



Development Progress



Rebuilding basic education in Cambodia: Establishing a more effective development partnership

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List of abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CDC	Council for the Development of Cambodia
CFS	Child-Friendly Schools
CGDK	Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DME	Deprivation and Marginalization in Education
DP	Development Partner
EC	European Commission
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EEQP	Enhancing Education Quality Project (ADB)
EFA	Education for All
EMIS	Education Monitoring Information System
ESP	Education Strategic Plan
ESSP	Education Sector Support Programme
ESWG	Education Sector Working Group
FTI	Fast-Track Initiative
FUNCINPEC	Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique et Coopératif (National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INEE	Inter Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
JFPR	Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction
JTWG-Ed	Joint Technical Working Group – Education
KAPE	Kampuchean Action for Primary Education
MEF	Ministry of Economy and Finance
MoEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport
MTEF	Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
NAR	Net Admissions Rate
NEP	NGO Education Partnership

NER	Net Enrolment Rate
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSDP	National Strategic Development Plan
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PAP	Priority Action Programme
PBB	Priority-Based Budgets
PETS	Public Expenditure Tracking Survey
PFM	Public Financial Management
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
PTR	Pupil-Teacher Ratio
SCN	Save the Children Norway
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SMC	School Management Committee
SWAp	Sector-Wide Approach
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
US	United States
VSO	Volunteer Services Overseas
WFP	World Food Programme

1. Introduction

After years of civil war and the genocide of the Khmer Rouge era, Cambodia has made substantial progress in re-establishing a more equitable primary and secondary education system. Through an incremental and ongoing process of rebuilding both the country's destroyed infrastructure and its decimated human, institutional and social capital, Cambodia could approach universal primary completion within the coming decade.

Currently, almost all children are entering school, and significantly more are completing primary and secondary school than only 10 years ago.¹ The gender gap both at primary level and at lower secondary level has effectively been closed. In recent years, high dropout and repetition rates have begun to decline, which has contributed to a significant expansion of secondary education. The number of children reaching the last year of lower secondary school more than doubled between 2000 and 2008, and the number of successful Grade 12 graduates increased almost threefold in this time. The rate of improvement has been most notable among girls; in rural and remote areas where the majority of the poor and most marginalised live; and among lower income quintiles.

Three closely interlinked factors have driven recent improvements:

- Efforts by the Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) together with development partners (DPs) to create a more effective administrative and planning structure, paired with capacity development of the ministry and regional departments;
- An increase in supply-side investments by donors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), complemented by greater government expenditure and demand-side policies to increase initial enrolment and address high dropout and repetition rates;
- Highly innovative work with communities by some local and international NGOs, particularly in remote areas, developing more effective ways of improving educational quality, reaching the marginalised and increasing the relevance of education.

Progress achieved to date points to the increased effectiveness of the partnership between the government, DPs and civil society. Improvements in policymaking and capacity are also facilitating the movement towards national ownership. In particular, Cambodia's reform process underlines the importance of moving towards more sustainable and nationally owned systems of service delivery, even when institutional capacity is still developing, while also promoting experimentation and innovation.

Sustaining, consolidating and building on the improvements of the past two decades will be a key challenge over the coming years. Substantial concerns remain with regard to high dropout and repetition rates; low levels of education among teachers; teachers' low salaries; continued prevalence of informal school fees; limited accountability and capacity in terms of system administration and governance; and the slow pace of decentralisation and deconcentration reforms. Achieving the Education for All (EFA) goals will require substantial further reforms to address sector governance, and targeted investments to lower the opportunity cost of education for the poor, as well as comprehensive efforts to improve the relatively low quality of education.

¹ Almost all children are entering school, and the gross intake rate for the last year of primary – a proxy for completion – increased from 47% in 2000 to 79.5% in 2008 (data from UNESCO Institute of Statistics).

2. Context

Cambodia's ongoing improvements in its education system must be seen within a historical and social context of frequent conflict, fragility and a strongly hierarchical social and political structure. According to some estimates, the genocide under Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979) resulted in the death of at least 1.7 million out of a population of 7 million. In the process, Cambodia's education system was destroyed, with schools left to rot. The educated classes were killed, fled or managed to survive by impersonating subsistence farmers. The government estimates that 75% of teachers, 96% of university students and 67% of all primary and secondary school pupils were killed or died of overwork and starvation when the Khmer Rouge was in power (Benveniste et al., 2008). In short, 'the education system was transformed into part of the Khmer Rouge's "agricultural village ideal"' (Ratcliffe et al., 2009: 127).

The ousting of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge by Vietnamese troops and the establishment of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) under the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) marked the beginning of a long and difficult period of reconstruction. The Cambodian Department of Education (the forerunner of MoEYS) was established under Vietnamese occupation in 1979. It initially comprised 10 members of staff, who nonetheless managed to open schools throughout the country in the same year (Quinn, 2009a).

The devastated economy drew support from the communist and non-aligned world,² as well as from numerous NGOs that were supporting the country's reconstruction process. Enrolment increased steadily, from 240,000 to 1.3 million pupils only a few years later. However, civil unrest continued, and substantial sources of fragility remained throughout the 1980s. Most notably, the Chinese- and Western-supported insurgency continued to generate great instability,³ and there was substantial mistrust of the Vietnamese occupying force, as well as considerable tensions within the CPP leadership. Further, social sector spending remained very low, with state revenues constituting only 1-2% of gross domestic product (GDP). A lack of resources and low capacity in ministries meant central and provincial administrative governance remained underdeveloped (Ratcliffe, 2009).

After the signature of the Paris Peace Agreement in 1991 and establishment of the transition government, the country remained in a fragile situation. However, the new situation allowed for a more concerted effort by many within the Cambodian government, donors and NGOs to expand access to education in a more equitable and sustainable manner. MoEYS was established in 1992, and EFA principles were integral to the new 1993 Constitution. The UN organised free elections in 1993, which resulted in FUNCINPEC (the royalist party) winning the most votes, with the CPP coming in second. However, the CPP contested the results, and the end result was a power-sharing agreement, with two prime ministers and two ruling parties (Commins et al., 2009).

This outcome arguably laid the groundwork for a continuously problematic process of state building throughout the 1990s, and for continued conflicts between the two parties, between different branches of government, between the military and the police and between different factions of the CPP (Hughes and Conway, 2003). The ensuing rule by a 'two-headed government' was characterised by efforts by both parties to control various aspects of the political and economic system. This period represented an 'inauspicious start to the building of the constitutional state in Cambodia' (Hughes and Conway, 2003: 25), as 'constitutional provisions were consistently subordinated to short-term political gain by parties who feared one another as a threat to their own survival and the survival of nation and state.'

Legislation was passed only very slowly, and political elites made almost no progress in constructing a political settlement on the basis of the Paris Peace Agreement (Commins et al., 2009). The political and security situation remained precarious, and tensions resulted in a military battle breaking out between the ruling parties. This resulted in a clear victory for the CPP, and the killing, flight or defection to other parties of the FUNCINPEC leadership.

The CPP, led by Hun Sen, won both the 1998 and 2003 elections, entering into coalition governments with the increasingly weakened FUNCINPEC. The latter was in charge of most social ministries, including education, but parallel bureaucracies remained in most ministries. It was not until 2008 that the CPP won an outright majority, with MoEYS also transferring to the CPP under Secretary of State Im Sethy.

² Until the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement, the Vietnamese-supported PRK remained under US sanctions, and the US provided covert support to the tripartite opposition, including the Khmer Rouge, the Khmer People's National Liberation Front and FUNCINPEC. Within the UN, this Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) continued to be recognised as the legitimate government of Cambodia.

