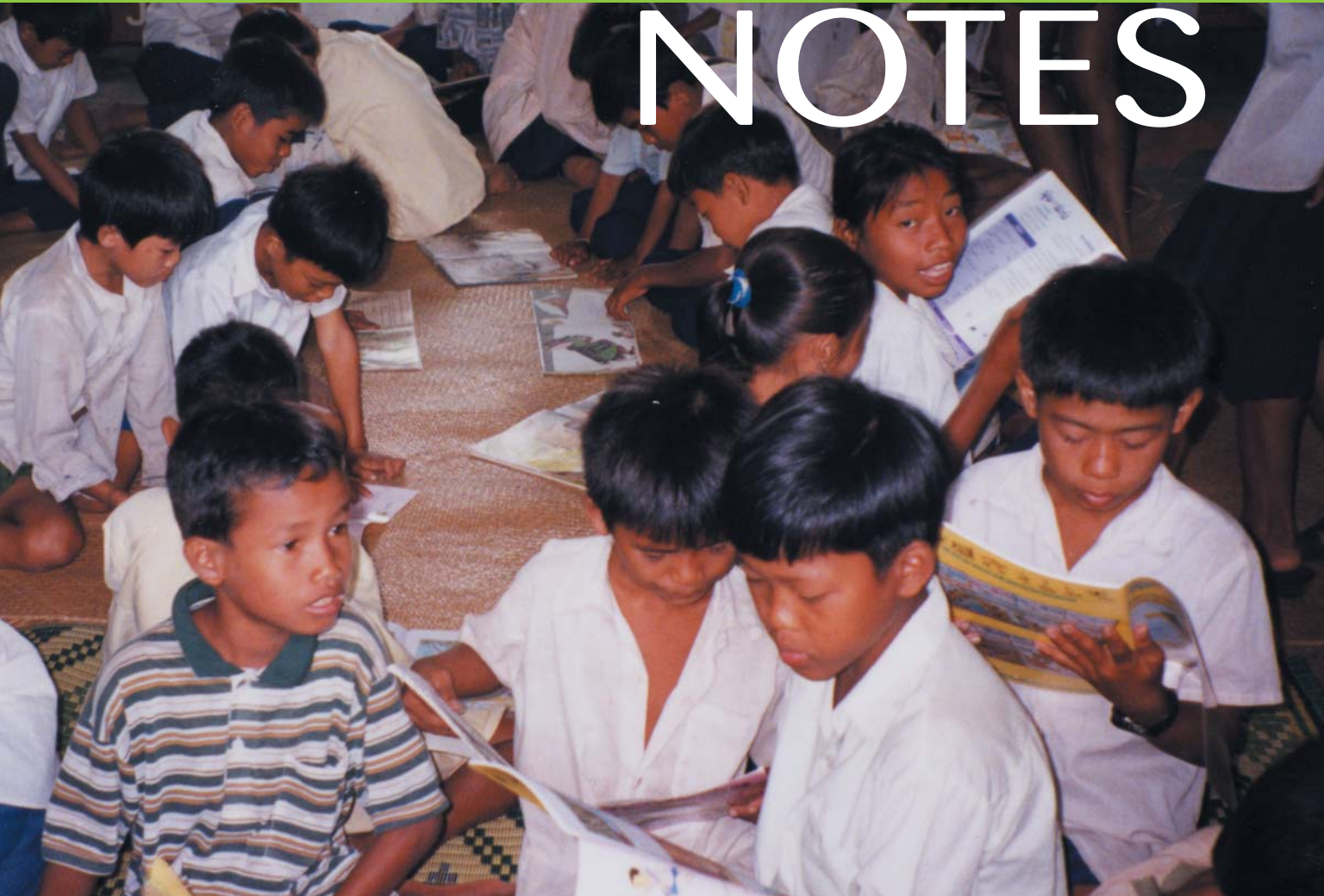


# Education NOTES



## Achieving Education for All in Post-Conflict Cambodia

Cambodia has made good progress in rebuilding its education system after three decades of conflict and isolation. Enrollments are growing, administration is improving, and large numbers of schools have been rehabilitated. A number of innovative and mutually reinforcing programs have energized local administrators and resourced schools, building on early efforts to rebuild capacity. **These are, however, not sufficient conditions for improving education outcomes, and significant challenges remain in the financing and management of education in order to realize Cambodia's goal of providing free, universal access to basic education.**

