Basic Education Opens Doors for Teachers

In a classroom of seventh-grade students divided equally between girls and boys, Tim Sophanny, a 30-year-old teacher at Sre Preah Secondary School in Keo Seima district of Mondulkiri, is writing the lesson on a dark-green board with one hand while covering her nose with the other to avoid inhaling chalk dust.

She turns to her students and asks: “Who knows what a Cambodian house is usually made of?” Several students raise their hands. Her question relates to one of the subjects she is now teaching at grade 7 since being promoted to working at a secondary school in the middle of last year after four tough years as a kindergarten teacher.

“It was an important day for me,” she recalls of her first day teaching at secondary school. “I felt a little afraid, but I was committed to rise to the challenge.”

Sophanny finished high school in Battambang provincial town, about 720 km from where she lives now. She passed the entry exam for teacher training in 2001 and became a teacher in 2003. After teaching a kindergarten class for four years, she felt frustrated and began looking for an opportunity to find a job that matched her education.

“I wanted to upgrade my knowledge and my skills to teach at a higher level,” she says. “I wanted to get a better salary for living,” she adds, laughing.

Sophanny teaches Khmer Literature and Home Economics. She teaches 18 hours a week and expects to get around 260,000 riel (US$65) a month, up from only 190,000 riel ($47) a month teaching kindergarten.

Sophanny: “I want to upgrade my knowledge to teach at a higher level.”

Program Inspires Students to Dream Big

Meas Sokhunthea, a shy 8th grade student at Preah An Kosa secondary school in Siem Reap town, has wanted to be a teacher since she was a little girl. “With the scholarship that I’ve been given and my mom’s strong support for my studies, I believe I will reach my goal,” she said.

Sokhunthea is one of 36,000 lower-secondary and primary students who received scholarships through a component of the Cambodia Education Sector Support Project (CESSP), which is financed by the World Bank in Cambodia. Under the program, students receive scholarships ranging from US$45 to US$60 per year to support their study. Sokhunthea got US$ 45, which she used to buy her uniform, books, pen and her school bag. Sokhunthea thanks the program because it helps to reduce her mother’s financial burden of buying Sokhunthea’s school materials.

Her schoolmate, Cheng Sopheap, who received US$60, said the money is helping him to concentrate on his studies. He said it makes him less worried about finding money to buy school materials. Sopheap has three brothers and a sister; all of them are in school. “If there is no support, I won’t be here because my parents are very poor,” he said.

In a classroom at Borkeo secondary school in Borkeo district, around 25 km from Ratanakiri provincial town, another student...

Meas Sokhunthea: “With the scholarship that I’ve been given and my mom’s strong support for my studies, I believe I will reach my goal”
Improving the Quality and Access of Education

Challenge: Keeping children – particularly poor children – in school beyond the first few grades of primary school, the quality of teachers and the large student-teacher ratio (49.7:1 in primary school) are the most significant challenges. Policies that attract children to school at the proper enrolment age and policies that attract, retain, develop, and motivate teachers are key to reducing primary school dropout and improve quality of education. Child work, which contributes significantly to the livelihoods of households, can interfere with schooling. Also, household direct costs for schooling, such as pocket money, transportation costs, and supplementary tutoring, remain substantial. School incentive schemes that provide cash or in-kind subsidies to poor children conditional on school attendance are promising.

Approach: The World Bank funded, Cambodia Education Sector Support Project is supporting the Government to expand access to educational services by addressing supply, demand, quality and efficiency constraints. At the same time, a multi-donor trust fund project managed by the World Bank called Education Sector Support Project. In addition to the World Bank, the FTI multi-donor trust fund provides US$57.4 million to achieve the educational MDGs.

The main objectives of the Government’s approach to improving education include:
• assuring equitable access to early childhood, primary, and lower secondary educational services through the reduction of cost barriers to schooling and targeted facilities development;
• improving the quality and efficiency of services through greater decentralization of school management, enhanced teacher professional development, and provision of instructional materials, and developing national assessment system and teacher standards, developing higher education systems and capacity; and
• strengthening institutional capacity to administer educational services and implement quality control mechanisms.

Results:
• Together with development partners, the World Bank has been instrumental in supporting Government’s adoption of institutional reforms through analysis and policy dialogue, such as the Government’s Education Sector Support Project. In addition to the World Bank, the FTI multi-donor trust fund provides US$57.4 million to support the Government’s efforts to achieve the educational MDGs.

