason why students drop out of school are to help their family to generate income (23 percent), to conduct chores (21 percent), or that they have no interest in studying (18 percent). Other reasons include low performance at school, family impoverishment, and ‘other’ (unspecified reasons) (38 percent in total).

At lower secondary level, the reasons why students drop-out largely echo those at primary level. Among those reasons, the need to generate income accounts for the highest percentage (34 percent), and family impoverishment for the lowest percentage (9 percent). The need to conduct chores, and low performance at school are other significant reasons.

### 2.3 Student Grade Repetition

According to the definition given by UNESCO in 1984, a “repeater” is a student who stops his or her study progression to repeat the education received in the previous year.

**Table 2. Student Grade Repetition in 2010-2016**

	2010-2011	2013-2014	2015-2016
Primary School	158,287	105,353	135,678
Lower Secondary School	11,818	7,660	12,262

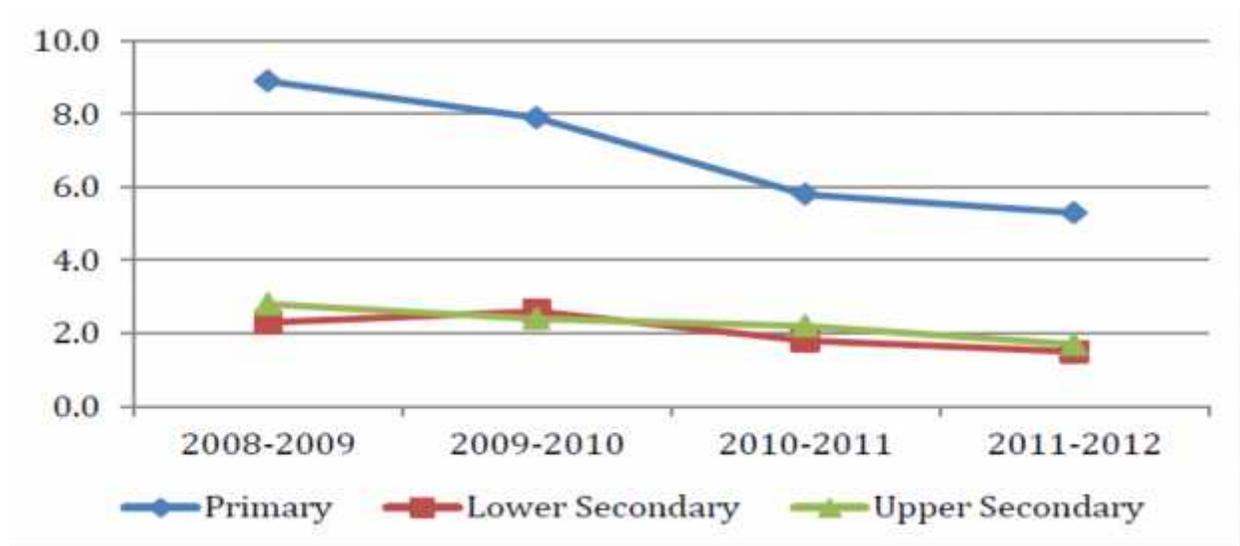
Source: Author’s calculation base on Education Statistics and Indicator 2010-2016, Moeys

In primary school, the number of students repeating a grade in 2015-2016 in the whole country was 135,678. In 2010-2011, that number was 22,609 higher at 158,287. In lower secondary school in 2015-2016, 12,262 students repeated grades in the whole country, an increase of 444 compared with the school year 2010-2011 for which the figure was 11,818.

In 2015-2016, the primary school student repetition rate was 6.7 percent (8.1 percent for girls). In 2014-2015 it was 5.1 percent (4.3 percent for girls).<sup>20</sup>