³ Many of these insurgents who had been pushed to the Thai border by Vietnamese troops hid in remote parts of the country and continued to launch attacks throughout the 1990s.

3. What has been achieved

This section argues that the reforms in the education sector, particularly over the past decade, represent ‘a significant improvement in access and quality of education at primary and secondary level.’ The provision of equitable access at all levels of education, especially primary, has undoubtedly improved. The process of addressing education quality is – as in most low-income countries – less amenable to the large-scale investments and supply-side improvements that have driven increased enrolment rates, although substantial efforts are being made.

Box 1: Cambodia's progress in education – key initiatives to expand access to the poor

The past three decades have seen systematic improvements throughout the education system, which have particularly accelerated in the 2000s. The following four initiatives are indicative of progress achieved:

Fee abolition: The abolition of start-of-year school fees in 2000 across the country, paired with extensive outreach and enrolment campaigns, led to a surge of new students, with the number of primary school pupils rising from 2.2 million to 2.7 million between 1999/00 and 2001/02. The greatest increases occurred in remote areas, where the number of pupils almost tripled (Chansopheak, 2009). At the lower secondary level, achievements were equally dramatic, with an average annual expansion between 1999/00 and 2003/04 of 24.2% (Bray and Seng, 2005). Although household schooling costs remain substantial (particularly to pay for supplemental afternoon tutoring), they declined significantly as a result of fee abolition. In 2004, households were meeting 55.6% of primary schooling costs, compared with 76.9% in 1997/98 (ibid).

School construction: Within the space of less than 20 years, a nationwide system of over 6,600 primary schools (an increase of over 40% on 1990/91) and over 1,500 secondary schools (an almost fourfold increase in relation to 1990/91) was created. This has been instrumental in facilitating access to education – particularly in rural and remote areas, where school construction has been most intensive. School infrastructure has been improved substantially, and the phasing-out of a number of incomplete schools (which do not offer all grades) is being tackled as a priority in the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2006-2010. These improvements have been key to increasing enrolment rates, particularly in rural and remote regions.

Teacher recruitment and deployment: Similarly, recruitment of teachers from remote areas to teach in underserved schools has been facilitated through the waiving of Grade 12 entry requirements in areas where upper secondary schools are not widely available, thereby allowing lower secondary graduates to train. Further, teacher-training scholarships for students from poor and ethnic minority backgrounds are now available, and targets have been set for the recruitment of minority students. Despite facing initial problems, these efforts are starting to pay off, as the supply of young teacher recruits is being expanding to small isolated schools (Benviste et al., 2008).

Scholarships for the poor: Lower secondary scholarship programmes for the poorest girls (and later boys) piloted by local NGOs proved an effective tool to address demand-side constraints. These programmes provided grants to the families of children from disadvantaged backgrounds to decrease the opportunity costs entailed in continuing education after primary school. Through programmes supported by the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR), families of eligible girls entering Grade 7 received grants of around \$45, conditional on their children attending secondary school. The JFPR programme covered 93 secondary schools in the poorest communes across the country (and 15% of all lower secondary schools). This benefited over 4,000 girls per year between 2002 and 2005, and proved a remarkably effective incentive, increasing enrolment rates by 31.3% among beneficiaries and by as much as 50% for girls in the poorest income quintile. A follow-up programme, Scholarships for the Poor, was started in 2005. This was integrated into the ESP 2006-2010 and was also open to boys (see Box 3 for further details).

3.1 Gradual recovery of the sector

Throughout the past two decades, reforms of Cambodia's education sector have, in the words of one informant, been a process of 'two steps forward, one step back.' Despite the country's continued fragility after the signature of the Paris Peace Accords in 1991 and the establishment of the transition government, a more concerted effort to expand access to education in an equitable and sustainable manner was launched by the Cambodian government, donors and NGOs. MoEYS was established in 1992, and EFA principles were integral to the new 1993 Constitution.

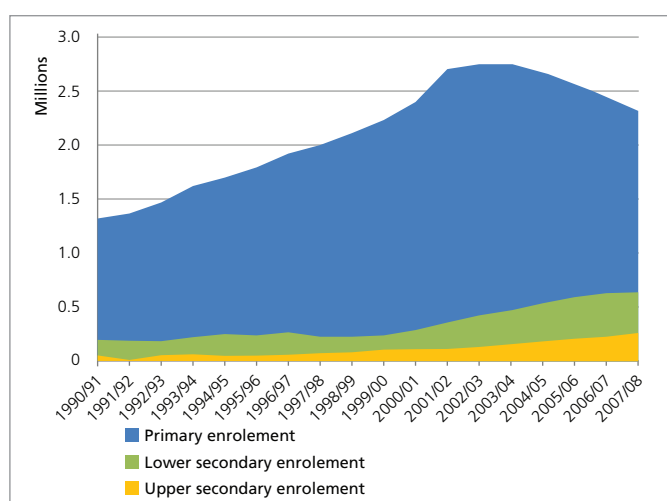
The return of foreign aid in the early 1990s led to what has been called the 'donorship' phase of the country's post-conflict development, with donor and NGO assistance amounting to approximately \$50 million per year. Reconstruction of the education sector was extensive, but the gradual expansion of the system remained largely uncoordinated, with limited attention accorded to medium-term planning and capacity development. The process was not nationally owned in any meaningful way. Donors drove most investments in education through parallel implementation and management systems, and security concerns further limited support to underserved provinces. Nonetheless, during this period, a general understanding of the services that communities could expect was created (Ratcliffe et al., 2009).

Despite the inflow of aid and emergency relief from DPs during the 1990s, and despite improved enrolment outcomes, it was widely recognised by the end of the decade that sector performance had remained disappointing. The approach in which 'everything was a priority' (Quinn, 2009a: 3) had resulted in a proliferation of discrete and often unconnected donor and NGO projects. Donor support was poorly aligned and generally independent of highly fragmented government policies, with no clear sector priorities or implementation plans. The government provided only a low share of spending on education – less than 10% of total expenditure. Over 50% of public spending was devoted to defence throughout most of the 1990s, and ministries exerted little pressure to give greater resources to social sectors (Hughes and Conway, 2003). Nevertheless, as we discuss in greater detail below, substantial gains were made in education.

3.2 Primary school access and progression

The expansion of access to basic education represents the biggest success story in the Cambodian education system. Over the past two decades, enrolment has increased dramatically, with primary enrolment doubling between 1990 and 2000 and secondary enrolment increasing substantially from 2000 onwards (Figure 1). Although primary enrolment in absolute numbers began to decline in 2004/05, the enrolment rate continued to increase, owing to Cambodia's unique population structure caused by high mortality during the 1970s and 1980s. It is gradually approaching 100%.⁴

Figure 1: Expansion of primary and secondary education, 1990/91-2006/07

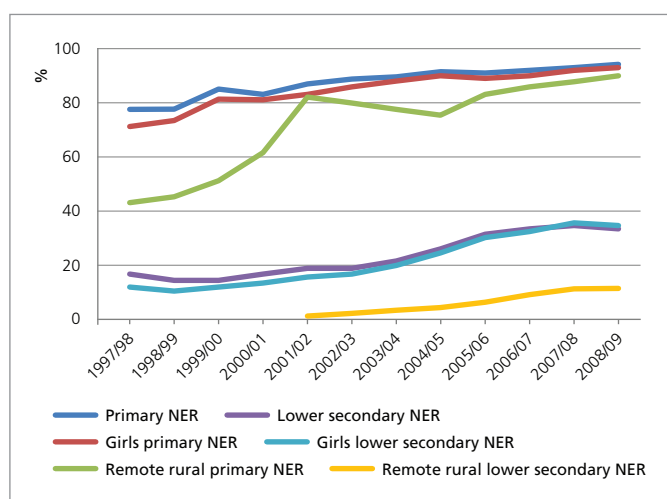


Source: MoEYS (2008).

