

Education Budget Policy Brief 2018

Addressing cost-barriers to schooling for primary and lower secondary learners from poor, rural and remote households

Introduction

The Government of Cambodia's commitment to comprehensive education policy reform and efforts to increase the education budget are well acknowledged. However, the investments in education to date have not yet reached the global benchmark of 20% of the total national budget¹ as set out in the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action adopted in 2015². Furthermore, strong absolute growth in education spending is being absorbed by increases in personnel emolument (PE) costs (e.g. staff salaries; staff-related costs) and other recurrent expenditure. This has translated into a limited amount of the increased investment making its way to learners - particularly for those from poor, rural and remote households.

As part of a joint and ongoing focus on increased and equitable educational investments in children, Save the Children, the NGO Forum and Gender and Development in Cambodia (GADC) with technical support from Budget Working Group commissioned a rapid assessment to better understand the impacts of financial and non-financial barriers to primary and lower secondary schooling for girls and boys from poor households³ in four geographically and socio-economically distinct provinces: Kampong Cham, Koh Kong, Preah Vihear and Pursat. Data was collected between May-July 2018 from 486 households using a mini-households survey. In addition, qualitative data was collected from key informant interviews with 4 Commune Council Chiefs, 10 Head Teachers and 4 District Education Officials and through a total of 27 focus group discussions with parents and learners from the same communities in which the surveys were administered, and triangulated with the survey findings.

The findings indicate that there are intersecting financial and non-financial factors for drop-outs of both girls and boys at primary school level, and to a greater extent at lower secondary school. These include the lack of money (household income/poverty), other related financial barriers, and poor learning outcomes⁴. In the focus group discussions (FGDs), lower secondary school aged girls and boys (and to a lesser extent girls and boys at primary school) indicated the immediate requirement for them to engage in income-generating activities - in and outside their homes - to supplement the precarious livelihoods of their parents. This need to help sustain household income was a significant factor in dropping out of formal education. These findings correspond with similar findings in the NGO Education Partnership's (NEP) community level research on the right to education conducted in 2014⁵ and the OECD 2017 Youth Well-being Policy Review of Cambodia⁶. The latter study noted that 'youth from the poorest households in Cambodia have the lowest secondary school enrolment rate'.

Negative parental attitudes and perceptions on the value of education for both boys and girls (as reflected on by parents and reported on by the learners in the FGDs) appeared to have a negligible impact on school drop-out in this study. However, parental influence appears to play a more indirect role in relation to financial needs of the household, rather than based on the perceived value of schooling, gender differences and physical access to schooling. Respondents across the four provinces unanimously indicated that schooling was important for their children. As well, 95% of the respondents indicated that it was equally important for both their sons and daughters to attend secondary school. Primary reasons for drop out at both primary and lower secondary school identified by the respondents were as follows: 'children self-selecting to drop-out of school, lack of money and children having to work to supplement household income'.

Recommendations

Based on findings from this analysis, and wider education budget equity research conducted by the NGO Education Partnership (NEP) and other institutions, it is recommended that the Royal Government of Cambodia and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) should:

1. Allocate 20% of the national budget expenditure to the MoEYS to meet the global benchmark with increased and equitable investments in learners from provinces with higher poverty rates.
2. Build capacity of officials responsible for school management and budget planning and increase investments for the provision of text-books, teaching and learning materials and stationery for schools in provinces with higher poverty rates, so that costs are not passed on to poor households.
3. Address teacher shortages in rural and remote areas and increase investments in teacher professional development to minimise drop-outs and costs of private tuition to poor households due to poor quality teaching and learning.
4. Invest in the provision and expansion of 'non-formal learning' opportunities and social protection (such as IDPoor scholarships) to minimize school drop outs, taking into account differences for boys and girls, and ensure learners who have dropped out of lower secondary school can develop life and employment skills to obtain decent work.

1. **Allocate 20% of the national budget expenditure to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport to meet the global benchmark with increased and equitable investments in learners from provinces with the highest poverty rates.**

Based on Budget Working Group's analysis on 2017 education budget, there appears to be a lack of equitable investment in education across provinces. For example, the non-salary budgets per enrolled learner of Pursat and Preah Vihear, are lower than that of Koh Kong despite the fact that both provinces have a higher poverty rate than Koh Kong, pointing to the need for increased and equitable investments in provincial budgets.

Table 1: Education budget allocation vs. poverty rate per province in 2017

	Kampong Cham Province	Koh Kong Province	Pursat Province	Preah Vihear Province
Poverty Rate (%)	17.32	14.57	23.16	28.67
Education budget per enrolled learner (USD)	169.4	251.5	175.3	212.3
Non-salary budget per enrolled learner (USD)	17.27	48.7	19.4	37.0

Source: Budget Working Group's analysis on 2017 Education Budget

In addition, we recommend that increased investments in education should be accompanied by increased budget transparency and explanation. The MoEYS should institute a mechanism for disclosure of public expenditure and promote access to information on the education budget at all stages of the budget cycle and at all levels of governance. This can assist in reflect the priorities and service gaps identified by citizens through the Implementation of Social Accountability Framework (ISAF) and strengthen the commune level Joint Accountability Action Plans (JAAP). Increased

investments in education, together with budget transparency, will help increase public participation and increase public support for the Ministry's reform efforts in quality and accessible education.