Partners: 30 development partners contribute funds to the FTI multi-donor trust fund, which is part of the global Education For All Fast Track Initiative (http://www.education-fast-track.org/).

Next Steps for FTI
• 650 new pre-school classes, 150 home-based care and 150 community preschool programs to be established;
• 650 incomplete schools buildings to complete with six full primary grades; 25 preschool buildings; 25 overcrowded primary school buildings; 1 three-story pre-school teacher training center to be constructed;
• school improvement grants and supplementary learning materials to be provided to 650 schools;
• primary scholarships to be awarded to 10,000 children;
• 15,000 teachers to be trained in child-friendly school methodologies; 1,500 principals to be trained in effective leadership and school management;
• school self-assessment and planning tools and new School Inspection and Monitoring policy issued;
• 60 District Education Offices buildings to be upgraded; and
• 300 Government official to be trained in financial and procurement management.
• early grade reading assessment and intervention will be piloted to improve quality of education.
Effective Education Project Focuses on Poor

The Cambodia Education Sector Support Project (CESSP), which is supported financially by the World Bank, has been implemented by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport for four years. The World Bank Cambodia monthly Newsletter interviewed H.E. Ou Eng, CESSP Project Manager, on the project’s achievements and the challenges it faces.

Please could you let us know what the goal of CESSP is?

The goal of CESSP is to assist the Government of Cambodia, particularly the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), to expand access to educational services by addressing supply, demand quality, and efficiency constraints with special focus on poor and under-served communes. There are two essential objectives. First, to demonstrate characteristics of effective schooling for primary and lower secondary schools, with increased participation from poor and disadvantaged children a specific target. Second, to improve institutional capacity for Government Policy and Administration to address issues of education quality at all levels.

Why does Cambodia need the CESSP?

Cambodia needs the CESSP in order to implement three of the main strategies in the Cambodia Education Strategic plan. These are Increasing Equitable Access, Improving Quality and Effectiveness, and Support to Higher Education.

What are the achievements of the CESSP in its four years?

The CESSP is a five-year program due to end in December 2010. To date the project has achieved the majority of its planned outcomes. These include the following:

- Construction of 249 Lower Secondary Schools, mostly in remote areas. This includes 17 schools to be completed in 2010;
- Delivery of more than 30,000 scholarships to poor students in 23 provinces;
- Creation of a national leadership program for school directors;
- Creation of a set of Teacher Standards approved by the MoEYS;
- Establishment of a national training program for Basic Education Teachers. To date 6,343 teachers have had their skills upgraded through this program;
- Support to 139 Lower Secondary Schools to implement the MoEYS Child-Friendly School policy;
- Establishment of national tests at grades 3, 6 and 9;
- Support to the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia to develop Higher Education Accreditation Standards;
- Support to the Department of Higher Education to develop a vision and strategy for the future of Higher Education;
- Construction of the Hun Sen Library Extension at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, which began in early 2010.

What are the challenges of implementing the CESSP?

The main challenge is to establish mechanisms to ensure that the good practices developed by the project are sustained and further developed after the project finishes.

What lesson has been learned from the project?

The main lesson to be learned is that seemingly impossible obstacles can be overcome and seemingly impossible targets can be reached through development of a shared vision and clear leadership.

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“Now we have almost enough teachers at our school,” she said.

Another promoted teacher, 25-year-old Yim Sokhunthea, now teaches at O’Rang Secondary School after four years teaching at Rokar Primary School around 60 km from his home in the provincial town of Mondulkiri. He teaches Khmer Literature, Civics and Fine Arts to students at grade 7 and 8. This is his first year and it has some challenges, but he feels proud and confident of his promotion.

“I am so happy to be here teaching at secondary school,” he smiles. “This place has made it possible to move to teach at a higher education level.”

By being promoted, Sokhunthea also gets better pay and has more time than when he was teaching at primary school to prepare his teaching methods and to continue his university study. He spends his weekends studying for a Bachelor of Arts in Khmer Literature at the University of Phnom Penh. He hopes one day he can teach at high school and university.