⁴ This high mortality experienced among men and women (who are now in their 40s) led to a depressed birth rate among these individuals, resulting in an unusually smaller age cohort of individuals in the 20-24 age range. Because this is a prime childbearing time for Cambodian women, the effects of war in turn led to a smaller age cohort of children aged 0-4 during the current decade (Bredenberg, 2003). This has contributed to declines in school intake after 2004.

According to MoEYS statistics, the net enrolment rate (NER) increased from 85.5% in 1999/00 to 95.8% in 2007/08.⁵ The net admissions rate increased substantially – from 71.4% in 1999/00 to 93.8% in 2009/10 (Figure 2). The gross enrolment rate (GER), which takes account of all children enrolled (especially the large proportion of overage children) has been in excess of 100% for the past 10 years, and is gradually declining as the efficiency of the system is improving and the primary school age structure is approaching the appropriate age. The Grade 6 gross intake rate – a proxy for completion – has shown substantial improvements in recent years, increasing from 41% in 1999/00 to 79% in 2007/08, and the number of students successfully graduating from Grade 6 increased by 98% between 2000/01 and 2007/08.

Figure 2: Expansion of primary and secondary education, 1997/98-2008/09



Source: MoEYS data.

The internal efficiency of the system remains a substantial problem. While age-based enrolment figures for 2008/09 indicate that almost all children between the ages of 7 and 10 are enrolled in school in some grade, by age 10 less than one-third are in their age-appropriate Grade 5. Policies to reduce the repetition rate, which decreased from 22.8% in 1998/99 to 10.6% in 2007/08, have shown dramatic improvements in increasing efficiency. The Grade 1 repetition rate remains at almost 20%, but drops to 12% in Grade 2, and is only 2.8% in Grade 6, suggesting that underage children without access to early pre-primary schools are entering Grade 1 and re-entering the next year. However, the dropout rate (particularly in the early years of primary and in lower secondary school) remains high. The primary survival rate is comparatively low, at 52.5% (2007/08).

3.3 Secondary school enrolment and progression

In the past 10 years, perhaps the most notable improvements have occurred in secondary school enrolment. The lower secondary school NER more than doubled to 31.9% in 2009/10. However, this represents a decline compared with 2007/08 figures (34.8%). Net enrolment in upper secondary remains low at 15.7%. This nonetheless represents a substantial improvement: the number of students in upper secondary had increased almost threefold since 2000/01 and the NER more than doubled.⁶ Given high rates of repetition and late entry, it is notable that GERs at lower secondary remain almost twice as high as NERs (63.6% in 2007/08).

Over two-thirds of Cambodian children can now gain at least initial access to lower secondary education, although less than 30% of the new intake of students are 12 years old, the correct age. The number of students enrolled in upper secondary school has also increased significantly, with almost 300,000 students currently enrolled – almost triple the figure of 2000/01. Completion rates show the greatest improvements in performance compared with the beginning of the last decade, with the gross intake to Grade 9 at 48.7% in 2007/08. The number of students finishing Grade 9 in 2007/08 had increased by 274%, and the number of students finishing Grade 12 had more than doubled. Whereas repetition rates are very low in secondary school, dropout rates in lower secondary have remained high, at 21%, and are at 14.4% in upper secondary (MoEYS, 2008).

⁵. According to World Bank Education Statistics, the net enrolment rate in 1990 stood at 66%.

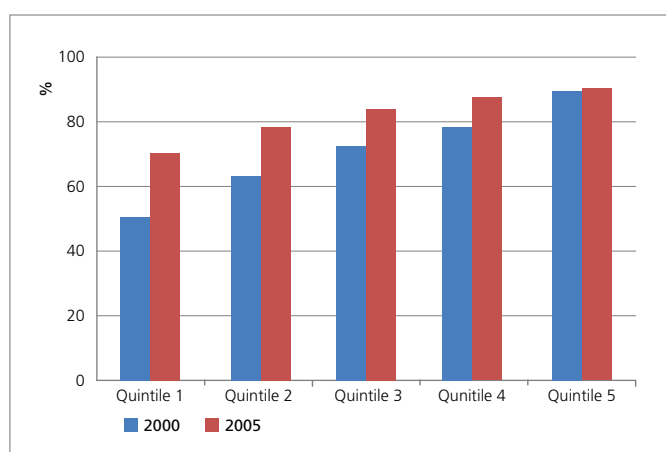
⁶. Enrolment in upper secondary increased from 105,086 students (33,465 females) to 292,423 (123,334) in this eight-year time period.

3.4 Equity of education

Reform efforts in the education sector have tended to improve equity outcomes, with particularly noticeable success in expanding access to education for previously marginalised groups of children, such as girls and those in rural and remote areas (Chansopheak, 2009). Although socioeconomic, rural/urban and gender gaps in educational attainment remain substantial, these have generally been reduced significantly during the past decade, particularly in primary schools (Benviste et al., 2008). At primary level, Cambodia has achieved gender parity, and the lower secondary NER for girls is higher than that for boys. Dropout rates at lower secondary remain higher for girls, but the difference between boys and girls has closed significantly in recent years. However, Cambodia remains a very unequal society, with educational marginalisation heavily stratified according to geography (region and rural/urban), income, ethnicity and gender.

The poorest in Cambodia are much more likely to attend primary school, and school enrolment has improved substantially for the bottom quintiles (Figure 3). Substantial efforts have been made to increase access for the poorest, and progress has reduced disparities. However, the poorest continue to find it difficult to remain in school. Further, a World Bank (2005b) study found that overage intake and quality of teachers are distributed very much along socioeconomic lines. Addressing this challenge and ensuring that the poorest and most remote Cambodian children can enrol and remain in school will be key to improving equity of access and improving opportunities for Cambodian children in the coming years and decades.

Figure 3: Primary school enrolment by economic quintile, 2000 and 2005



Source: Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey data.

Although all provinces now have primary NERs above 79%, secondary net enrolment rates range from 9.7% (Pailin) and 13.5% (Ratanakiri) to 66.5% in Phnom Penh. Differences used to be particularly pronounced for rural, urban and remote areas, although remote regions have caught up significantly at primary level: the primary NER in remote areas increased from 52% in 1996 to over 88% in 2007/08. However, the lower secondary NER in remote areas (11.1%) remains far below the national average (34.8%), and at upper secondary the NER is only 1.2% (14.8% nationally).

In examining the distribution of educational outcomes by region, Collins (2009) finds that, although educational inequality declined substantially between 1997 and 2003 (coinciding with the introduction of school fee abolition), provinces with significant minority populations (Koh Kong, Mondulakiri, Otdar Meanchey, Preah Vihear and Ratanakiri) remain more disadvantaged and also have higher levels of educational inequality.⁷

⁷ Collins (2009) argues that a number of factors can explain this. The education system is not culturally neutral and may not be perceived as relevant. Despite some recent efforts to increase the scope of bilingual education, the language of instruction is generally Khmer, and the curriculum does not sufficiently recognise indigenous languages, cultures or knowledge. Ethnic minority students are often exposed to small, overcrowded schools that are located far from their homes, with lessons taught in a language foreign to their own by a teacher with only primary education.