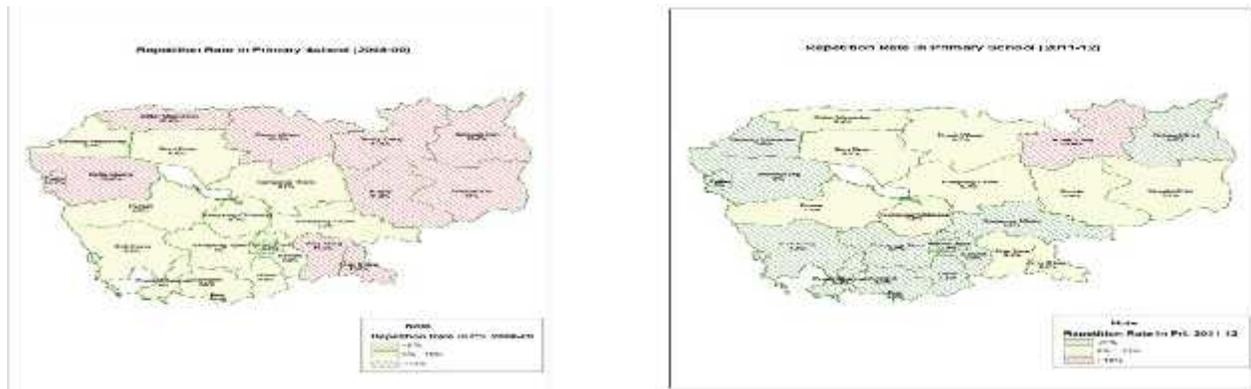
The repetition rate at all levels dropped in the year 2011-2012, although it had increased in the year 2008-2009, when the student repetition rate at primary level was highest at 9 percent, and the number had grown a little to 2.3 percent for the same year at secondary level (see Figure 2). During the following years (to 2011-2012), the student repetition rate decreased from 9 to 4.6 percent at primary level, and from 2.3 to 0.9 percent at secondary level.

**Figure 2. Grade repetition rates by level of education 2008-2009 to 2011-2012**



Source: Education Strategic Plan 2014-2018

## *Repetition Rates in Primary School SY 2008-2009 Repetition Rates in Primary School SY 2011-2012*



The maps compare repetition rates at primary schools in 2008-2009 and 2011-2012 in all provinces in Cambodia. In 2008-2009, the percentage gap in the repetition rates at primary school ranged from <5 percent to >10 percent. There are eight provinces in which the student repetition rate at primary level was over 10 percent compared with 12 provinces that had percentage rates from 5 to 10. In 2011-2012, Stung Treng had the highest student repetition rate at over 10 percent. Ten provinces had rates lower than 5 percent, while 10 provinces had rates from 5 to 10 percent.

### **2.4 The Relationship between Teachers :**

The relationship between students and teachers is an important element in education outcomes. The students receive knowledge from the teacher in many ways: the quality of teaching; the behavior of teachers when giving their lessons; and the quality of the information they provide to students. However, there are few students that know and accept these factors.<sup>21</sup>

Some students are afraid to go to school if they have missed a class. The school punishments include standing on one leg, collecting water, and running around the school. These punishments can scare students and are sometimes among the reasons why students drop out of school. Indeed, some students decide to stop studying if they are late coming to class, rather than face punishment.

### **2.5 The Challenges at Primary and Secondary School Level**

#### **Lack of teachers in rural and remote areas**

Teacher shortages in rural and remote areas in recent years have led to the recruitment of non-teaching staff into teaching, the relocation of teachers to areas of high need, and allowances for hardship postings.<sup>22</sup> Teaching postings in areas of need are, not surprisingly, not very attractive. Furthermore, low teacher pay makes it difficult for teachers to work in areas without family

support, housing or land to continue farming. It is generally agreed that the top-up amounts have proved insufficient to cover the costs of living in a more challenging environment and have thus failed to be an attractive incentive to lure newly qualified teachers from urban centers into less-advantaged localities. Between 2003 and 2006, about 2,650 teaching staff in service agreed to be assigned to schools facing teacher shortages.<sup>23</sup> In order to address a never-ending shortage of teachers in under-served areas, MoEYS has sought to promote local area teacher recruitment as a means to match teacher supply and demand. In order to address historical barriers to entry to Provincial Teacher Training Colleges, MoEYS has waived grade 12 entry requirements for potential candidates from provinces and districts where upper secondary education options are unavailable. Hence, potential teacher trainees from remote areas can gain access to teacher training after completing only their lower secondary studies. These teacher trainees are more likely to return home and accept long-term postings after graduation.

