

UNESCO INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION, SEPTEMBER 2004

QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE: CHALLENGES, TRENDS AND PRIORITIES

CAMBODIA NATIONAL REPORT: PRESENTED BY H.E. POK THAN, SECRETARY OF STATE, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, YOUTH AND SPORT, CAMBODIA

I welcome the opportunity to present the Cambodia Country Report on education on behalf of Senior Minister Kol Pheng. I also appreciate the opportunity to share experiences and lessons learned with other senior education officials from so many countries. On behalf of the Royal Government of Cambodia, I would also wish to thank UNESCO for organizing this 47th session of the International Conference on Education (ICE).

The theme of this year's conference is very opportune for Cambodia. Over the past 12 months, the Ministry has been formulating its next five year Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2004-2008. As Cambodia embarks on the next phase of reform, the Ministry acknowledges that this has been a very challenging process, requiring an analysis of previous trends in sector performance. It is also being a complex exercise to finalize future policy and strategic priorities, designed to accelerate progress towards Education for All (EFA) by 2015 at latest.

Firstly, the Ministry would like to share an overview of education sector performance over the past four years. The Ministry has provided UNESCO with a copy of a CD which documents performance. The Ministry has used these key findings and progress reports to identify future priorities for a sector-wide approach for education reform.

Sector Performance 2000/2004

The successes achieved through education sector reforms over the past five years in Cambodia have been very significant. Primary school enrolment has grown from 2.4 million to 2.7 million over the past four years, with the majority of growth being in rural areas. The overall primary net enrolment rate has increased from 84% to 91% since 2000. The rise has been even greater for girls, especially in rural and remote areas. Encouragingly, the number of students from the poorest communes has increased by around 0.5 million in the past four years.

Lower secondary education opportunities have also increased significantly since 2000, with grade 7-9 enrolment almost doubling in the past four years. An additional 180 lower secondary schools have been constructed, mainly in previously un-served rural, remote and border communes. Similarly, the number of students in post-basic education has increased significantly, with encouraging expansion of private higher education and skills training opportunities. Once again, the number of girls in secondary and higher education has almost doubled in recent years.

The quality and efficiency of the teaching service continues to improve. The number of trained primary and secondary school teachers has increased. There are now more teachers with upper secondary education and graduate qualifications. However, we recognize the need to improve teacher deployment systems. An ESP priority will be to ensure that the majority of newly trained teachers will be used to staff the proposed 800 new lower secondary schools.

The Ministry is spending more money on quality related programs, especially for basic supplies, books and teacher training. The Ministry is also taking steps to strengthen standards and governance in schools. Standards monitoring will be strengthened to ensure these funds have maximum effect. Another priority has been to strengthen governance systems that make schools and communities mutually accountable for results. The anticipated new education law and regulations is designed to provide the necessary authority.

Key Sector Challenges and Priorities

The Ministry recognizes key challenges for the next phase of reform. The main challenge is to ensure all students complete nine years of basic education. Priorities include: a) reducing cost barriers for poorer families; b) reducing dropout and repetition leading to inefficiency and wastage; c) ensuring access to schools as close to home as possible; and d) ensuring effective setting of school standards and monitoring. The Ministry's new Education Strategic Plan, which I am circulating in draft, sets out clear operational strategies to address these issues.

A particular challenge to ensure that students from the poorest families enrol at the correct age and are fully prepared for schooling. Related priorities are: a) targeted expansion of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in the poorer communes; b) better regulation of entry at age 6, and c) reducing the number of incomplete primary schools which do not offer the full six years of primary education. Consistent with many other countries, EFA National Plans, we also recognize the need to expand non-formal re-entry, remedial and equivalency programs.

A further challenge is rapid expansion of secondary education opportunities. A priority is to reduce inefficiencies at the primary levels which adversely effect transition rates. A second priority is to provide at least one lower secondary school in each of 1,621 communes and one upper secondary school in each district. This will be linked to new teacher training and staff deployment strategies that ensure a fair distribution of experienced teachers to staff these new schools.

In 2001, the Ministry abolished start-of-the year contributions in grades 1 to 9 which resulted in around 0.6 million additional students enrolling. However, the Ministry has recognized that this is not sufficient to sustain demand. In the medium term, a central priority will be to eliminate other cost barriers. As a first step, the Ministry has introduced targeted scholarships for the poor, girls and ethnic minority students in grades 7 to 9. A medium term priority will be to expand these programs into upper secondary and higher education to help these disadvantaged groups to progress further.

Higher education enrolment has increased from under 20,000 to an estimated 45,000 in the past three to four years. The increased number of private universities has been a key factor in this growth, including expansion of more market-oriented programs. The next priority is to selectively decentralize some higher education foundation programs at regional and provincial levels, building on growing private provision. A second priority is to create a new ladder of qualifications for teachers wanting to become graduates. At the same time a high priority will be to strengthen quality assurance systems, including governance and regulatory reforms.