2. Build capacity of officials responsible for school management and budget planning and increase investments for the provision of text-books, teaching and learning material and stationery for schools in provinces with higher poverty rates, so that costs are not passed on to poor households.

An analysis of a total of 812 Joint Accountability Action Plans (JAAP) (in 812 Communes across 18 provinces) from the Implementation of Social Accountability Framework (ISAF) in 2017 indicated that the provision of adequate number of textbooks per learner is a main priority for participating citizens and local officials.⁷ The standard for the provision of textbooks under JAAP is 3 textbooks per learner from grade 1 to 3, and 5 textbooks per learner from grade 4 to 6. However, analysis indicates that this standard is not being met in many schools. Additionally, survey data from across four provinces indicates that the costs of compensating for school supplies and teaching and learning materials are passed on to poor households with negative impacts for learners at both primary and lower secondary school level. Parents who participated in 2014 study by NEP noted that 'the lack of learning materials as one of the primary causes of poor attendance and reason for children to drop out of school'.

We recommend that the MoEYS continue to invest in building the skills and capacity of officials responsible for school management and budget planning to ensure teaching and learning materials are adequately accounted for in school budget plans. Furthermore, school-level budget preparation and school management should include the participation of teachers and community representatives to ensure transparency and accountability. In the NEP's 2018⁸ research study on performance budgeting, approximately 70% of school directors, 65% of accountants, 58.5% of teachers and 73% of representatives of the School Support Committees (SSC) mentioned that they came across some challenges in the process of formulating the school development plan. 56.6% of school directors surveyed in that study acknowledged that they lacked the knowledge and understanding of how the budget plan should be formulated.

3. Address teacher shortages in rural areas and increase investments in teacher professional development to minimise drop-outs and costs of private tuition to poor households due to poor quality teaching and learning.

District Officials, Commune Chiefs, Head Teachers and learners from the various primary and lower secondary schools included in this study spoke about teacher shortages at rural schools. Several participants across the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and FGDs noted that teacher shortages were mainly in mathematics, physics and chemistry. As a result, non-specialists were being requested to teach mathematics. Findings also indicate that one of the primary 'push factors' for learners to drop out (for primary school and to a greater extent at lower secondary school level) is poor learning outcomes due to under-qualified and inadequately trained teachers. These poor learning outcomes are evident in the low levels of reading proficiency among early grade learners across Cambodia – seen in the early grade reading assessments (EGRA) in 2010, although with notable improvements in the EGRA 2012⁹ based on the new curriculum.

Further, a 2017 Assessment of Early Grade Teaching Quality in Cambodia, by NEP¹⁰, shows that 'whilst many of the teachers can pass a student level test and have a basic grasp of the mathematical concepts from the grades 1-3 curriculum, there is an alarming number of teachers who could not demonstrate even a basic level of understanding of the subject material they teach'. Head Teachers who participated in this NEP 2017 study identified 'the high level of need for training of teachers in classroom management techniques, in mathematical instruction practices and a moderate to high need for training in student assessment'.

In our study, learners and parents described the teaching and learning they had observed or experienced as "classroom-based/theory-based teaching" without practical application in the science subjects due to a lack of expertise of teachers and a lack of requisite equipment. As well, poor quality of teaching and learning appeared to disproportionately affect learners in Grades 7-9, who experienced greater challenges grasping concepts in mathematics, physics and chemistry than their peers in earlier grades. Several of these learners self-selected to drop out of school, citing the inability to understand what was being taught as the reason for dropping out.

Insufficient investment in the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in rural and remote areas, has also resulted in the privatization of schooling with the associated costs passed on to poor households. Many teachers who are employees of the state offer after-school classes (often to their own learners). The UNDP study on Private Tutoring and Informal Fees in Cambodia's Basic Education in 2014¹¹, similarly noted that 'among items paid for by the majority of parents, private tutoring was a major component representing four of the 11 fee items paid for by parents'.

As a critical policy measure to address the insufficient quality of teaching and learning, the MoEYS should increase investment in pre-service and in-service training for teachers, prioritizing rural and remote areas. This also requires greater financial investments by the MoEYS in provincial education budgets for education officials to visit schools, monitor the quality of teaching and learning and offer professional development to teachers as part of a larger teacher performance and appraisal program.

4. Invest in the provision and expansion of 'non-formal learning' opportunities and social protection (such as IDPoor scholarships) to minimize school drop outs, taking into account differences for boys and girls, and ensure learners who have dropped out of lower secondary school can develop life and employment skills to obtain decent work.

