



**វិទ្យាស្ថានសភាកម្ពុជា**  
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## **Challenges in Basic Education in Oddar Meanchey, Preah Vihear and Banteay Meanchey**

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## 1. Introduction

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) has completed the Education for All National Plan 2003-2015 and has continued to prioritize the improvement of basic education quality by establishing a new Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2014-2018. This has links to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[1]. The ESP 2014-2018 aims to expand and improve basic education and ensure access to free compulsory basic education while raising the quality of education and ensuring free access to basic education for girls, ethnic minorities and disabled children.[2] Despite substantial progress at the national level, some provinces/ areas still lag behind.

This briefing note aims: (1) to briefly illustrate the achievements of the basic education policies at the national level and in the three provinces of Preah Vihear, Oddar Meanchey and Banteay Meanchey; (2) to identify challenges in the effort to improve basic education; and (3) to identify the roles of communes in terms of improving education quality.

## 2. Overview and Progress in Basic Education

To improve the Cambodian education sector in terms of both quantity and quality, the government has implemented a series of policies including the Education Strategic Plan 2001-2005, the Education Sector Support Program 2001-2005, the Education for All National Plan 2003-2015, the Education Strategic Plan 2006-2010, the Education Strategic Plan 2009-2013, and the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2014-2018, with links to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Table 1: Indicators in respect of primary education at the national level

Indicators	2000-2001	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
Net admission rate (%)	76.40	94.30	98.10	94.50	95.90	95.10
Net enrollment rate (%)	83.80	97.00	98.20	97.90	98.40	97.70
Dropout rate (%)	NA	10.50	8.30	6.20	4.60	NA
Completion rate (%)	46.8 (2004-2005)	87.35	88.94	84.10	80.60	79.90
Repetition rate (%)	42.9 (2005-2006)	4.80	5.10	6.70	6.60	NA
Transition rate (%)	82.60	76.80	76.80	78.70	82.10	85.50

Source: MoEYS, Education Statistics and Indicators

Table 1 shows that Cambodia has made significant progress in primary education. The net admission rate has been steady, rising from 83.8 percent in 2000 to 97.7 percent in 2016. This means that almost all children aged 6 are enrolled in grade 1 and almost all children aged 6 to 11 are in school. Other indicators are also generally positive. The dropout rate has been going down, while the repetition and completion rates remain relatively steady. Furthermore,

the transition rates continues to rise – from 82.1 percent in the academic year 2015-2016 to 85.5 percent in the following year. This means that less than 15 percent of primary students do not now move on to lower secondary education.

Table 2: Indicators in respect of lower secondary education at the national level

Indicator	2000-2001	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Gross enrollment rate (%)	NA	NA	NA	55.10	65.50
Promotion rate (%) <sup>1</sup>	NA	77.40	77.20	78.60	80.60
Repetition rate (%)	NA	1.40	1.80	2.20	2.50
Dropout rate (%)	NA	21.20	21.00	19.20	17.00
Transition rate (%)	63.00	69.10	71.10	72.90	76.60

Source: MoEYS, Education Statistics & Indicators

According to Table 2, there has been less success in the lower secondary education sector. The promotion and transition rates are about 80 percent and 76.6 percent, respectively, which means that approximately 23.40 percent of lower secondary students do not reach upper secondary level. The dropout rate is still high, but while the promotion rate has been going up it was still at only 80.6 percent in the academic year 2015-2016. This means that 20 percent of lower secondary students do not move on to the next grade in the following year. Transition rates in primary and secondary education are 85.5 percent and 76.6 percent, respectively. These transition rates coupled with high dropout rates could mean that quite a number of children do not make their way to upper secondary education.

Nationally, Cambodia has made significant progress in terms of the indicators shown above. In addition, the number of primary and lower secondary schools has increased from 5835 in 2000 to 8336 in 2015. The number of students and teaching staff has also been increasing.[3] In addition to the education policies mentioned above, other important education policies have been developed and implemented. These include teacher training programs, curriculum improvements, and the Child Friendly School Policy. [4]

### 3. Progress in Basic Education in Oddar Meanchey, Preah Vihear and Banteay Meanchey

In comparison with the national level indicators, it is interesting to note that the net enrollment and promotion rates in primary education have been steadily decreasing in Oddar Meanchey and Preah Vihear provinces (see Table 3). In contrast, dropout rates and repetition rates have been increasing (see Table 3).

<sup>1</sup> The promotion rate relates to the proportion of students from a cohort enrolled in a given grade at a given school year who study in the next grade in the following school year.

Table 3: Indicators in respect of primary education in Oddar Meanchey and Preah Vihear

Indicators	Oddar Meanchey			Preah Vihear		
	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Net Enrollment Rate (%)	92.50	87.70	84.30	96.80	95.30	93.60
Promotion Rate (%)	82.10	82.10	80.60	81.00	81.00	78.60
Repetition Rate (%)	5.40	5.40	9.20	8.90	8.90	12.10
Dropout Rate (%)	12.40	12.40	10.20	10.10	10.10	9.30
Transition Rate (%)	68.30	69.00	71.40	63.00	77.70	78.90

Source: MoEYS, Education Statistics and Indicators

Table 4 shows that in Banteay Meanchey the transition and promotion rates are a bit lower than the national rates. Furthermore, the dropout rate is higher than the national equivalent. This means that 33 percent of students do not reach high school, and 22.6 percent drop out. These figures are high.