Meanwhile, according to the UN Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) Deprivation and Marginalization in Education (DME) database (2005), being a rural girl in Mondulkiri and Ratanakiri provinces increases the risk of not being in school by a factor of five; 17-22-year-old women in the poorest income quintile from these provinces averaged only 0.56 years of education – around a third of their male counterparts and a tenth of the national average for this age cohort (5.96 years). This clustering of disadvantages ‘reflects the combined effects of poverty, isolation, discrimination and cultural practices, as well as policy failures in education’ (UNESCO, 2010: 145).

Thus, although access to education has improved substantially for many in recent years, the level of inequality remains high. Ensuring good quality education and other services for all Cambodians is therefore a key challenge for the government and DPs.

3.5 Quality of education

As in most low-income countries, where quality enhancement programmes compete with programmes to expand access for scarce resources, quality of education and levels of achievement by Cambodian students remain one of the key obstacles to ensuring the benefits from education. Classrooms remain very crowded – the pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) at primary level has remained at or above 50 over the past decade. It also varies significantly across provinces, ranging from 31.9 in Phnom Penh to 71.0 in Pailin. The pupil-class ratio in primary has declined in recent years, from 44.6 (2001/02) to 38.3 (2007/08). Given the surge in lower secondary enrolment, the PTR at this level increased from 17 to 27 between 1999/00 and 2007/08 and, more importantly, the pupil-class ratio is at 48 (2007/08), an increase on 2001/02 (45.1). Secondary schools are thus increasingly experiencing problems of overcrowding, although this is highly variable at the class level.

Levels of achievement remain low: a Grade 3 assessment of the Khmer language involving almost 7,000 students found that 60% had ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ skills in reading, writing and maths. Scores improve substantially among Grade 6 students: given near universal completion rates for Grade 3 – and more limited access to Grade 6 – these differences highlight the inherent challenges of maintaining quality while expanding participation. There are also reports of considerable gaps between planned and actual teaching hours, as well as of late starting, early closing, teacher and student absenteeism and long breaks during school hours (IIEP, 2010).

The elimination of the educated class during the Khmer Rouge period has left a legacy of low levels of education among the adult population. This severely limits short- and medium-term possibilities in relation to improving teaching quality: while over two-thirds of primary teachers have completed at least lower secondary school, older teachers tend to be much worse educated than their younger counterparts. A total of 87% of primary school teachers over 40 have only a lower secondary education or less. In contrast, 90% of teachers under 30 have completed upper secondary school (Benveniste et al., 2008). Construction of teacher training colleges has been a high government priority in recent years, and almost all secondary school teachers have graduated from these. Among secondary teachers, almost-two thirds have completed at least upper secondary, and 18% have had some post-secondary education. These numbers, while in many ways quite low, still represent a considerable improvement, taking into account the country's starting point.

Despite many shortfalls, the quality of education is seen to be significantly better throughout the country than it was in the early 1990s. Quality improvements have been particularly pronounced in areas where NGOs and donors have been most active. Although this leads to patchworks of higher quality, many of these are operating at increasingly higher scales and have become a more significant part of government planning in the most recent ESP (2009-2013). The new ESP also places more emphasis on standardised national learning assessments to track progress more effectively, and on the scaling-up of initiatives focused on improving quality (such as the Child-Friendly School policy). Further, there has been considerable movement forward in terms of improving curricula and material resources, with particular emphasis on developing targeted strategies to address the needs of districts with lower enrolment and completion rates (MoEYS, 2010).

Commendable efforts have been made in recent years to improve education quality and teacher training (Ratcliffe, 2009) and to deploy teachers more effectively (UNESCO, 2010). However, in addition to human and especially financial resource constraints,⁸ ‘the lack of good governance has been a factor that has historically held back efforts to improve educational quality, particularly in so far as it relates to what happens in the classroom and at school level’ (Bredenberg, 2008: 1). The country seems to remain – according to one interviewee – ‘one generation away from a higher level of education.’

⁸ According to Fast-Track Initiative (FTI) projections, MoEYS is a long way from having sufficient recurrent funds to provide even ‘low quality’ EFA, with the financing gap estimated at approximately \$150 million per annum and the financing gap for EFA with medium quality at over \$500 million per annum (Quinn, 2009a).

4. Drivers of progress

Three key factors have driven improvements in Cambodia's education in the past 20 years, enabling more equitable access to education: 1) the development of a more effective planning structure that has enabled a gradual move towards national ownership; 2) substantial increases in investments by the government, donors and NGOs to increase the number of schools and teachers and to abolish school fees; and 3) a frequently very effective and innovative NGO sector that has been instrumental in working with rural and remote communities to recognise demand-side constraints and improve access to and quality of schooling, particularly for the most marginalised groups.

4.1 A more effective planning structure led by MoEYS and DPs

4.1.1 Recognition of the need for sector reform

The lack of progress in the 1990s provided a strong incentive for a move towards a more effective and coordinated planning and implementation structure through a sector-wide approach (SWAp). Key problems were highlighted in MoEYS's EFA 2000 Assessment: high repetition and dropout rates (especially among students from poor families) after the first years of primary; high informal costs of schooling constraining equity; stagnating enrolment rates in primary and secondary education as a result of high rates of repetition and dropout; and poor learning outcomes (ADB, 2003).

Commitment at the top level in MoEYS and among certain DPs was integral to the reform process. The late Minister of Education and Deputy Prime Minister, Tol Lah, provided the impetus within the Cambodian government, and also was eager to work with DPs to improve sector organisation and performance.⁹ The Minister convened top-level donors in 1999 to propose the development of a SWAp, and MoEYS circulated a series of discussion papers to propose an 'alternative development paradigm' (ADB, 2003: 1). Key DPs, led by the European Commission (EC), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), were able to draw on early experiences of education and social sector development programmes in other Southeast Asian countries, and provided substantial leadership, technical assistance and analytical support.

It has been argued political economy factors fostered the relative effectiveness of MoEYS (and arguably that of the Ministry of Health) in establishing a framework to improve the delivery of services and to address equity more effectively. In the early stages, these ministries tended to be led by relatively effective FUNCINPEC ministers, unlike many of the ministries managing high-value resources, which the CPP controlled (Hughes and Conway, 2003). More importantly, owing to their large numbers of staff and facilities, they created fewer and more diffuse opportunities for rent seeking. This created substantial opportunities for an engaged ministry leadership to work with DPs on the development of a more pro-poor policy framework.¹⁰

The government-led consultation process guided movement towards a SWAp framework by creating the ESP and the Education Sector Support Programme (ESSP) for 2001-2005. The strategies in the ESP/ESSP were based on the overlying objectives of increasing equitable access and enrolment at all levels; improving quality and effectiveness of education; and training and strengthening capacity for education decentralisation. Box 2 summarises the key features of the SWAp.

⁹ Further, several top-level MoEYS leaders participated in the 2000 EFA World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, providing a powerful impetus to initiate a more methodical and systematic policy and planning process (Hattori, 2009).

¹⁰ While rent seeking was by no means a trivial problem, it consisted in large part of thousands of small-scale daily extractions by frontline staff to supplement incomes, rather than the large-scale corruption common in other sectors for high-level officials to use for personal enrichment (Hughes and Conway, 2003).

Box 2: Key features and components of Cambodia's SWAp

Definitions vary, but SWApS are generally said to comprise a type of cooperation in which all significant public funding to the sector supports a single policy and expenditure programme under government leadership, with all funding parties adopting common approaches across the sector, gradually progressing towards reliance on government procedures to disburse and account for all public expenditure (Brown et al., 2001).