As Cambodian educational opportunities expand and a new generation of teachers enters the classroom, traditional assumptions about teacher distribution are challenged. At present, remote primary schools—with smaller and younger staffing profiles—exhibit a substantially larger share of teachers who are upper secondary school graduates than urban or rural primary schools. Rural schools have the greatest share (56 percent) of 9+2 teachers (students who have graduated from grade 9 and then have trained for two years more, can become primary school teachers), while urban schools follow closely behind (41 percent). However, while 75 percent of primary school teachers in remote areas completed their upper secondary diploma before entering teacher training, 6 percent hold only a primary school level qualification.<sup>24</sup> And, many teacher posts in remote areas have remained unfilled. The situation is especially dire in localities with large ethnic minority populations. Active teacher training and recruitment policies for these marginal communities are still needed.

Moreover, the numbers of teachers and school principals are unbalanced in the country as a whole, partly because of low salaries but also because there are few incentives to attract staff to work in rural and remote areas.<sup>25</sup>

## **Student Issues**

The non-attendance at school of both students and teachers is a challenge to the quality of education, particularly in rural areas.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, students sometimes come to class late, which affects teachers' ability to effectively manage the classroom and the lessons. During the rice planting season, absenteeism among students is also more frequent as they are asked by their families to assist in rice cultivation. The high cost of a child's education is also a burden for parents. Poor children cannot afford to undertake private/extra classes and this tends to diminish their achievements. They have an increased risk of dropping out or repeating a grade. Teachers in rural areas are also frequently absent from their classes, working during the planting season or undertaking additional jobs. The limited capacity of some teachers is also a challenge. For

example, teachers are instructed in Child Centered Learning and Teaching during the pre-service training, but some of them fail to put it into practice and still use a lecture method to teach their students. These are important barriers for acquiring mastery of curricular content or for adhering to pedagogically pertinent teaching practices. Distance from school, geographical isolation, a long rainy season - all of these factors can have a negative effect on student performance and, directly or indirectly, affect student outcomes in terms of cognitive development, grade repetition and drop-out.

### **Low quality teachers**

Almost all secondary teachers have completed at least grade 12, 18 percent have some post-secondary education, and younger teachers tend to have reached higher educational achievements.<sup>27</sup> However, most teachers achieve only low-level C, D, and E markings in grade 12 examinations. Their knowledge is thus limited so they are similarly constrained in what they are able to share with their students. For instance, few teachers wish to teach at schools in remote areas, so these schools have to recruit whatever teachers they can, regardless of quality. Nonetheless, there is little job turnover. About 60 percent of primary school teachers have taught in only one school, while a mere 8 percent have taught in three schools throughout their professional careers.<sup>28</sup> When teachers are busy with jobs other than teaching, they also have insufficient time to create lesson plans or to correct students' homework. As a result, the education quality can be impoverished.

### **Lack of teachers**

In 2008, Cambodia had about 50,000 primary and 25,000 secondary school teachers.<sup>29</sup> These numbers remain insufficient to meet needs: as Table 1 in the annex shows, in 2015 the figure for primary school teachers was still only 53,989 and for secondary school teachers, 24,928. The figures for some provinces like Kep (201 primary school teachers and 134 secondary school teachers) and Mondul Kiri (380 primary school teachers and 77 secondary school teachers), were lower than those for Phnom Penh with 3,963 primary school, and 2,887 secondary school teachers.

The present restrictions on annual recruitment do not follow the standard<sup>30</sup>, because the number of newly trained teachers does not meet the needs of schools<sup>31</sup>. More teachers are retiring than are starting teacher training because, after they finish grade 12, the brightest students do not apply for teacher training. Instead, they turn to other careers because teachers receive a low salary that is insufficient to meet their needs. Rural areas have over-crowded classes that are hard to teach. Remote schools cannot meet teachers' needs in terms of food, clothing, medicine and electricity.

Based on MoEYS research, while in 2014-2015 there were 3109 basic education teachers 3109 that met the needs of the whole country<sup>32</sup> some schools were still lacking basic education teachers. According to MOEYS, about 439 secondary schools lacked a sufficient number of basic education teachers<sup>33</sup>.