## Challenges for the Education System

Nations recovering from conflict face special challenges. Education, health care, and income-earning needs are enormous, but government institutions responsible for delivering social services and setting economic policy are often weakened. In many cases, years of political and economic instability follow major conflict, adding to the initial loss.

Recovery in Cambodia has been particularly difficult. The Khmer Rouge regime, in power from 1975-1979, devastated Cambodia's education system. It destroyed much of the education infrastructure and eliminated its key personnel. The successor Government began rebuilding the education system but faced a decade of international isolation, continuing resistance within Cambodia, and hostility from large sections of the population. The first large-scale development assistance for education was provided after U.N.-administered elections in 1993. However, its effectiveness was limited by continuing political instability and many programs were suspended after political violence broke out again in 1997. Aid was gradually restored after elections in 1998.

The education system still ranked among the weakest in the world in 2000, more than 20 years after the end of the worst years of the conflict. The net enrollment rate was 84 percent in primary school, 17 percent in lower secondary school and 8 percent in upper secondary school. By one estimate the repetition and dropout rates were so high that it took 19 student years to produce a primary school graduate. UNESCO estimated functional literacy in the adult population to be 36 percent. Government spending on education was 1.3 percent of GDP, while donors, NGOs and households provided more than 70 percent of total financing for education.

## Rebuilding the Education System

A number of innovative and mutually reinforcing programs have contributed to the reconstruction of the education system during the last decade:

- At the school level, the Government, UNICEF, and several NGOs grouped schools into clusters of six to 10 schools. The main purpose of the clusters was to enable schools to share scarce administrative, pedagogical and material resources. The strategy was beneficial for the relatively small number of clusters which received external support, and particularly for the "core" (central) school within the cluster that received most of the material support.
- The school infrastructure was substantially improved by large-scale spending on school buildings throughout the 1990s. Funds were provided by international donors, politicians, NGOs, and private individuals. Notable among the programs was the Social Fund of Cambodia, which helped to generate jobs at the local level while building or renovating more than 500 schools.
- Donors helped to strengthen administrative capacity at the provincial and central levels by providing training and technical assistance. Training was provided on the job and through formal course and study tours. By the end of the 1990s, a significant pool of talent was generated in the central Ministry and local education departments. However, much of the talent was underutilized in what remained a highly centralized administration and under-financed civil service.
- The Government gradually increased expenditure on education, from 11 percent of the budget in 1996 to 15 percent in 2002. A 1999 World Bank-financed Structural Adjustment Credit was particularly instrumental in encouraging increased expenditure on education and providing budget support that enabled improvements in the actual delivery of funds against budget. Relative political stability and economic policies that restored growth improved the fiscal outlook while creating income-earning opportunities for people and enabled families to enroll their children in school.

The improvements in the administration, infrastructure and financing of education were all necessary but not sufficient conditions for improvement in

educational outcomes. While the number of children enrolled in school increased substantially, net enrollment has increased more modestly, from 78 percent in 1996/97 to 84 percent in 1999/00, reflecting rapid increases in the school age population and continuing inefficiencies in the education system.