In our study, several respondents indicated that some primary and lower secondary school learners drop out due to opportunity costs of schooling, despite being recipients of IDPoor program scholarships. The public education statistics and indicators 2016-2017 indicates that the drop-out rate of male learner is higher than those of female learner at all education level¹². Scholarships can help mitigate this opportunity cost of schooling for children living in poverty; however, ongoing assessment of its effectiveness and delivery mechanisms with gender sensitivity may be required.

Based on the qualitative data in this study, learners who drop out of lower secondary school struggle to find alternative learning pathways. Parents and learners in the FGDs indicated that remedial and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) opportunities are limited in the rural and remote communities in this study. Furthermore, entry into most TVET opportunities appear to require schooling at least up to Grade 9. The MoEYS should expand current policy options such as the technical and soft skills development for youth component of the MoEYS 2014-2018 Education Strategic Plan to improve life skills and employability skills within schools. The MoEYS should also further expand investments in school re-entry programs, supplementary programs, and further support non-formal education programs that are currently available at community learning centres (which include functional literacy among other learning opportunities). Learners who dropped out of lower secondary school can use these opportunities to develop life skills and employment skills to obtain decent work and future income.

List of organizations participating in the analysis and endorsing this policy brief:

1. Advocacy and Policy Institute Organization (API)
2. Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC)
3. Oxfam in Cambodia
4. Save the Children International in Cambodia (SCI)
5. STAR Kampuchea (SK)
6. The NGO Forum on Cambodia (NOGF)
7. Transparency International Cambodia (TIC)
8. Save Vulnerable Cambodians (SVC)
9. Rural Aid Organization (RAO)
10. THE AFFILIATED NETWORK FOR SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY (ANSA)
11. Child Rights Coalition Cambodia (CRC-Cambodia)
12. Buddhist for Social Development Action (BSDA)
13. Children and Poor Communities Development Organization (CPCDO)
14. Happy Tree Social Services (Happy Tree)
15. KnK Cambodia (KnK)
16. Krousar Thmey (KT)
17. Khmer Youth Camp for Culture (KYCC)
18. The Cambodia Centre for the Protection of Children's Rights (CCPCR)
19. Sacrifice Families and Orphan Development Association (SFODA)
20. Sovann Komar
21. Wathnakpheap (WP)
22. Health Action Coordination Committee (HACC)

¹ Based on the executive summary of the draft budget law 2019, the education budget is 13.7% of total national budget.

² Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4, available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002456/245656e.pdf>.

³ For Save the Children, child poverty is seen as ‘multi-dimensional’ affecting children of all ages and not measured by income alone. Save the Children therefore looks at the multiple ways in which poverty impacts children’s lives - such as poor health and nutrition, lack of access to water and sanitation, lack of education and poor learning achievement, lack of access to essential services, exposure to harmful work, violence or restrictions on mobility. Therefore, while the focus of this assessment was on financial barriers to schooling for (income) poor households in rural and remote areas, a few of the above dimensions of child poverty were included to the extent possible, in this study.

⁴ Financial barriers include the costs of uniforms, books, school meals, transport and more pertinently the opportunity cost of schooling.

⁵ NGO Education Partnership, 2014. Right to Education in Cambodia: Community Level Research. Available at <http://memlib.nepcambodia.org/libraries>

⁶ OECD, 2017. ‘Youth Well-being Policy Review of Cambodia’, EU-OECD Youth Inclusion Project, Paris. Available at <https://www.oecd.org/countries/cambodia/Youth-well-being-policy-review-Cambodia.pdf>

⁷ The analysis was conducted jointly by 5 ISAF implementing NGOs—RACHA, World Vision International in Cambodia. Save the Children in Cambodia, Care Cambodia, and STAR Kampuchea.

⁸ NGO Education Partnership, 2018. Performance budgeting at the primary school level in Cambodia. Available at <http://memlib.nepcambodia.org/libraries>

⁹ Research Triangle Institute, 2015. Cambodia Education Sector Early Grade Reading Assessment Report. Prepared for United States Agency for International Development, Cambodia. Available at https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pa00krtd.pdf

¹⁰ NGO Education Partnership, 2017. An Assessment of Early Grade Teaching Quality in Cambodia. Available at <http://memlib.nepcambodia.org/libraries>

¹¹ UNDP, 2014. Curbing Private Tutoring and Informal Fees in Cambodia’s Basic Education. UNDP: Cambodia. Available at <http://www.kh.undp.org/content/dam/cambodia/docs/PovRed/Curbing%20Private%20Tutoring%20and%20Informal%20Fee%20in%20Cambodia%20Basic%20Education.pdf>

¹² MoEYS, 2017. Public Education Statistics & Indicators 2016-2017. Available at <http://www.moeys.gov.kh/en/emis/2461.html#.W9I8XZMzaUk>