The Cambodian SWAp was – at its outset – characterised by the following features (ADB, 2003; Hattori, 2009):

- An ESP that sets out MoEYS's overall policy framework and direction for education reform for the next five years.
- An ESSP that defines specific programmes and budget to achieve the objectives set out in the ESP. Although funding modalities varied greatly (Prasertsri, 2008), both the ADB and the EC supported the first ESP through direct sector budget support to fund ESP priorities.
- An Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) functioning as a formal mechanism for donor coordination and harmonisation, composed of 13 DP and NGO representatives.
- An NGO Education Partnership (NEP) providing an umbrella organisation representing more than 70 NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) working in education.
- A Joint Technical Working Group on Education (JTWG-Ed) offering a forum for regular policy dialogues and coordination between the government and DPs/NGOs.
- A Joint Annual Sector Review/Education Congress to assess sector performance and identify future priority actions.
- An Annual Operational Plan that translates medium-term policies and strategies into annual actions and targets, specifying all funding sources (government, DPs/NGOs).
- An Aid Effectiveness Advisor technical assistance position jointly funded by multiple DPs to assist MoEYS and the ESWG to facilitate the translation of the aid effectiveness agenda into concrete actions.

An embryonic medium-term expenditure framework (MTEF) and a joint annual sector performance review process further complemented the creation of the SWAp.

4.1.2 Effectiveness of the new planning framework

Although the move towards a SWAp is on its own not sufficient to improve sector performance, a number of important accomplishments have facilitated improvements in terms of access and efficiency outcomes. The move towards a SWAp framework allowed for multiple avenues of consultation that previously had not existed, enhancing the government's ownership of sector development. Cambodia's Fast-Track Initiative (FTI) appraisal (ESWG, 2006: 3) noted that the 'consultation process is well established and has been shown to influence the quality of policy interventions.' There has also been progress in developing key legal and policy frameworks to support and accelerate the implementation of the ESP/ESSP (Hattori, 2009).

The new planning structure greatly facilitated the disbursement of funds to schools through the Priority Action Programme (PAP) system. Senior policymakers within the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) were undertaking a financial planning and management reform process, and developed the system of PAPs for key social services, including education, to promote the implementation of pro-poor rural development policies and programmes. The 12 education sector PAPs became the primary vehicle for key supply- and demand-side initiatives and for more decentralised service delivery, providing schools with operating budgets following the abolition of school fees. They proved reasonably effective in ensuring the disbursement of funds to schools given the country's low public financial management (PFM) capacity, although concerns have been raised about the timeliness of disbursements.¹¹ The SWAp modality provided the assurance of longer-term and more flexible financial support from donors, and has been vital in enabling the channelling of funds to schools (Seel, 2007).

Cambodia was selected as a pilot country for the Paris Declaration, and this has promoted an acceleration of the ongoing PFM reform process. It has also coincided with a reduction in the number of PAPs from 12 to 5 (now known as Priority-Based Budgets (PBBs)) and attempts to improve internal auditing. Capacity remains limited, but MoEYS is arguably the most effective and consistent ministry in terms of achieving PAP/PBB objectives, and is also piloting the implementation of PFM reforms (Quinn, 2009b). There have also been substantial improvements in terms of government data collection, including the establishment of a robust Education Management Information System (EMIS). Studies by the government and the EC (in Prasertsri, 2008) found that aid effectiveness through the education sector improved substantially during 2000-2008 in terms of ownership, harmonisation, alignment and capacity development.

Nonetheless, the new systems remain far from optimal, and there are substantial concerns around capacity and sector governance: donors remain wary about using government systems in the absence of sufficient accountability. Despite significant alignment in terms of priorities and increased use of government systems, these are still in their early stages, and multiple project implementation units (including for the recent FTI-financed Education Sector Support Scale-Up Project) remain in place.¹² The movement towards a more effective sector planning structure has provided an important basis for improving education outcomes but, for it to be most effective, capacity at all levels needs to continue to improve. Hattori (2009: 195) argues 'greater efforts are required to improve the transparency, accountability and predictability of education financing on the part of both the government and [development partners].'

The process towards a more effective and nationally owned development partnership benefited from committed leadership on the part of all stakeholders, given a sense of urgency and concern at the end of 1990s that complacency had set in and that the system was underperforming. The achievement of EFA goals and of further expanding secondary and higher education, as well as the continued challenges in terms of educational quality, require that the process of institutional reform remains a priority.

4.2 Increased financing to improve education access

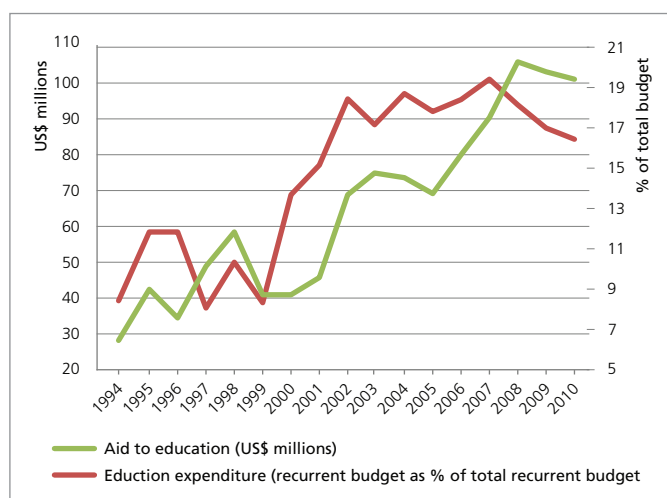
Increases in aid and government expenditure on education within the context of a more effective planning structure were an essential factor in improving the effectiveness of education policies and outcomes. Funding to the sector increased substantially following the first international conference on aid to Cambodia in 1992, with bilateral and multilateral aid increasing to an indicative \$30-40 million by the end of the decade, and the Cambodian government more than doubling public resources for education, from \$13 million to \$31 million (Ratcliffe, 2009). The development of the ESP/ESSP in 2000 increased the level of prioritisation of the sector substantially, and was followed by significant increases in government expenditure and aid.

4.2.1 Increased government education expenditure and aid to education

Even though GDP per capita has doubled over the past decade, Cambodia remains one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia. However, stabilisation and high growth rates have helped reduce poverty in recent years.¹³ The proportion of the country below the national poverty line declined from 47% in 1994 to 30.1% in 2007 (37% in rural areas). Per capita income has more than doubled over the past decade, and health outcomes and the delivery of other basic services have improved substantially. Increased revenue has helped enable increases in education expenditure (both in real terms and as a percentage of current government expenditure) by the government, which has been complemented by increased aid to the sector (Figure 4).

¹² Among all donor aid for 60 projects in 2006, 17% was included in the national budget or direct budget support, 53% was provided by other donors through direct project support and another 30% was provided through other modalities (Prasertsri, 2008).

¹³ This has been reflected in substantially increased education expenditure (in nominal terms), from 183.2 billion riel (\$43.6 million) in 2000 to an estimated 754.4 billion riel (\$179.6 million) in 2009. According to the MTEF, this is expected to increase to 1.091 trillion riel (\$259.8 million) by 2011. Approximate values in US\$ are based on an exchange rate of \$1=4,200 riel (Quinn, 2009b). While Cambodia's boom sectors – garments, tourism and construction – have suffered considerably during the ongoing crisis, and the economy contracted by an estimated 2.5% in 2009 according to International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates, growth is projected to return in 2010.

Figure 4: Increases in education expenditure and aid to education, 1994-2010

Source: MoEYS and CDC data.