In 2015-2016 there were a total of 88,818 teaching staff, of whom 51 percent were primary school teachers, 31 percent were lower secondary school teachers, 13 percent upper secondary school teachers, and 5 percent kindergarten teachers.<sup>34</sup> About 2,000 people drop out of teaching each year. (For example, in 2012, 2,017 teachers gave up teaching, and in 2013 that number was 2,137.) These are significant numbers, given that MoEYS takes on only around 5,000 new teacher trainees each year.<sup>35</sup>

**Table 3. Teacher shortages**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Education System</b>	<b>Need</b>	<b>Lack Teachers</b>
2015	Primary School	47 760	1961
	Lower Secondary School	27 067	909
2016	Primary School	48 637	23 36
	Lower Secondary School	27 067	909
2017	Primary School	50 497	3375
	Lower Secondary School	27 451	1306
2018	Primary School	52 948	4040
	Lower Secondary School	27 824	1309

Source: MoEYS /UNICEF /

### **Low teachers' salaries**

The low teacher salaries in Cambodia are barely sufficient to support living costs; teachers therefore often have second jobs—as taxi drivers, farmers, workers and sellers—to supplement their income. This seriously affects the quality of teaching and learning as teachers do not have enough time to update lessons or to monitor student performance. It is also a major factor behind the student drop-out rates.<sup>36</sup>

According to the World Bank (2005) teachers in Cambodia at that stage earned only USD 35-40 per month in primary schools and USD 60 in upper secondary schools: it was estimated at the time that a teacher needed a minimum salary of USD 150 to support a typical Cambodian family with five members.<sup>37</sup>

The situation regarding salaries has, however, started to improve: the Cambodian Independent Teachers Association (CITA) urged the government, international donors and others working in

the Cambodian Education sector to work to raise the basic salary of all teachers to USD 250 per month by 2015.<sup>38</sup> This would have meant a significant increase to the 20 percent annual increase promised by MoEYS, which would have provided primary school teachers with a salary of USD 124.46, and lower secondary teachers with USD 186.62 by 2015. It is clear from Table 3 below that in order to have achieved a harmonized basic teachers' pay level by 2015 the government would have needed to increase primary teacher salaries by 38 percent and lower secondary teachers salaries by just under 30 percent.

**Table 4. The increased percentages in teachers' salaries**

<b>Year</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
Primary 20%	\$50	\$60	\$72	\$86.40	\$103.68	<b>\$124.46</b>
Primary 38%	\$50	\$69	\$95.22	\$131.40	\$181.33	<b>\$250.23</b>
Lower Secondary 20%	\$75	\$90	\$108	\$129.60	\$155.52	<b>\$186.624</b>
Lower Secondary 28%	\$75	\$96	\$122.88	\$157.28	\$201.31	<b>\$257.67</b>

Source: CITA (2015)

Table 3 above shows the projected increases in teachers' basic pay if the government kept to its schedule of a 20 percent annual pay rise, and the pay rise required to get teachers to the basic pay urged by CITA for 2015 (that there should be an increase in all teachers' basic salaries to a target of USD 250 per month). The reason why harmonization has been supported is to protect the integrity of the entire education system, rather than promoting an internal brain-drain whereby the best primary teachers seek to become lower secondary teachers and thus leave the primary sector. CITA is, therefore, committed to harmonized basic wages for teachers to promote the value of education at all levels and to allow for specific additional allowances depending on teaching grade and qualifications. The figure of USD 250 reflects the education and training teachers undergo: teachers commonly have more years of education and are more likely than other civil servants or workers to speak at least one additional language. Teachers are also more likely to be attending continuing education programs than other civil servants.

### **School infrastructure problems**

As shown in Table 2 in the annex, some schools still lack classrooms. For instance, Kep province has 21 primary schools with 162 classes, and five secondary schools with 53 classes compared while Battambang province has 634 primary schools with 5178 classes, and 108 secondary schools with 874 classes.

The major problems with schooling in Cambodia include standard of living for teachers, poor infrastructure and a lack of space. Although the first mentioned is the issue that is the most significant,<sup>39</sup> school infrastructure remains an issue that needs attention. At the primary level there are poor school buildings and not enough places/desks<sup>40</sup>. The poor condition of roads outside of the main towns, which is even worse in the wet season, can make field trips and visits

to schools very time consuming. Internet access and the postal service are very limited so that paperwork is often delivered via buses that run between Phnom Penh and the provinces. In the rainy season, some roads to school are flooded which prevents some students from attending classes. Adequate infrastructure and working conditions are important in supporting the teaching function and enabling students to learn. Appropriate physical facilities and the availability of teaching aids provide the basic elements for engagement in a teaching-learning relationship. Therefore, inadequacies in this area hamper the effectiveness of teaching delivery. Furthermore, some school building has not been completed on time.

