

CAMBODIA

A New Beginning

Children, primary schools and social change in post-conflict Preah Vihear Province

Preah Vihear is a Province in northern Cambodia, bordering Thailand and Laos. The Province was an insecure and contested area from the late 1960s until 2000, when stability returned and the participation of children in primary education throughout the province became a possibility.



have been out of touch with formal education for periods of up to thirty-five years.

“War makes people hopeless. Minds are paralyzed and it is difficult to think of the future. It seems impossible to initiate new ideas. We need to know this and to know that people will eventually pass beyond that stage...Where community development has worked well, the thing that has happened is not the projects. It is the people of the community moving together to support each other.”

- Keo Sarath “Education for Social Change : How to bring back hope to hopeless people” Phnom Penh, November 2005

Preah Vihear is divided into seven districts and 49 communes with 208 villages. Ethnic minorities make up a significant proportion of the population with the principal groups being Kouy and Lao.

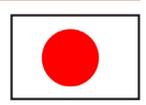
The province is characterized by geographical remoteness, cultural diversity and a turbulent history which has left a legacy of distrust in public institutions and any outside agency. Isolation, distance and limited opportunities for participation in the cash economy led to widespread poverty, with many families living a subsistence lifestyle.

The total population of Preah Vihear is relatively small by Cambodian provincial standards with people scattered over a wide area. This includes extended family groups who have deliberately sought isolation for reasons of security. Some of these groups

The Project

In 2003, the JSDF provided a grant to Save the Children Norway - Cambodia (SCN-CO) aimed at improving access and quality in all schools and education offices in the region. This marked an important break with the past. The period of forced isolation had resulted in an education system that operated with a high degree of self-sufficiency, with only limited resources, both physical and human, coming from outside the Province. The project offered an opportunity for education officials, teachers and communities in these previously under-served areas to see a quick return on their investment of labour, energy and professional commitment.

The project faced many challenges, not least the need to convince parents of the benefits of participation in formal education, beyond an achievement of rudimentary numeracy and literacy. The approach was built on local people doing something, rather than on having things done to them.



The approach taken was both comprehensive and gradualist. It was comprehensive in that SCN-CO believes that any work it does in education should involve all stakeholders, at the local level (school staff, community, parents, children) and at various levels of authority within the formal education system (District, Province, National). It is gradualist in that, although long term aims, and the big ideas that drive them, are described, work goes ahead at the level that stakeholders can manage (and for which they already have most of the resources) and the emphasis is on planning and tasks which can be managed successfully. Small successes engender confidence and momentum which can then be built upon to move on to more ambitious tasks.

Results

A 2006 evaluation confirmed that the combination of a major infrastructure initiative with activities that built social capital and which were carried out by an NGO working in partnership with government at the local level produced a powerful mobilizing effect on disadvantaged communities. All stakeholders consulted during the evaluation, from the Governor, education officials and teachers to children and community members, agreed that public education in Preah Vihear was transformed during the project period.

The project design was ambitious, setting high targets, especially for school participation in the more remote districts of the Province. While many of the indicators were achieved in all, or some of, Preah Vihear's 154 primary schools, some targets did prove unreachable, partly due to the duration of the project (two years). It was not possible to meet teacher recruitment targets, for example, although considerable progress was made and experiences in the Province have undoubtedly helped shape the Ministry's new policy that focuses on local recruitment (rather than redeployment and incentives) to meet the demand for teacher in remote areas. Two years was also too short to achieve many of the ideas for an ethnic minority curriculum and materials development set out in the design document.

In terms of the project development objectives, the following results were obtained:

1 - Increase access to school Grades 1-6 for disadvantaged children

Major achievements:

- Enrolment rates increased from 50% to 75%
- Promotion rates increased from 65% to 85% in all 7 Districts with the equal participation of disadvantaged children

The test of project impact, in the medium term, is not so much whether these levels can be sustained or improved upon but whether they can be held at levels somewhere around the national average. Achieving this would provide evidence to families of

Project Data

- Implementing Agency: *Save the Children Norway, Cambodia*
- Grant (TF052059) Amount: *\$1.8 million*
- Implementation Period: *03/20/2003 to 12/31/2005*

the continuing and concrete benefits that arise from education and that the sacrifices they must make to keep their children at school are warranted.