A key challenge is to ensure equitable access to higher education. A major constraint is the uneven quality of upper secondary education in some provinces which results in few qualified secondary and higher education graduates. This has created an over-reliance on university graduates and qualified teachers being posted

from five or six provinces to supply the human resources for the rest of the country. A Ministry's priority therefore is to create at least one top quality model upper secondary school in each province, linked to a network of community colleges which provide further and higher education opportunities.

Consolidating a Sector-Wide Approach to Education Reform

An overarching priority is to consolidate the sector-wide approach to planning, management and monitoring introduced in 2000. A key lesson learned in the past four years is that a SWAp approach necessitates strong Ministry leadership, ownership and coordination and effective partnership development. The Ministry is pleased to report that only last week, it successfully completed its fourth joint annual sector performance review with other Government ministries, donors and NGOs.

During this first phase of a sector-wide approach, the Ministry has focused on strengthening a number of key areas. A priority has been facilitating cross-cutting and inter-ministerial strategic linkages, especially with finance and public service ministries. A second priority has been to strengthen financial planning, management and reporting systems and establish internal audit operations. The Ministry has been a leading agency in adopting the Government's broader financial reforms, especially use of a Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF).

Another feature of the Ministry's SWAp has been to introduce results-based performance monitoring and other related capacity building. The Ministry has been strongly supported by an integrated donor support program, including UN agencies, European Commission, Sida and other bilateral agencies, World Bank and Asian Development Bank.

The Ministry's sector management strategy has been guided by the principle of increased delegated authority within the context of decentralisation. Systematic and coordinated capacity building programs have been critical in supporting these processes. Key achievements have been the establishment of around 200 decentralized budget management centers and associated operational guidelines and staff training. In effect, over 7,000 schools in Cambodia have largely delegated authority to make their own spending decisions.

The results orientation of the Ministry's planning and monitoring system have been a key factor in securing the significant increases in Government recurrent budget share to education in recent years. Since 2000, the recurrent budget share has increased from around 13% to over 19% in the last four years. The volume of recurrent spending on policy oriented programs has increased from US\$ 2.5 million to almost US\$ 20 million in the same period. The proposed financing plan for the next phase of reform projects similar levels of increase, including an effective balance between salary and non-salary spending.

A priority challenge for the Ministry will be to continue to demonstrate that both Government funds and external assistance is well spent and having maximum impact on policy and the poor. Further strengthening the internal audit functions and audit coverage is therefore critical. This will ensure greater financial transparency and spending efficiency. The Ministry's main priority is to ensure that all budget management centers are fully operational and to ensure that all schools, institutions and programs are audited by the end of 2008.

The Ministry acknowledges that a fundamental challenge in the next five years will be to improve staff remuneration systems. A priority will be to ensure that any pay rises

are clearly related to better performance, more responsibility and contribute to staff deployment efficiencies. The new ESP 2004/08 clearly defines these strategies and their cost implications, including new forms of staff training and development.

Education Partnership Development

In recent years, the Ministry has accorded the highest priority to institutionalizing education partnership arrangements with the donor and NGO community. Partnership principles agreed in 2001 help guide the Ministry's dialogue with the formal Education Sector Working Group of donors and the NGO Education Partnership in Cambodia. These are fully formal arrangements and not loose occasional alliances. For example, these three partners formally work together to organize the annual joint sector performance review.

These partnership arrangements have been successful in instituting mechanisms for formal strategic negotiation on education reform. For example, the annual joint review provides the opportunity for joint agreement and negotiation of future priorities. The growing mutual trust and confidence has resulted in significant increases in external assistance, rising from around US\$10-15 million in 2000 to an estimated US\$50-60 million per annum in the next five years.

The international Education for All (EFA) alliance places significant emphasis on integrating education, youth and physical development as part of a more holistic approach. The Ministry's mandate is fully consistent with this approach, reflected in the new ESP. The challenge will be to mobilize additional partners who have a comparative advantage in youth and sports development to complement our current friends in education. Another challenge will be to fully embrace the private sector, especially for selective expansion of secondary and higher education opportunities.

The Ministry's new reform program is a combination of consolidating existing reforms and extending into new areas. The challenge for the Ministry and its partners will be to ensure that current and projected external assistance is responsive to the new balance of priorities. A Ministry priority will be to mobilize additional recurrent budget support from Government and donors, essential for implementing institutional, financing and personnel reforms.

Finally, the Ministry would like to encapsulate the broad philosophy of its ongoing reform program. The long term vision of the Ministry is to enable a strong combination of *ambition and self-reliance*. Cambodia's history demands a continued focus on ambitious and far reaching reforms. Our ever present sense of self-reliance demands that the Government, the Ministry and our partners must place sustainability at the heart of the reform program.

Thank you.