

UNESCO INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION, NOVEMBER 2008

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: "THE WAY OF THE FUTURE"

CAMBODIAN NATIONAL REPORT: PRESENTED BY H.E. IM SETHY, MINISTER, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, YOUTH AND SPORT, CAMBODIA

I welcome the opportunity to present the National Report on behalf of the Cambodian delegation. I also appreciate the opportunity to share the experiences and lesson 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 48th session of the International Conference on Education (IEC).

As you are aware Cambodia is a post conflict nation, having experienced great tragedy in terms of reduced human capacity. After great hardships, the Royal Government of Cambodia is dedicated to develop its human resources in order to reconstruct the country and integrate with the regional and global community of nations. In the case of Cambodia, I would like to highlight the *current and planned initiatives* within our education reform process. In particular, I will focus on how the Ministry is establishing a wide range of educational instruments designed to address the emerging challenges of delivering relevant education services, particularly inclusive education in Cambodia. Our aim is to ensure all children have equal access to quality basic schooling regardless of their gender, where they live, or the wealth or poverty of their parents.

Overview of Education Reform

The Education For All (EFA) initiative was absolutely critical for our reform. As you well aware, to embark on any type of comprehensive reform, the starting point needs to be a long-term visioning process. Meanwhile, the National Plan for Education for All 2003-2015 sets out important strategic policies which include our long-term economic development goals for the future of Cambodian society. This necessity provides that Cambodian children and youth should have equal opportunities and access to formal education, and non-formal education regardless of their living standard, gender, geographical area, physical condition or ethnicity.

To realize this vision, we needed a few more instruments to be in place. Firstly, the Ministry needed to have a credible medium term strategy and program to implement this vision. In 2002, the Ministry prepared its first five year Education Strategic Plan (ESP) and Education Sector Support Program (ESSP). The ESP/ESSP is underpinned by a policy action matrix which was jointly endorsed by the Government and our development partners. The policy matrix sets out annual institutional and organizational capacity development priorities and targets for the sector.

The ESP/ESSP adopts a rolling planning approach to enable continuous assessment and adjustment of reform policies, strategies and programs, through the joint annual sector performance review with our development partners. Since then, the ESP/ESSP has been revised in 2004-2006, and 2006-2010. This new plan enables Cambodia to accelerate progress towards EFA comprehensively and efficiently. The broad strategy is to reduce cost barriers to basic education, ensure improving quality and standards and enable communities, parents and the private sector to effectively participate in planning

the future of their children. Securing equal benefits for all, especially the poorest, is central to the ESP financing policy. The plan sets out measures to effectively regulate and govern education and maximise mutual accountability for education standards.

The plans and programs are also guided by and supportive of the Governments rectangular strategy for development. They are enabling us to focus on the four corners of education reform; *a) Assuring equitable access to education; b) Improving education quality and efficiency; c) Capacity building for education decentralization and d) Pro-poor education financing strategies.* Well defined priorities are allowing us to carefully direct the use of growing resources for education from both Government and the international community.

In the past few years, Cambodia has become increasingly aware of the need to assure equitable access to education. Our primary enrolment increased by 15% annually. We were getting 350,000 more children into school every year; mostly girls in rural areas and children from poor families. As a result, the number of primary students entering grade 6 has rapidly increased from 175,224 students in 2000-01, to 312,909 in 2006-07, an increase of more than 135,000 students. This initial primary enrolment gain is now steadily progressing to the secondary level. Our lower secondary enrolment today has grown by 120% from seven years ago. Just as important, there is improved parity in gender and socio-economic profiles of our students.

Another key instrument is a results-based medium-term expenditure plan, which is linked to the national medium term expenditure framework. Our Ministry and the Ministry of Finance set up an inter-ministerial committee to work on the medium-term budget plan, including a jointly agreed set of performance indicators, consistent with EFA and ESP/ESSP policy targets. As part of this effort, I am pleased to report that Government spending on education has risen from under 7% to 19.2% over the past 7 years and the share of spending of priority programs within the education budget. At the same time, we are grateful to the different stakeholders and the support from the international community is significant. We are proud that currently we have 3.5 millions children in our school system from pre-schools to tertiary level. It represents $\frac{1}{4}$ of total population of Cambodia (13.6 millions).

Despite the efforts of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and its development partners, a number of young people are seriously affected by drugs, HIV/AIDS and illiteracy. This is largely the result of poverty. Therefore, we have to commit ourselves to the implementation of the Rectangular Strategy of the Royal Government of Cambodia under the wise leadership of **Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo HUN SEN**, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia in compliance with the Dakar Forum Declaration in 2000 and subsequent Millennium Development Goals recognized that education development is a critical component of broader Government poverty reduction strategy (NPRS) and Socio Economic Development Plan (SEDP).

Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future

As many of you will know, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport has accelerated its reform program in recent years. The policy priority has been to make education participation more inclusive, especially for the poorest, girls and ethnic minorities. For many years these groups had been, at least partially, excluded for reasons of cost

barriers, shortage of facilities and social, cultural and geographic reasons. I am please to say that in the past 5 years, the number of students from these groups has increased by over 0.7 million students, particularly in primary schools.

Nevertheless, the next challenge will be to provide inclusive education for these groups in secondary and post-secondary education. We have made some progress in lower secondary education through abolition of start of year contributions and speeding up the building of new schools in under-served areas. Once again, we have been able to ensure an additional 0.2 million students now participate in lower secondary education from the same disadvantaged groups and areas.