2 - Improve the quality of education with children as active learners

- 85% of teachers demonstrated improved teaching skills, according to agreed quality standards.
- 85% of children knew how to develop and use an individual learning plan starting in Grade 2 and demonstrated the application of life-skills starting in Grade 4.

3 - Improve the efficiency of public education and promote community participation

- 85% of schools and all District Education Offices (DEOs) and Provincial Education Offices (PEOs) carried out satisfactory planning, data collection, and monitoring and evaluation and supervision procedures.
- 85% of schools have involved and responsible School Development Committees (SDC).

The evaluation team found clear evidence of :

- Large increases in the participation, retention and progress of children in primary schools because of school construction, improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and community support for schools. By the end of academic year 2004-2005, key indicators had reached 85.74% (enrolment), 79% (promotion) and 4.18% (drop out).
- Significant improvements in teacher performance and morale.
- Innovative, inclusive, child friendly and child-centred approaches to teaching and learning.
- A functioning, supportive system of management of public education in Preah Vihear, in which staff at each level of management and/or coordination had direct knowledge, through regular contact, concerning the institutions and personnel for whom they are responsible.
- Systematic planning and reporting (province to district, district to cluster and school, cluster to school).
- Strong participation by community members in activities that support schools and teachers.
- Recognition by community members of the linkages between a child's school learning and the quality of home life (life skills)
- Commitment by education officials, school head teachers and teaching staff to investigate and be responsive to the needs and aspirations of children and their families from the villages served by schools

Innovation

SCN-CO project staff and their Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) counterparts in Preah Vihear piloted a number of innovations which have already proven to be of interest to education officials and school staff from other provinces in Cambodia. Among these are:

- **A major extension of the school mapping strategy** to include a wide range of socio-economic data to help schools and school staff better understand the problems and needs of the communities they serve.
- **Bringing well qualified mentors** (District Facilitators) into Preah Vihear from outside the province to provide continuous, on-the-job training for education officials at the District level.
- **Approaching primary education holistically** with a strong life skills foundation.
- **Encouraging teacher reflection and self-evaluation as quality improvement mechanisms.**
- **Working with teachers to help them develop more integrated programs**, highlighting child-to-child and independent learning activities both inside and outside the classroom.
- **Introducing alternative approaches to the rigid grade separation model** of multi-grade teaching previously in use.
- **Assisting isolated and under-qualified teachers to improve teaching skills** through teacher-to-teacher support from mobile teacher teams.
- **Streamlining reporting procedures** from school to District and District to Province increases the frequency and depth of visits from DEO personnel to schools, promoting exchanges of good management practice at District level with the DEO acting in the role of coordinator and moderator.
- Identifying, utilizing and documenting **how the natural environment can be used as a resource for teaching and learning.**
- Identifying and engaging **local resource people** in the school's instructional program.
- **Promoting community support** in isolated areas for school infrastructure development and teacher support.



Sustainability

While there are likely to be challenges ahead, the results of the Project are expected to be sustained for a number of reasons:

- The ownership and deep involvement throughout the life of the Project of MoEYS staff and departments, community leaders and parents. The Project is highly integrated with the Cambodian public education system and Government is paying for teacher salaries.

- SCN-CO made a commitment to maintain a presence in the Province for an additional four years after Grant closing (December 2005), albeit at reduced levels. This maintained the momentum and enthusiasm created by the Project and ensured the continuation of the strong partnership between SCN-CO and MoEYS officials in the province. SCN-CO is also replicating the Project in Pursat province.
- In addition, the Bank implemented the Cambodia Education Sector Support Project (August 2005 - December 2010), which adopted many important lessons learned from the JSDF Grant. This Project aimed to assist Cambodia in implementing its sector goals - to expand access to education services by addressing supply, demand, quality and efficiency constraints, with a special focus on poor and underserved communities.

Lessons learned

The project and the evaluation that followed generated a wealth of lessons learned. Those with broad applicability include:

Participation and Inclusion

- **School mapping activities** give many opportunities to include people from all sectors of the local community - in data collection, analysis and presentation. Extending these activities to include a wide range of socio-economic data can help schools better understand the communities they serve and promotes the ideas that, (i) schools serve a local community (rather than the reverse) and, (ii) schools should be responsive to local socio-economic and environmental conditions when designing their instructional programs.