## Accelerating Progress toward EFA

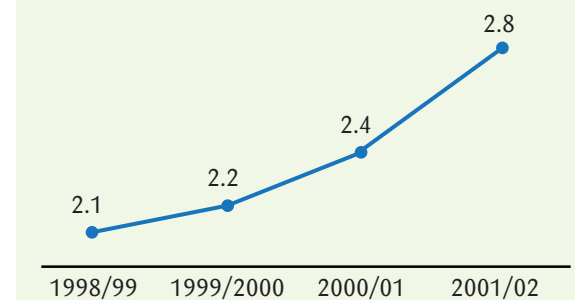
Since 1999, two programs have been built on these foundations to help to accelerate progress. The Education Quality Improvement Project seeks to model a participatory approach to school quality improvement and performance-based resource management. The project operates in three provinces, covering 23 percent of the total primary school population. Responsibility for change is lodged at the grassroots level, with local school communities empowered to identify their own needs and make proposals for change and investment. Funds are delivered directly to school clusters by the Ministry of Education. Change management in clusters is supported by district-based animators, who in turn draw general lessons from the experience with the schools' quality improvement grants to advise government on how to improve its education policies. The animators are supported by a network of technical assistance at the local level which provides pedagogical and organizational support.

The project has succeeded in stimulating a lively professional dialogue at the school, cluster, and administrative levels on ways to improve schools. It has also set in place the process of change in the administration of schooling as well as in teaching and learning practices. As a result, unprecedented responsibility has been devolved to school and local administrators, challenging them to fully utilize their skills and imagination; education policy has become more "adaptive" and better informed by experience; and encouraging progress has been made in increasing enrollment, decreasing repetition and dropout, and improving teaching and student learning.

Another major effort of the Government is the Priority Action Program (PAP) that operates nation-

wide. By providing resources directly to schools for routine operating expenses and a few pre-specified development activities, this program improved the availability of classroom materials and helped to mitigate the effect of very low teacher salaries by providing teachers with supplements for conducting remedial classes. However, its greatest impact has perhaps occurred through the requirement that schools which receive PAP funds do not charge entrance fees. The reduction in fees appears to have helped stimulate demand for education from many families for whom cost of education was a barrier to entry. As a result, the Ministry is reporting a rapid increase in the number of children registering for school in the 2001/02 school year.

Enrollment in Primary Education (millions of students)



## Lessons Learned

Prolonged periods of conflict weaken the education system by destroying the organization and talent which it needs to operate. The effects are compounded by impoverishment of the population and the consequent loss of many people's ability to pay for education. Even in a post-conflict environment, progress can be hampered for many years by continuing political instability, poor economic performance, and weak financing systems.

Recovery is often slow. It requires mutually reinforcing programs that address the organizational and financial issues at hand. It requires participation by all levels of the system, from schools and communities to the central ministries.

## Education in Cambodia

### Socio-Economic Indicators:

Population (millions)	12
Percent below poverty line	36.1
GNP per capita	260
IDA/IBRD	IDA
PRSP	Full 2003

### Education Indicators:

Adult functional illiteracy rate	64
Primary net enrollment rate:	84
Net enrollment rate in lower secondary school	17
Upper secondary net enrollment rate	8
Tertiary gross enrollment rate	1
Total education spending as % of GDP	1.3
Estimated annual financing gap for EFA (\$m)	19
of which recurrent	19

## Remaining Challenges

Cambodia's recovery has been particularly slow and painful. This is due in part to the depth of the crisis in the 1970s and the many years of isolation and instability that followed. A decade of gradually increasing Government budget for education and significant foreign investment in the sector appears to be on the

verge of paying off. Many of the recent gains can be attributed at least in part to programs which have energized and resourced schools, communities and local administrators. Sustained efforts to build capacity and strengthen institutions are essential. However, faster progress is hampered by continued Government under-spending in the sector, the heavy burden on families and communities for financing education, and the lack of meaningful civil service reform.

**This note was prepared in consultation with the Cambodian government by Christopher J. Thomas, Senior General Educator, East Asia and Pacific, Human Development Network, The World Bank. This note series is intended to summarize lessons learned and key policy findings on the World Bank's work in education. The views expressed in these notes are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the World Bank. For additional copies of Education Notes, please contact the Education Advisory Service by email at [eservice@worldbank.org](mailto:eservice@worldbank.org) or visit the web site: <http://www.worldbank.org/education/>**