Between 2003 and 2008, government recurrent expenditure to MoEYS increased by 29.5% in real terms, and the education recurrent budget share rose from around 11% in 1999 to 19.2% in 2007, although this share has declined in the past three years, to 16.4% in 2009/10. The focus – as articulated in the ESP/ESSP and the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2006-2010 – has been on primary education, which receives approximately 60% of resources. Sustaining high levels of expenditure in the sector provides a basis for consolidating many of the gains achieved during the past two decades. Despite these improvements, education expenditure as a percentage of GDP remains very low, fluctuating between 1% and 2%, and per primary student public expenditure is approximately \$50 (Ratcliffe, 2009).

Substantial increases in official development assistance (ODA) to Cambodia have complemented increased expenditure: the country is one of the highest aid recipients. According to data from the Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC) Database, ODA disbursements to Cambodia for the period from 1992 to 2007 were \$7.9 billion. In 2007, about \$790 million in ODA was disbursed, equivalent to nearly 9% of GDP. Of these resources, 29% came from the UN and multilateral sources, 63% from the EC and bilaterals and 8% from NGOs. Aid to education has increased greatly from the 1990s, and generally fluctuated at about \$70 million per year between 2003 and 2008. According to projected disbursements to education for 2006-2010, the ADB, the EC, the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Bank, UNICEF and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) are the largest education donors, constituting over 70% of total aid to the sector. In the past decade, only a small share has been provided as direct sector budget support by the EC and the ADB, with over 80% provided as direct project support or through other modalities.

Significant efforts have been made to improve aid effectiveness, coordination and ownership in recent years, and gains are gradually being consolidated in terms of planning and administrative capacity, particularly at ministry level (Ratcliffe, 2009). The country remains constrained by low revenue generation, with a revenue-to-GDP ratio that has increased only gradually over the course of the past decade, from below 10% to approximately 12% – a proportion substantially below the average for low-income countries. PFM and public administration reforms in MEF have been a key focus of donor support, and are ongoing. Improving the coordination of MoEYS planning with these reforms is seen as a central priority and, given its pioneering role in the development of a SWAp framework, the education sector is seen as having progressed further and as being more engaged in central planning and aid coordination than other ministries. The process remains fraught with difficulty, but improving financial accountability and auditing systems will be vital to ensure that government and donor education funding leads to improved outcomes.

4.2.2 Increasing the number of schools and teachers

Increases in aid to education and the government education budget have been instrumental in increasing the supply of schooling in Cambodia. A period of less than 20 years has seen the creation of a nationwide system of over 6,600 primary schools (an increase of over 40% on 1990/91) and over 1,500 secondary schools (an almost fourfold increase in relation to 1990/91). This has been instrumental in facilitating access to education – particularly in rural and remote areas, where school construction has been most intensive. School infrastructure has been improved substantially, with over 80% of schools in urban and rural areas made of concrete and/or brick, although this number drops to less than 50% for remote schools (IIEP, 2010). Schools in rural and remote areas have been equipped with usable playgrounds and gardens, as well as an increasing number of bookshelves, desks and chairs (Chhinh and Dy, 2009). Further, the ESP 2006-2010 is prioritising the phase-out of a number of incomplete schools (which do not offer all grades). These improvements have been key to increasing enrolment rates dramatically in remote regions. Secondary schools have only recently become a priority: government plans to build an upper secondary school in every district are further likely to increase access and reduce geographical disparities.

A recent focus of MoEYS policy has been improving access to Early Childhood Education (ECE), with the number of pre-primary schools increasing by over 400%, from 397 in 1990/91 to 1,634 in 2007/08, and the number of students increasing from 51,421 to 79,585. The pre-primary GER in Cambodia, although relatively low at 20%, is still higher than in wealthier countries in the region, such as the Philippines (UNESCO, 2010). Promoting ECE has important effects for school preparedness and, in turn, completion. According to household survey data in Cambodia, the availability of preschool facilities has increased the probability of successful school completion from 43% to 54%. The strongest impact found was for remote rural areas and the two poorest income quintiles, for which the likelihood of cohort graduation increased at almost double the rate of that of the richest cohort (UNESCO, 2009).

This has been complemented by a surge in teacher hiring and training, particularly at secondary level. Between 1990/91 and 2007/08, the number of staff at lower secondary almost doubled, from 14,351 to 27,240, whereas that at upper secondary increased more than threefold, from 2,057 to 7,857 (MoEYS, 2009b). Teacher salaries increased during the second ESP/ESSP (from approximately \$30-45 to \$60-80 per month),¹⁴ and substantial efforts have been made to increase the number of teachers in remote areas through local recruitment and more effective deployment of teachers, as well as allowances for teachers willing to move to remote areas.¹⁵ These improvements have been important in lowering high PTRs, although challenges remain in addressing low levels of teacher motivation and capacity, as well as in continuing to increase the supply of trained teachers.

4.2.3 School fee abolition and a shift towards more demand-side initiatives

Along with substantial improvements in the number of teachers at schools, a series of demand-side initiatives have been instrumental in increasing enrolment. Most notably, the abolition of start-of-year school fees in 2000 across the country, together with extensive information campaigns, led to a surge in students, with the number of primary school pupils rising from 2.2 million to 2.7 million between 1999/00 and 2001/02. The greatest increases occurred in remote areas, where the number of pupils almost tripled (Chansopheak, 2009). This was complemented by extensive information campaigns on government policy and commitment to providing education.

Fee abolition helped lower the cost of education significantly: Bray and Seng (2005) compared data on private expenditure by parents on public education in 1998 and 2004 and found that the parental cost of sending a child to primary school reduced by about 60% across the grades. This coincided with the introduction of formula-based block grants through the PAP system, designed to benefit smaller schools in poorer areas, and the establishment of School Management Committees (SMCs) to determine PAP spending priorities. Although PAP/PBB disbursement remains slow and unreliable, and numerous informal fees remain, the government has attempted to address these issues, most recently making informal fees illegal in the 2008 Education Law. However, given the low salaries of teachers and inadequate enforcement, informal fees for additional tutoring often remain in place.

¹⁴ Teachers in Phnom Penh earn around 1.8 times the per capita poverty line, whereas teachers in remote areas earn 3.7 times the per capita poverty line (Benveniste et al., 2008), although they earn substantially less than GDP per capita.

¹⁵ MoEYS has waived the Grade 12 entry requirement for candidates from areas where upper secondary education is unavailable, to increase the pool of teachers from ethnic minorities. This has had benefits in terms of their understanding of local culture and motivation to stay in remote areas, as well as ensuring they are able to teach effectively in the vernacular language (Benveniste et al., 2008).

A number of initiatives went hand-in-hand with the abolition of formal school fees, helping reduce the opportunity cost of education. These included secondary school scholarship programmes for the most disadvantaged students (especially girls); increased provision of toilets and water in new and existing schools; multi-grade approaches to reduce the number of incomplete schools in border, remote and ethnic minority areas; poverty-targeted school feeding through the WFP; non-formal education programmes for the hard to reach, as well as re-entry programmes for students out of school for more than three years; and equivalency and adult literacy programmes (Bernhard, 2005; Seel, 2007). In recent years, the joint MoEYS and UNICEF/Sida-funded Expanded Basic Education Programme has also focused on more effectively targeting inequities in the education system. This programme focuses on education quality and school readiness in six priority provinces, and addresses the specific needs of disadvantaged children without access to formal preschools or basic education, through community preschools, home-based early learning activities, life skills education and bilingual education for hard-to reach remote and minority areas (MoEYS/UNICEF, 2005).