Capacity Building

- **The use of mentors** is an effective way of delivering capacity building for managers and administrators.
- There are competent trainers within Ministry ranks but they must be **selected according to explicit criteria** (not simply the office they hold) and may be best used outside their provinces of origin.
- The presence of external trainers/mentors and other NGO agency staff provides an opportunity to **reduce or eliminate corrupt and/or dysfunctional management practices.**
- A **participatory model of training** in which local trainers develop the curriculum (via design workshop), present it to participants (follow up workshop) and then document it (including content, proceedings and outcomes), greatly increases the relevance of the reference document.

- **The training methodology should demonstrate the learner-centred approach** advocated for teaching-learning in school; workshops and follow up activities for participants can involve practical applications of key ideas and content; formal documentation can be prepared after (not before) the workshop demonstrating that workshops are dynamic, not simply one-way knowledge transfer processes.
- Teacher self-assessment takes a long time
 - teachers must develop the objectivity and skills required to pass reasonable assessments. It may have been better to begin the process on a more simple footing and move step-by-step. This project was captive, to some extent, to the indicators chosen for teacher development.
- Teacher training should be conducted as close to the workplace as possible to ensure cost effectiveness. In Preah Vihear most training was done at the Cluster level, but small, workshops were also organized at very isolated schools.
- Activities using minority languages are complex and require lengthy development periods.

Community Involvement

- Life skills have proven to be a very successful way of **increasing the community's perception of the relevance of schools**, especially when school activities are replicated at home.
- Community members typically enjoy **assisting in practical tasks that improve the school environment** and this is a good way of opening up discussion on more abstract activities such as school improvement planning.
- The **strategy of communities building "mini-schools"** as a practical way of demonstrating interest in, and a commitment to, education has proven highly successful. These structures can later be replaced by permanent buildings.
- **"Culture Centres" have proven to be popular installations in many schools**, serving as venues for outside learning by children as well as an exhibition space for artifacts, implements, musical instruments, fishing and hunting equipment and other handcrafted products. They have also been very useful as a place where community members can informally meet school staff and other visitors.

Improving Educational Outcomes

- **Encouraging teacher reflection and self-evaluation as quality improvement mechanisms** offers an alternative to current practices which rely on external assessments through infrequent inspection visits. They also provide a methodology by which isolated teachers can work systematically on developing skills in the



absence of consistent support. This might also be usefully considered for inclusion in pre-service teacher education courses.

- **Assisting isolated and underqualified teachers to improve teaching skills through teacher-to-teacher support from mobile teams** could help build support networks for isolated teachers. Peer support is likely to be more responsive and less directive in dealing with issues of teaching and learning and more cost effective.
- **Streamlining reporting procedures** from school to District and District to Province offers a clear and practical model which could rationalize a system characterized by the poor organization, use and retention of data. It enables Districts to offer effective support to schools on the basis of evidence of need. It could also help provide a solid foundation for building a system of school performance appraisal - a stated policy target of the MoEYS.
- Promoting the concept of District Working Groups, **DEO staff are moving towards being generalists and working together as a group** to support education activities in the district rather than operating along departmental lines.
- **Promoting exchanges of good management practice at District level.** A practical school-helping-school process will be a vital part of a more formal and comprehensive school appraisal process being developed by the MoEYS (this activity would be conducted at Cluster level in less remote, more populous Districts).

Key Resources

Richard Geeves, Eng Kim Ly, Sa Lorn, Lon Borrmei, Sok Saran (2006) "A New beginning: Children, primary schools and social change in postconflict Preah Vihear Province-Cambodia. An evaluation of the project Public Education for Disadvantaged Children in Preah Vihear Province".

The Japan Social Development Fund -- The JSDF is a partnership between the Government of Japan and the World Bank that supports innovative social programs in developing countries. JSDF grants are executed by NGOs/CSOs and local governments and implemented at the community level. JSDF projects meet four basic requirements: (i) they target and respond to the needs of poor, vulnerable, and disadvantaged groups, and aim to achieve rapid results, (ii) they are innovative and pilot alternative approaches or partnerships, (iv) they use participatory designs and stakeholder consultation to design inputs and as an integral part of monitoring and evaluation, (iii) they empower local communities, local governments, NGOs/CSOs through capacity building and rapid feedback of lessons learned, and (v) they focus on scale-up potential, replication and the sustainability of interventions.