Table 4: Indicators in respect of lower secondary education in Banteay Meanchey

Indicators	Banteay Meanchey		
	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Promotion Rate (%)	74.20	74.20	75.30
Repetition Rate (%)	1.70	1.70	2.20
Dropout Rate (%)	24.00	24.20	22.60
Transition Rate (%)	65.10	63.00	67.00

Source: MoEYS, Education Statistics and Indicators

### Local Support Mechanisms

The following mechanisms have been established to help to improve education at the local level:

- Primary School Support Committees represent communities in coordinating and producing a school development plan. They are composed of a chair, deputy chairs and some members. Commune chiefs are honorary chairs.[5]
- Education For All Committees have also been established at the commune level with the commune chief as chairperson. Education For All Committees have the duty to ensure that all children are enrolled in schools and to mobilize development partners for assistance in their areas.[6]
- District Education Offices are responsible for checking school development plans, and for supporting the effective functioning of schools. District Education Offices have District Training and Monitoring Teams (DTMT) who are trained by MoEYS. DTMTs train and monitor schoolteachers, and report on progress and issues to be improved.[1, 7]

The mechanisms described above show that communes have supporting roles in terms of the quality of basic education in their areas. They help to promote

enrollment and community participation. They also participate in the development of the schools' development plans. When it comes to the quality of education, teachers and schools play important roles in this area.[8] In addition, District Training and Monitoring Teams are key actors in respect of teacher training and monitoring, which have a direct impact on the quality of education.

#### 4. Challenges

To improve basic education in terms of both quality and quantity, the government faces many challenges. These include a shortage of teachers and school buildings as well as other infrastructure such as water systems and toilets. High student-teacher ratios, student issues and poverty are other challenges. Since teachers and schools are the central issue in the education sector, this briefing note focuses on these.

##### Challenges at the School Level

Schools in Cambodia establish school development plans and receive four-staged annual budgets.[9] School budgets may range from 1,060,000 riels to 2,350,000 riels for a primary school and from 2,650,800 riels to 5,490, 000 riels for a secondary school. These budgets can cover administration, stationery, teaching materials, minor repairs, and water and electricity bills.[9]

More than 90 percent of schools prepare their development plans and submit budget requests on time.[9, 10] Research has shown that 67 percent of schools are confident that their development plans are suitable, and more than 70 percent of schools implement more than 70 percent of their planned activities.[9] Around 85 percent of schools spend more than 50 percent of their budgets while 15 percent claim that they have to readjust their development plans.

In terms of finance, schools still face the following challenges:

- Although schools may have incomes and contributions from communities,[3] school budgets are small compared with the financial needs for school development.
- School budget payments can be delayed, consequently leading to delayed implementation of school development plans. As noted above, 85 percent of schools spend more than 50 percent of their budgets while 15 percent of schools spend less than 50 percent. It is not clear what percentage of schools spends all of their budgets. A study conducted by the NGO National Education Partnership (NEP) in five provinces found that, on average, schools receive about 65 percent of their proposed budgets because on average schools in the study received only 3 out of four payments.[10]
- Budget lines are not flexible enough to meet the schools' development needs.

- Financial procedures are complicated, and are frequently modified, which causes confusion.
- School budgets do not include travel costs, which presents some challenges for schools in remote areas.

### Teacher-related Challenges

- Although there has been an improvement in the numbers of teachers at both primary and secondary levels (which, as of 2016, stand at 44,884 and 40,924, respectively) [3], there is still a shortage.[4]
- Of the teachers at primary level, about 30 percent have a lower secondary education level or lower. Of all the teachers at the secondary level, about 50 percent have upper secondary education, about 14 percent lower secondary education, and 0.7 percent primary education.[3] Therefore, there are a number of teachers with limited education, and whose teaching methodologies are consequently restricted.[4]

## 5. Policy Directions

At a MoEYS Education Congress<sup>2</sup> in 2017, a wide range of policy directions were set out. This briefing note selects only those relevant to schools, teachers and curriculums. In addressing the challenges, MoEYS identified the following major proposals: to enhance the effective use of school budgets; to improve the distribution of text books to schools according to supply and demand; to strengthen leadership and management at the school level; to strengthen school support committees; to improve curriculums; to strengthen pre-service and in-service training of teachers; and to prepare for international student assessment tests for development.[4]

To address school budget issues, the publication Education Reform in Cambodia (by H.E. Dr. Hang Chuon Naron, the Minister for Education) suggests that financial procedures should be simplified, that other items such as travel costs be allowed in the school budgets, and that budget lines be made more flexible.[9]

## 6. Looking Ahead

The Royal Government of Cambodia recognizes the important role of education in helping Cambodia to achieve its ambition to transition from lower-middle income status to being an upper-middle income country by 2030, and a developed country by 2050. Cambodia also aims to push for deeper regional (ASEAN Economic Community - AEC) and international integration[11]: one of the four pillars of an integrated ASEAN Economic Community is the free flow of skilled

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<sup>2</sup> The Annual Education Congress was organized by MoEYS. This has provided all stakeholders with the opportunity to review work progress and challenges and to set directions for the year ahead.



labor. For Cambodia to be able to benefit from this integration, education will be key.