Increased government and donor funding in education, especially when seen together with an improved sector-wide planning structure, has contributed to improved education outcomes. However, government expenditure on education remains well below the suggested 20% benchmark recommended by the EFA Secretariat, and the financing gap for the achievement of EFA goals requires substantial increases in aid to education.¹⁶

4.3 NGO- and community-based innovation in education to reach the marginalised and foster participation

Despite impressive achievements by the government and DPs in recent years, many of Cambodia's poorest and most marginalised still face substantial obstacles to remaining in school. As Section 3.4 discussed, there are significant regional disparities. Although progress has been made, children in remote regions of the country in particular remain socio-economically and educationally disadvantaged. A key concern in this regard has been promoting the relevance and effectiveness of the education system by fostering greater avenues of participation.

4.3.1 Changing structures for community participation

Decentralisation and efforts to implement greater school-based management frequently have the intention of promoting improved local school governance and providing communities with a greater voice in this process. In Cambodia, this process has been cautious, and has been characterised by piecemeal initiatives that were not effectively reconciled with other initiatives aimed at increasing the authority of local governance (Turner, 2002). In the education sector, these efforts started with the development of school clusters in 1993, through which five or six satellite schools were grouped together around a core school for administrative and educational purposes. MoEYS adopted this policy nationwide in 1995, and donors often supported individual clusters directly and promoted community involvement in the disbursement of funds. The abolition of school fees and the provision of school operating budgets through the PAPs was a further important step in the direction of greater decentralisation. This devolved greater responsibility to the local level through the establishment of SMCs. In many districts, parents have become more involved in education management.

However, this process has not been effective throughout the country, in part because of implementation problems, but more importantly because of underlying tensions inherent in the post-genocide state formation process in Cambodia. The role of kinship ties and patronage networks has traditionally formed the basis of state–society relations, Hughes and Conway (2003: 26) argue, left leaving 'a large pool of outsiders whose relationship to the state was characterised merely by alienation.' The creation of elections for local Commune Councils in 2002 has created spaces for participation that were not available previously (Pellini and Ayres, 2007). There have been reports of individuals engaging enthusiastically in these new structures, but the extent to which these can provide long-term fora for local participation remains unclear. The fundamental problem, Pellini and Ayres (2007: 404) argue, is that 'participation in governance had traditionally been discouraged, and citizens had been socialised to accept without question the decisions of their leaders.' This has constrained the open contestation and expression of views. Pellini (2007: 153) argues that 'reform has so far failed to realise a greater delegation of decision making and financial autonomy implicit in democratic

¹⁶ The 2005 FTI/UNICEF report *Financing Quality Education in Cambodia* (in Quinn, 2009) provided an assessment of the financing gap in education, assuming low, medium and high GERs as well as low and medium quality of education. For low quality, the annual gap for 2008-2010 was estimated as ranging from \$131.7 million (low GER) to \$154.4 million (high GER), an amount broadly equivalent to the entire education budget. For medium quality, the gap ranged from \$515.8 million (low GER) to \$566.6 million (high GER).

decentralisation,' resulting in 'a limited promotion of community participation in school based management and local governance.'¹⁷ With many aspects of education policy still heavily centralised, decentralisation to date has generally been limited to a deconcentration, dispersing responsibilities to lower-level agencies while the government retains political authority and control.

4.3.2 Longstanding NGO engagement and innovation

In this context, the role of local and international NGOs working with communities and within existing structures of participation has been an important aspect of increasing community involvement in the education system and expanding access to the most marginalised. NGOs were heavily involved in education service provision prior to the arrival of donors in the 1990s, and have generally had relatively free reign in setting up projects throughout the country, particularly when they have had support from donor organisations. Although the substantial diversity and lack of coordination of NGO activities during the 1990s created difficulties in integrating these into broader sector planning and provided the impression that NGOs were in competition with the government, NGOs nonetheless played a vital role in rebuilding a national basic education system. Greater alignment and dialogue in planning has in recent years improved through the creation of the NEP and the integration of NEP representatives in the ESWG, and NGOs remain involved in sector planning activities within the ESP/ESSP framework. They continue to represent an effective network that has been able to raise key policy concerns and, Seel (2007: 17) argues, to 'provide some "ground-truthing" on SWAp implementation.'

Perhaps the most substantial role of NGOs in the education sector has been as sources of educational innovation to address many of the key problems within the system, including increasing enrolment in remote regions, addressing the high dropout rate and low quality of education, fostering local participation and ensuring greater relevance of the school curriculum. The scope and reach of many of the piloted initiatives has been increased substantially through additional donor and government funding, and these have often been established as national programmes within the sector planning structure. Perhaps the most notable innovation in this regard has been the provision of secondary school scholarships for girls, which were piloted by local NGOs and have since been scaled up substantially and become an integral part of government policy to improve gender and socioeconomic equity in secondary schooling (Box 3).

Similarly, NGOs have had an important role in addressing education quality, capacity constraints and curriculum relevance through methods that integrate community needs and foster participation. Working in Siem Reap and Preah Vihear provinces in northeast Cambodia, both of which are relatively remote and disadvantaged, a Save the Children Norway (SCN) capacity-building project was highly effective in increasing quality and access. The project included school construction, but also adopted a holistic approach to ensuring improved learning and teaching environments. The project benefited from close personal interaction between SCN workers, teachers, staff, parents and MoEYS officials, and relied on child-centred methodologies. The approach was highly effective in increasing enrolment rates (from 59% to 91%) and promotion rates (from 71% to 83%); improving teacher performance and morale; integrating child-friendly and inclusive approaches to teaching and learning; improving administrative efficiency and management commitment; and generating strong participation by community members in activities to support schools and teachers (Geeves et al., 2006; Prasertsri, 2008).

¹⁷ Research by Shoraku (2008: 13) found that, although of 92 parents interviewed more than 90% mentioned 'Contributing money to the school,' very few had participated in activities such as 'Attending an opening or closing ceremony' or 'Attending a meeting at school.' This shows that, in addition to regular schooling expenses (e.g. purchasing learning materials), parents are still burdened with private costs for schooling, and are not motivated enough to participate in school management: 'Decision-making power still remains in the hands of few who have already been in positions of authority in the communities. In spite of the recent reforms, the style of school management maintains the status quo.'

Box 3: A success story in scaling up NGO innovations – scholarship programmes for the poor

Lower secondary scholarship programmes for the poorest girls (and later boys) demonstrate an important factor in Cambodia's improvements in terms of providing more equitable access to basic education, namely, the innovation of local NGOs in addressing demand-side constraints and the willingness of the government and larger donors to scale up successful pilot programmes. As such, they show the reform process of the Cambodian education sector at its most effective.

In 2000, the Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE) launched an innovative pilot programme aimed at addressing low secondary school enrolment rates among girls by providing girls from disadvantaged backgrounds who completed Grade 6 with a scholarship to decrease the opportunity costs entailed in continuing education after primary school. This programme was supported by JFPR from 2002-2005, and families of eligible girls entering Grade 7 received grants of around \$45, conditional on their children attending secondary school. The JFPR programme covered 93 secondary schools in the poorest communes across the country, that is, 15% of lower secondary schools, and benefited over 4,000 girls per year between 2002 and 2005. Through proxy means testing, 45 scholarships of approximately \$45 were provided per school. Students had to remain enrolled in school, attend regularly and maintain passing grades. This proved a remarkably effective incentive, increasing enrolment rates by 31.3% among beneficiaries and by as much as 50% for girls in the poorest two income deciles.