In addition, the implementation of guidelines at the sub-national and school level is still limited, and some schools in rural areas have no means of transportation (motorcycles and boats with engines), or properly furnished libraries with books to promote reading.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the implementation of school health programs does not yet match set plans; sanitation facilities for promoting health in school are likewise not in accordance with standards; and, in some provinces, the delivery of administrative letters through a single channel is not yet working properly.<sup>42</sup> Other issues include school sizes, location relative to the population, and the number of students per school.<sup>43</sup>

### **Limitation of materials**

The libraries in most schools operate only one shift (that does not match the schools' shift) and have insufficient materials to promote reading or to meet students' needs.<sup>44</sup> The limited quality of education can also be attributed to a lack of teaching materials, which relates to the government-published textbooks for all grade levels. In some schools, three to five students have to share one copy of each textbook. For example, among the more than ten subjects a student must take during the school year, he or she is allowed to borrow only three kinds of textbooks. Students have to come up with their own solutions for acquiring materials for the other seven subjects. Those who are from families with sufficient funds can buy the remaining textbooks, while poor students have to share textbooks among friends who sit next to them. In addition, the school libraries do not have specific librarians to take care of the library operations. Very few schools have a laboratory or computer room.<sup>45</sup> In Cambodia, the lack of facilities and equipment in schools, especially in rural areas, are issues of particular concern.<sup>46</sup>

### **Limitation of Education Budget**

The Ministry of Education Youth and Sport's budget has increased from year to year.<sup>47</sup> According to budget law for 2017, MoEYS is set to receive USD 627 million, up from the USD 502million in the 2016 budget.<sup>48</sup> While the budget for the education sector increased, the percentage of GDP spent on the education sector also increased from 15.5 percent in 2013 to 18.3 percent in 2016.<sup>49</sup> An increase in budget for education is a sign of government commitment

towards the education sector; it is equally important that the allocated budget is spent efficiently. However, it still falls short of internationally recommended minimums. With less than the suggested minimum, MoEYS has been obliged to prioritize, which has limited the funding available for reforms and issues that need to be addressed. Some teachers survive by charging for extra classes or courses. Some, as already discussed, have second jobs, and schools need more books, buildings, restrooms, tables and chairs because much of the old furniture has become unusable. In response to infrastructure needs, the Ministry's budget proposal also sets aside USD 9 million for building new schools.<sup>50</sup> A greater boost in funding would lead to higher enrolment and a decrease in students dropping out of school. However, the Ministry also needs to give schools more flexibility to meet local demands. For example, one school's request for toilets took three years to fulfil, and even then, the money came from private donors.<sup>51</sup>

New research conducted on 150 schools by MoEYS found that 71 percent lacked training in administration and management skills, and that this was an obstacle in the effective use of school funds.<sup>52</sup>

**In addition to the points raised above, further issues have posed challenges<sup>53</sup>:** Schools lack staff with expertise in accounting and financial management, the school budget is not sufficiently flexible to respond to the needs of local schools, and there is no budget allocation for travelling. This makes it harder for employees in remote areas and some rural areas to receive funding through banks. Furthermore, complicated financial procedures, and a further lack of funding for tools and materials .

### **III. Policy Options**

#### **Lack of teachers in rural and remote areas**

To solve the problem of teacher shortages in rural and remote areas the government could encourage teachers' families to go to live with them, provide scholarships for their children and free health checks. There could be more development in rural and remote areas in terms of transportation and good internet services. Houses could be built, and land could be provided for the family to farm and raise animals to increase their income. Smart students should be encouraged to apply to be teachers and students who achieve grades A, B and C should be allowed to become teachers automatically.<sup>54</sup> MoEYS could allow teachers who agree to teach in rural and remote areas to teach at schools near their hometown. And, insurance could be provided for teachers working in rural and remote areas.

#### **Students' issues**

MoEYS could strongly encourage and motivate students to attend classes regularly, and not give them permission or stop during harvesting and the rainy season. They could also implement education policy so that when students have missed class many times, they fail the exam or

repeat the grade. Teachers should not take money from students for extra classes or to buy class materials.