Choy Veasna, Director of O’Rang Secondary School, where 90 percent of the 155 students are of Mondulkiri’s Phnong ethnic group, welcomes the new policy of upgrading and assigning more teachers for secondary schools. At his school, teachers used to teach more than 30 hours a week, but now many teach a maximum of 20 hours. However, for some subjects such as Home Economics, Computers, and English, it is still a challenge to find enough teachers, so some teachers are still teaching over 30 hours a week, much more than the standard 18 hours.

Sophany and Sokhunthea are among 2,500 primary school teachers around Cambodia who have been trained and upgraded to become basic education teachers under the Cambodia Education Sector Support Project (CESSP), supported by the World Bank and implemented by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport.

Basic-education teachers were introduced in 2005 to relieve the shortage of quality teachers in lower secondary and primary education.
Subject-Based Classroom Improves Student Learning

Chan Srey Lin, an 8th grade student at Tropang Chres secondary school, enjoys studying in her new Subject-Based Classroom. “I like studying in a subject-based classroom because it is a friendly and good environment. It is easy for me to learn and to absorb what our teachers tell us.”

The subject-based classroom is a part of the Child-Friendly School Policy launched by the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport in December 2007, aimed at improving the quality of the learning environment. Each subject-based classroom is the setting for teaching from one to four subjects; for example, maths, physics and chemistry could be grouped together as one; history and geography as another.

Chan Ratha, Principal of Tropang Chres secondary school in Kon Mom district of Ratanakiri province, said her school had introduced subject-based classrooms in 2007 and found it encourages students to come to class and actively participate in producing their own teaching materials, such as maps, mathematical, chemistry and other formula charts, artwork and so on.

“I see that students are very active in participating in this kind of classroom compared with what we used to have before,” she said.

In the past, she said, students from grade 7 to 9 remained in their classroom while their subject teachers came and went. However, since no teacher was responsible for the classroom in which they taught, there were generally no learning displays on the walls and the classroom was often a barren environment. Now, with the subject-based classroom, it is the students rather than the teachers who move from room to room. The classrooms have become dedicated environments for their special subjects. And moving classrooms to change subjects gives the pupils a break to refresh themselves for the next lesson.

In the two years since the new policy has been implemented in her school, Ratha has noticed students’ learning has significantly improved.

Nget Sophen, who teaches grade 7, 8 and 9 on geography and history at Tropang Chres Secondary School, agreed with his Principal that his students’ learning had greatly improved. In particular, he said, the new system encourages slow learners to communicate with better students in the class.

Sophen added that the subject-based classroom is an easier environment for teachers because the appropriate teaching materials are right there in the classroom.

“If we want to show a map, for example, we just point to a big map hanging on the wall; no need for everyone to try to look in the teacher’s text book,” he said.

Tropang Chres Secondary School’s introduction of subject-based classrooms makes it a stand-out success among schools in Cambodia. However, some schools, particularly new schools and schools short of teachers, find it hard to set up or to sustain subject-based classrooms.

Seng Chantha, Principal of Tropang Kroham Secondary School, 9 km from Tropang Chres School, is planning to introduce subject-based classrooms in the next academic year.

“I see that this kind of classroom allows students to participate more in their learning; it favors student-centered learning,” he said. “However, because we don’t have enough teachers, it will be a big challenge for us.”

Mr Chantha said his school has only four teachers, including himself. Each of them teaches four subjects for grades 7, 8 and 9. This multiple-subject teaching does not allow teachers to focus thoroughly on their particular subjects.

The subject-based classroom program is supported by the Cambodia Education Sector Support Project, which is supported financially by the World Bank.

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9th grade scholarship recipient, Pov Theary, has been given a scholarship for grades 7, 8 and 9. Each school year she gets $60. Like most of other scholarship students, Theary uses the scholarship money to buy books, uniforms, and a bicycle, and the rest she gives to her mom for buying food for the family.

Theary had been asked by her mom to quit school when she finished grade 6 because her family could not support her continuing schooling.

“When she passed grade 6, I asked her to quit school because I don’t have money to support her and I have to look after my old parents,” her mother, Pov Loth, said. “I am alone, with no husband. It has been difficult. I couldn’t support her to continue to study. The school is far. I had no money to buy a bicycle for her and to pay for her school uniforms and school materials. “I remember, Theary looked so sad and worried. I really felt bad. Luckily she got a scholarship.”

Like Sokhunthea and perhaps many other students, Theary’s end-goal is to be a teacher. “I want to be a teacher because I like it and I see that there are not enough teachers in my community.”