The Global Competitiveness Report 2016-2017 ranks Singapore 2<sup>nd</sup> in terms of primary health and education out of 138 countries, and Cambodia 103<sup>rd</sup>. [12] Singapore has been ranked as one of the top countries in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which provides education rankings based on international tests taken by 15-year-olds in mathematics, reading and science. [13] Cambodia's policy makers could now shift their focus to improving the quality of education with a view to increasing Cambodia's deeper integration into the AEC and thereby to benefiting more from it.

It is, however, worth noting that Singapore differs from Cambodia in several ways. It is a small city state with a small population. As a developed nation, it has a large GDP and spends a substantial amount of its budget on education (see the Table below). However, it is also important to note that Singapore started in the 1960s as an independent, poor and under-developed island with a high unemployment rate. However, with the government's serious commitment and reforms to education, by 1995, students in Singapore performed well on the 1995 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). [14]

The Table below provides some important facts about Singapore's contemporary education system specifically relating to schools, teachers, curriculums and pedagogy, which can be useful when solutions are sought for improving the quality of the Cambodian education system.

## Facts for Comparison

Indicators	Cambodia	Singapore
Gross Domestic Product	USD 20.017 billion (2016)[15]	USD 296.966 billion (2016)[15]
Total government spending	USD 4.403 billion (2016)[16]	USD 73.43 billion (2016)
Spending on education	9% of total government expenditure (2014)[15]	20% of total government expenditure (2014)[15]
Teaching staff	<p>Primary level[3]                      - Graduate: 6.9%                      - Non graduate: 93%</p> <p>Secondary                      - Graduate: 34.52%                      - Non graduate: 65.48%</p>	<p>Primary level[17]                      - Graduate: 74.65%                      - Non graduate: 25.35%</p> <p>Secondary                      - Graduate: 94.92%                      - Non graduate: 5.08%</p>
Student teacher ratio	<p>Primary level[3]                      44.8</p> <p>Secondary                      19.7</p>	<p>Primary level (2015)[17]                      16.0</p> <p>Secondary (2015)                      12.2</p>
Curriculums and pedagogy[18]	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculums have a strong focus on mathematics, science and technical skills</li> <li>• Teachers spend more time preparing lessons so that they can teach each lesson better, which allows students to learn more</li> <li>• Policies are developed based on evidence-based scientific research</li> <li>• In addition to data at the national level, officials visit schools to get a good idea of what is happening at the school level</li> <li>• Visits are made to other countries to explore and adopt best practices in terms of curriculum and pedagogical styles. The process is continuous</li> </ul>
Teachers[18]	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High quality teachers who are carefully selected (top performers in schools)</li> <li>• Attractive salaries are frequently adjusted to make sure that teaching is considered to be as attractive as other occupations</li> <li>• Teachers are entitled to 100 hours of professional development per year which could lead to higher degrees</li> <li>• Teachers' talents are identified and nurtured leading to career development</li> <li>• 83% of teachers have undergone practicum before becoming full-fledged teachers [19]</li> <li>• Induction programs for almost all teachers (99%)[19]</li> </ul>

Indicators	Cambodia	Singapore
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During a new teacher's first two years in a school they are guided and coached by experienced mentors or senior teachers.[19]</li> </ul>
Schools	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential good quality and effective leaders are identified and trained. Singapore believes good and effective leadership leads to good quality teaching. The model is "select and train" not "train and select" [18]</li> <li>• School leaders seek to create appropriate professional environments. More than 8 in 10 principals ensure that their teachers take responsibility for improving their teaching skills and students' learning outcomes [19]</li> <li>• There is a culture that is characterized by mutual support and respect among teachers [19]</li> <li>• 100% of principals have university degrees.[19]</li> </ul>

## 7. Conclusion

Cambodia has made significant progress in terms of net enrollment rates, drop-out rates and transition rates, and the government is committed to improving Cambodia's education sector. However, there are still issues particularly concerning school budgets, a shortage of teachers – and their quality - and the overall standing of education.

Considering the present status of Cambodia's education sector and the government's vision, policy makers could consider shifting their attention to improving the quality of education to support Cambodia's long-term vision to become an upper-middle income country by 2030 and a developed country by 2050. Lessons could be learnt from comparisons with other countries and there could be a focus on issues affecting teachers, curriculums and schools, which are central to the education sector.

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