MoEYS could encourage parents and authorities to let all of their children/students enroll at all education levels, especially in basic education, by developing attractive curriculums.

To reduce the student drop-out rate, MoEYS could give more scholarships, especially to poor students and to those in rural and remote areas, as well as providing school transportation and school health programs. There should also be cooperation with development partners to support poor students. School staff visits to the families of students who have dropped out (to convince the students to come back to school) could be intensified. Furthermore, the government could improve coordination between local authorities, schools and families to jointly solve the drop-out issues.

### **Low teachers' salary**

To improve teachers' living condition, MoEYS could consider further increases to teachers' salaries and provide other benefits such as payments for gasoline and food allowances that match the price of goods in the market. Increasing teachers' salaries could also improve the quality of education by reducing the need for teachers to take second jobs. Then they would have enough time to create lesson plans and correct students' homework. This could deter them from taking money from students for extra classes.

### **School infrastructure problems**

Schools could be built to a standard that makes sufficient provision for spaces/desks. They could also have access to clean water and electricity, and new roads could be constructed and old ones repaired to improve access to schools. To strengthen the capacity of school principals, the government could provide more training in leadership skills, foreign languages - especially English - and technological skills.

MoEYS could find relevant stakeholders, nationally and internationally, to cooperate in strengthening the school curriculum in both primary and secondary schools.

### **Lack of materials**

There could be two or three library opening shifts to enable students to read/research, more textbooks / resources could be provided, and librarians' capacity could be built.

### **Lack of education budget**

The education fund could be increased to ensure that MoEYS can meet demand, including boosting teachers' salaries, developing school curriculums, building more schools and

refurbishing old ones. An increased budget could also provide extra classes, tables, chairs and teaching materials, and enable MoEYS to be flexible in responding to schools' demands.

Moreover, the government could create a simple and reliable formula for an open budgetary accounting system for schools with the approval of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, particularly in terms of a medium-term budgetary framework. The formula could include provisions to: improve the quality of the education management information system so that it is more accurate and reliable and ensure that eligible expenses encompass travelling costs. Training and support could be provided for school staff in respect of financial procedures, and provincial education offices urged to participate in activities to support schools and accelerate the timely provision of funding. A more simplified school budget payment procedure could also be helpful.<sup>55</sup>

#### **IV. Conclusion**

There are four key areas in basic education in Cambodia where progress is needed: student enrolment; student drop-out; student grade repetition; and the relationship between teachers and students.

In 2015-2016, the number of students enrolled in primary school in the whole country decreased by 180,519 compared with 2010-2011. The number of students in lower secondary school was 558,464 in total, of which girls accounted for 285,399. This number was less than the school year 2010-2011 by 2,404.

The number of students enrolling decreased in 2015-2016. The student drop-out rate at primary level is still at its highest percentage. In lower secondary schools, the dropout rate was 19.2 percent, while in 2014-2015 it was 21 percent and in primary education it was 6.2 percent of student dropout and 7.2 percent for girls. In the school year 2014-2015 it was 8.3 percent of student dropout and 7.2 percent for girls.

The reasons why students drop out revolve primarily around the need to generate income – this accounts for 34 percent – while family impoverishment accounts for the lowest rate of 9 percent. The need to undertake chores and low educational performance are other reasons.

In 2015-2016, in primary schools, the number of students in the whole country who repeated a grade was 135,678, a reduction of 22,609 over the 2010-2011 figure of 158,287. In lower secondary school, in 2015-2016 there were 12,262 students in the whole country who repeated a grade. This was an increase of 444 compared with the school year 2010-2011, when the figure was only 11,818.

The relationships between students and their teachers are important influences on the quality of education. The shortage of teachers in rural and remote areas has been addressed by the transfer

of non-teaching staff into teaching, the relocation of teachers into areas of high need, and by allowances given for hardship postings. But the top issue is still low teachers' pay.

Almost all secondary school teachers have completed at least grade 12, and have generally taught at only three schools throughout their professional career. But they do not have enough time to create lesson plans or correct students' homework. The number of primary school teachers has decreased over a 12-year period. The number of teachers is insufficient, and the number of newly trained teachers does not correspond to the actual needs at school level, especially given the heavy requirements of disadvantaged areas and rural schools where the standard of living of education staff has not risen.