A follow-up programme, Scholarships for the Poor, began in 2005 and was integrated into the ESP. The poorest 25 students (boys and girls) received scholarships of \$60, and the 25 next poorest received \$45. Students filled out programme application forms to determine eligibility, and payments were made in cash every quarter in ceremonies that celebrated and encouraged students' enrolment and academic status. The programme had an impact of increasing enrolment by 21.4% among beneficiaries, and the transfers were successfully concentrated among the poorest, with 70% of benefits reaching households in the poorest quintile of per capita consumption.

The programme demonstrated that large transfer sizes do not necessarily have larger effects: the additional \$15 had only a 4% impact on reducing the likelihood of dropout. This suggests that increasing the number of scholarships, while keeping the size of transfers relatively low, may prove the most cost-effective way of increasing enrolment among many poor students who have thus far not been included in the scholarship programme. Further, the success of the scholarship programmes demonstrates that the abolition of start-of-year school fees was not sufficient to stimulate demand among the poorest and ethnic minorities. Similar strategies to increase secondary school transition and reduce dropout will likely be among the most important reforms in the education sector over the coming years if lower secondary education is to be universalised.

Source: Filmer and Shady (2006); Fiszbein et al. (2009); Quinn (2009a); UNESCO (2010).

Local and international NGOs and DPs have piloted the Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) initiative in Cambodia, whereby local stakeholders use participatory methods to define local needs and requirements to ensure that schools benefit the development and learning of children more effectively and sustainably (Bredenberg, 2008) (including UNICEF, SCN, Volunteer Services Overseas (VSO), KAPE and World Education). This has since been scaled up in MoEYS's CFS Policy, which has attempted to mainstream this process across schools throughout the country.¹⁸ NGOs have also been instrumental in non-formal education, in life skills training and in piloting efforts at mother tongue education in indigenous minority communities of Monduliri and Ratanakiri. Other projects have promoted Village Networks and School Associations, to build on government's decentralisation efforts by more effectively linking school management bodies and Commune Councils to existing sources of community collective action such as pagoda committees (Pellini and Ayres, 2007). Communities, teachers and school management have also been empowered to identify measures to address limitations in the equity, quality and relevance of education (Pellini, 2007).

Cambodia is in the privileged position of having an active NGO community in the education sector with a constructive – albeit not conflict-free – working relationship with MoEYS and related ministries (IIEP, 2010). Given the fragility of Cambodia's post-genocide reconstruction process, the highly localised approaches of many NGOs have been effective at fostering community participation in the system. Regrettably, this is frequently not sustained following the end of projects and programmes. Although the fragmentation of approaches and their limited scale remain a problem in terms of equity, creating potentially unsustainable patchworks of greater functionality and quality, these nonetheless have gained international acclaim and frequently provided innovative and effective models for education programme and policy reforms, within the gradual and incremental process of improving equitable access and the quality of the education system.

¹⁸ Some informants have expressed concern at the pace at which the CFS approach is being implemented throughout the country without enough consideration of regional and community contexts, as this is seen as universalising something that is inherently dependent on local conditions and needs.

5. Conclusions

Over the past 20 years, Cambodia has made impressive progress in expanding basic education. The system has proven remarkably resilient in sustaining improved education services during a long period of post-conflict recovery and reconstruction. Education has been one of the sectors that have implemented pro-poor reforms and addressed endemic institutional constraints most successfully.

5.1 Key lessons

- **Top-level commitment and leadership** by MoEYS and DPs has been vital in developing a policy and institutional framework to guide planning and implementation of policy reforms. The inclusive and increasingly nationally owned development of a SWAp approach was an important milestone in systematically addressing supply- and demand-side constraints to more equitable access to higher quality education. An important component has been improved linkage with PFM reforms at MEF, which is likely to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery in coming years. The post-2000 improvements, following a decade of slow progress, demonstrate the importance of launching broad reforms early to capture the peace dividend. Ensuring that government commitment, seen as faltering in recent years, is sustained will be vital in the coming years.
- Further, the sustained **engagement of DPs** in the sector – in terms of financial and institutional support – and the willingness of many DPs to move towards greater operationalisation of the Paris Principles has allowed for a more effective development partnership, resulting in gradually increasing capacity of officials at all levels, and in efforts to address institutional and operational legacies that have constrained the system in the past. Further, the gradual move from heavily supply-side investments towards more targeted funding of demand-side constraints and capacity building is more effectively opening up the education system to the most marginalised.
- Cambodia's improvements in recent years also demonstrate the importance of allowing for **educational innovation** and pilot projects and programmes that address demand-side constraints and integrate existing forms of community participation in more holistic, demand-driven programme design. In this context, Cambodian and international NGOs have been instrumental in the reform process. Recent legislative movements towards regulating the freedom of NGOs to operate should take strong consideration of the important contributions many of these organisations have made in the sector.

5.2 Challenges

- Continued **high rates of repetition and dropout** present a serious obstacle to universalising basic education. Education expenditure should continue addressing the barrier that poverty represents to children completing schooling (especially in rural areas). Further, high levels of repetition also result in an inefficient use of resources. Considering capping repetition rates or even moving towards a system of automatic promotion would help ensure that more students have the opportunity to finish school. This will be even more important in the coming years, as the number of students entering the system has started to increase again.
- Achievement of EFA goals is still constrained by **a lack of both DP and government resources**. Education expenditure remains well below 20% of the recurrent budget and has been declining in relative terms in the past three years. Meanwhile, efforts to improve revenue collection are progressing slowly. The estimated annual funding gap for achieving universal primary completion lies at around \$100 million per annum, and donors remain wary of moving away from multiple parallel implementation units, which have a detrimental impact on the efficiency and capacity of MoEYS to implement its programmes.

- Although progress has been made in moving towards a greater deconcentration of the education system, and directly providing schools with operating budgets, schools' autonomy in the use of funds remains constrained. The **system remains heavily centralised**. While central government control is advantageous for the coordination of priorities, and for the redistribution of financing across regions, the current structure offers few avenues for community participation. Continuing to foster initiatives that encourage local participation to adapt teaching and curricula to local needs can help address the **low quality and widely perceived lack of relevance** of the education system.
- **The lack of incentive structures that effectively promote accountability and participation** at all levels causes enormous problems, creating self-perpetuating dynamics that inevitably damage the efficiency and quality of the system. It is important to ensure that the state is more responsive to the concerns of parents, although this is unlikely unless these are aligned with the perceived interests of key elites within and around state institutions. Thus, the relatively slow pace of improving transparency in financial management has led to substantial concerns by donors in relation to using government systems. Further, the slow pace of civil service reform and the continued structural dependence on systems of patronage within lower levels of administration and school management lead to few incentives among many officials to improve their skills and work towards addressing quality issues within schools. While many of these problems extend beyond the education sector and are part of a longer-term reform process, this nonetheless remains an area of concern.
- Finally, **teachers' poor working conditions, low pay and lack of opportunities** for advancement result not only in low levels of motivation but also in the continued presence of **informal fees** (Dawson, 2010). Together with low levels of achievement, these lead to a general feeling of dissatisfaction with the system among parents, which instils these values in successive generations of students. The 2008 Education Law bans informal school fees, and the government has recently passed the Anti-Corruption Law, but the effectiveness of enforcement remains to be seen. This is a longer-term process in almost all low-income countries, and many of the problems plaguing the education system in Cambodia reach far beyond the control of MoEYS.

In many ways, the coming decade will be of critical importance; a report by the Inter Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (Garankani et al., forthcoming) argues that 'the country has the opportunity to turn a corner if key actors can maintain a stable state while mitigating patronage and corruption, diversifying the economy, and improving social services.' Achieving this, and avoiding a return to instability and social unrest, will require a more **substantial and sustained effort by all stakeholders**, most importantly by the Cambodian government.

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