We have adopted an innovative strategy to include girls and ethnic minorities in lower secondary education through providing targeted scholarships. As part of the next phase of reform, we anticipate building large numbers of additional facilities and expanding the scholarships program. As addressed in the national priorities by **the Prime Minister** that ***school buildings have to be close with the children***. With this in mind our target is to increase lower secondary enrolment from around 0.6 million to 1.2 million in the next 5 years. We also intend to extend these programs to upper secondary, higher education and skills training by expanding more new school buildings and facilities, as well as scholarship and incentive programs for the poorest communes to ensure that every child has a place to attend school no matter where they may live, and this relates to what is called "***reach the unreachable***". This range of program is designed to ensure poor children can complete their education.

Another contributing factor to children being disabled, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports has started to maintain statistics on children with disabilities through the Education Management Information System. The 2004 Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey found that vision and hearing disabilities as well as mobility-related disabilities together account for 68% of all reported disabilities and that 2.6% of girls and 2.9% of boys between the ages of 5 to 17 years did not attend school due to disabilities.

To face the issues of disabilities, at the institutional level, there has been significant legislative and regulatory development, such as the new Education Law, chapter 7, Article 38 and 39 addresses *special education specifically regarding the rights of the learners with disabilities to learn with the non-disabled children and provide a special education service for learners with disabilities*, has been adopted and come into force on 08 December 2007 to help strengthen governance and accountability.

As part of this process, the Ministry has recently developed the National Policy on Education for Children with Disabilities to ensure the equal rights of all children with disabilities to an equal education with non-disabled children. This policy supports Child Friendly Schools policy and implementation guidelines that the Ministry in order to achieve basic education initiatives, and the Education strategic Plan, as well as EFA goals by the year 2015. This policy delineates the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, particularly educational institution, in developing the potential of children with disabilities and providing appropriate interventions to increase the participation of children with disabilities as active members of their communities and nation now and in the future.

In this way, Child Friendly School program is a key objective for the Ministry to cope and work with partners to keep our children at school. The program has been included in the

new ESP/ESSP 2006-2010 and we are planning to move all primary schools, at least 70%, to be child-friendly schools. Through this program the schools could become the attractive place for our children to come and learn rather than staying at home, so that they are stick to education and not easily drop out. It is also anticipated that vulnerability will be reduced and ultimately eliminated.

In addition, the Ministry plans to expand various incentive programs to retain children in schools. At primary level, this will involve expanding the school feeding and take home rations programs. At secondary level, we will be introducing a new incentives program for children from poor families to meet some of the informal costs. Girls and children from ethnic minority families will be a very high priority. The World Food Program has been very active in supporting these initiatives.

The Ministry is also determined to address the issue of improving the quality of education, including for ethnic minority areas. We are already taking measures to ensure that more experienced and trained staff are posted to school in these areas, alongside ensuring an adequate supply of basic-education materials and textbooks. However, we recognize that addressing the issue of language in the curriculum is critical for sustained quality improvement.

The Ministry has been able to learn a number of lessons about language policy through activities supported by a number of NGOs, particularly in Ratanakirii and Mondulakiri. The Ministry has appreciated the way in which NGOs have actively engaged with the Ministry on the research and evaluation of bilingual literacy programs. At this stage, it would be premature to be formulating long-term language policy on the basis of these pilot programs.

As part of this process of bilingual education development, we are pleased to state the Ministry is undertaking a number of initiatives with support from a new taskforce on bilingual education including representatives from the Ministry, the Royal Academy and NGO groups (e.g., ICC, Care). At the moment we have developed Khmer scripts for five ethnic minority groups to learn their own languages, and they are also encourage to learn national language, Khmer in which the subject is incorporated within life-skills curricula.

We have already translated five minority languages into Khmer script for use in the bilingual program. In addition, we are introducing new life skills programs in Khmer language based on the social and cultural traditions of selected minority groups. The objective is to ensure that there is curriculum relevance for ethnic minorities as well as bilingualism.

There is a need for further detailed research on these bi-lingual literacy programs, in particular we need to study the impact on both continued participation in school and also whether bilingual education helps students to learn more effectively in Khmer in upper primary grades. We also need to assess how many years of bi-lingual education may be necessary to ensure inclusive education through children being encouraged to stay at school.

Another related question is language policy for the new NFE re-entry programs being introduced by the Ministry. In ethnic minority areas, we need to examine whether or not bilingual education provision can make these re-entry programs more effective. At the

same time, we need to think about whether high dropout rates in ethnic minority areas are connected with language issues or other factors, such as perceived value of education or cost barriers.

Inevitably, the Ministry needs to examine the cost implications of expanding bilingual literacy programs. There is the issue of training specialist bilingual teachers and special instructional materials. When the numbers of students from the different ethnic minority groups is small, the Ministry is examining options for providing these services in a cost-effective and sustainable way.

Finally, I would like to highlight that the year 2008 is the mid-year of the ESP/ESSP 2006-2010. Therefore, the reviewing the plans is a fruitful and necessary chance for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Development Partners, and other Non-Government Organizations (NGO), that have been assisting in the education sector together, reviewing, and evaluating the results and effectiveness of fulfillment of education work against defined goals and objectives. In addition, to make recommendations and proposals for 2008 to 2010 implementation to meet the current government's reforms for the in coming years especially on public financial reforms, decentralization and de-concentration programs so that public education service has stronger response to the needs of local people.

Thank you.