As a result of low salaries, teachers often have to take second jobs as taxi drivers, farmers and sellers to supplement their income. The schools' poor infrastructure, insufficient space, lack of internet access and limited postal services, along with the low capacity of school principals, libraries with inadequate furniture and too few reading books, a lack of school health programs and poor administrative letter management are still in need of attention. School sizes, and their locations relative to the population, as well as the high number of students per school, are further issues.

Learning programs are not very attractive for potential beneficiaries and some schools and classes are not able to finish the curriculum; the allocation of learning hours for some subjects does not match the allocation in the curriculum. Technical officials in charge of curriculum development have not addressed the requirements of potential students, and the numbers of students per class are among other challenges in education reform.

Meanwhile, libraries in most schools operate only one shift and do not meet the required standards, and supplementary reading materials to promote reading at school are insufficient. The lack of teaching materials in all schools limits the quality of education: three to five students often share one copy of the textbook. Parental attitudes, poverty and logistical issues are further challenges. The education budget is still inadequate because schools need to increase teacher salaries, add more books, buildings, restrooms, tables and chairs. MoEYS also needs to give schools more flexibility to meet local demands: for example, one school requesting toilets had to wait three years – and even then the money came from private donors.

To improve the quality of education in both primary and secondary schools, the government could increase salaries and provide other benefits such as more training in relevant skills. To recruit more teachers, the government could encourage A, B and C level students to become teachers automatically. More textbooks and information sources could be available in libraries, and the numbers of students per school and class could be reduced. Teachers should be discouraged from acquiring money from students for giving them extra classes. Overall, the government could consider increasing the education fund further to make sure that MoEYS can fully meet the country's education needs.

## Annex

**Table 1: Primary and Secondary school teachers in 2015**

<b>Primary and Secondary school teachers in 2015</b>		
Provinces	Primary School teachers	Secondary school teachers
Kandal	3354	2475
Kep	201	134
Koh Kong	625	245
Kratie	1558	650
Kampong Cham	3538	1590
Kampong Chhnang	1899	997
Kampong Thom	2635	1041
Kampong Speu	2591	1507
Kampot	2516	1393
Takeo	3628	1400
Tbong Khmum	3030	730
Banteay Meanchey	2710	973
Pailin	348	168
Battambang	4301	2076
Pursat	1716	1113
Prey Veng	3558	1621
Preah Vihear	1126	456
Sihanoukville	887	498
Phnom Penh	3963	2887
Mondulkiri	380	77
Ratanakiri	644	138
Siem Reap	4646	1194
Stung Treng	790	274
Svay Rieng	2343	1022
Oddor Meanchey	1002	269
<b>Total</b>	<b>53989</b>	<b>24928</b>

Source: Commune Data Base in 2015

**Table 2: Primary and Secondary Schools in Cambodia 2015**

<b>Primary and Secondary Schools in Cambodia 2015</b>				
<b>Provinces</b>	<b>Primary Schools</b>	<b>Primary School Classes</b>	<b>Secondary Schools</b>	<b>Secondary School Classes</b>
Kandal	373	4199	126	1088
Kep	21	162	5	53
Koh kong	107	668	25	106
Kratie	285	1905	45	249
Kampong Cham	411	3819	98	741
Kampong Chhnang	273	2237	77	488
Kampong Thom	473	3314	78	460
Kampong Speu	323	2861	90	703
Kampot	311	2589	90	623
Takeo	380	4334	93	854
Tboung Khmom	391	3363	71	573
Banteay Meanchey	420	2807	79	446
Pailin	51	293	11	45
Battambang	634	5178	108	874
Pursat	289	1955	54	452
Prey Veng	547	4519	108	838
Preah Vihear	216	1281	51	209
Preah Sihanouk	73	817	27	177
Phnom Penh	161	4018	62	889
Mondulkiri	73	426	11	40
Ratanakiri	187	843	13	57
Siem Reap	577	4801	110	827
Stung Traeng	172	900	25	97
Svay Rieng	267	2227	63	439
Oddor Meanchey	198	2286	26	144
<b>Total</b>	<b>7213</b>	<b>61802</b>	<b>1546</b>	<b>11472</b>

Source: Commune Data Base 2015

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