



4th CYCLE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW OF CAMBODIA 2024

THEMATIC FACTSHEET 3 OF 4

EDUCATION

TOPIC #3



3RD CYCLE RECOMMENDATIONS

During the previous UPR cycle, Cambodia received and accepted some 20 recommendations to, inter alia, increase efforts to ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education for all.

Some of these recommendations have been addressed by the Government of Cambodia and to different extents. A number of plans and guidelines were adopted recently, for instance: Action Plan on Inclusive Education, the New Generation School policy and guideline, Implementation guideline on Education in Emergency, Operational manual for child protection in school etc. However, implementation of those regulatory and policy frameworks remains under-resourced.

CHALLENGES



As outlined in its Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023, the education sector aims to increase its share to 19.1% of the entire national budget by 2023, equivalent to 3.1% of GDP. However, comparing to GDP, the share of education sector achieved only small increase, from 2.7% in 2022 to 2.8% in 2023. This is even lower than in pre-Covid time.

IMPACT

Since 2019, Cambodia has made significant progress in developing comprehensive national policies, plans and programs. Access to primary school education is almost universal with completion rates at more than 90%. However, the support for learning provided by the education system is insufficient. For example, high rate of repetition, low learning outcomes and high dropout rate are some of the consequences of this insufficient support.

- About half of the students who progress from primary school then drop out in Grades 7–9 in lower secondary school, with the prevalence of student dropouts especially high in rural and remote areas.
- In the 2020-2021 academic year, 7.08% of children in primary school were repeating a grade, with 11.76% of grade one enrollers being repeaters, and 9.13% of grade two. High rates of grade repetition – particularly in the early years – can increase the risk of drop outs, and impact learning quality. The correlation of this with learning outcomes is evident – almost 25% of children in grade 3 cannot write a single word in a dictation test. The implications become exacerbated for marginalized children.
- According to 2022 PISA-D results almost 9 of 10 students do not have the minimum foundational skills (mathematics, reading, science).

School environment is not sufficiently conducive for learning. For example, inadequate hygiene and WASH facilities in schools pose significant challenges, particularly during menstruation (40% of Cambodian schools lack adequate WASH facilities, with an even higher percentage lacking separate facilities for girls). Finally, schools in Cambodia are not always safe places for children, as 73% of students have reported at least one experience of violence at school.

Pandemic Impact



The pandemic demonstrably worsened the learning outcomes for many children across the country, with Cambodian children losing on average around 10% of their expected total lifetime schooling.

Government has shifted spending towards the health and economic response to the pandemic, which posed additional challenges to education budgets.

Nationwide school closures – the most prolonged in the region – particularly affected students in rural areas, as well as those from IDPoor households and those with limited internet connectivity for online learning.

School closures also led to a reduction in physical activity, poor eating habits, and disrupted sleep patterns among children, and affected their physical and mental health with increased loneliness, stress, and depression reported.

Paid Extra Classes



Cambodian law stipulates free access to education for all children from Grade 1 through to the end of lower secondary school in Grade 9. However, unofficial costs for education remain an obstacle for many children, with a significant proportion of primary teachers and lower secondary teachers supplementing their income with the provision of extra classes to their students.

According to KIIs with CSO representatives, students who cannot afford these extra classes end up with consistently lower grades, often falling behind to the extent that they eventually drop out altogether.

Additionally, children are often asked to contribute money towards school maintenance and teaching materials, or towards the costs of building renovations and school festivities. Mental and emotional violence perpetrated by teachers was also reported, and some teachers discriminate towards students who do not attend extra classes where teachers can earn additional income. These teachers reportedly treat those children who cannot pay in a harsher manner.

Inclusive education for children with disabilities



Despite efforts in recent years to improve the quality and accessibility of education for children with disabilities, it remains the case that most children with disabilities – especially in rural areas and especially those with intellectual disabilities – are either never enrolled in school, or drop out prior to completion of lower secondary.

Reasons for this include costs associated with school, a lack of accessible physical infrastructure both within school grounds and on the roads and pavements on the way from students' houses; parental concerns about safety and bullying; and the student not feeling welcome or supported.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Increase the annual budget allocation to **gradually achieve 20% of national government expenditure for education** (as pledged in 2021) and improve the quality of education at all levels, especially in rural areas, including by reducing the student-teacher ratio, ensuring appropriate levels of training for teachers and equipping schools with adequate and inclusive educational infrastructure, technology and sanitation.
- 2 Strengthen measures to guarantee access to inclusive education and increase school enrolment and completion rates for all children, and ensure that children whose schooling was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic can benefit from interventions to address learning losses and complete their schooling.
- 3 Ensure that primary education is **compulsory and that free education** is provided for all children for at least nine years, and take active steps to guarantee that for children in the public education system, financial costs – including voluntary contributions – do not present obstacles for children to access education on an equal basis with their peers.
- 4 Undertake special legal efforts to guarantee the right of all children with disabilities to inclusive education, and ensure their access to quality inclusive education in mainstream schools with individual support by specialized staff and reasonable accommodation for their educational needs.
- 5 Speed up the adoption and promulgation of the comprehensive Child Protection Law, and reinforce all policies and plans related to ending violence against children in school and provide adequate resources for their implementation.

SOURCES

- National Institute of Statistics (NIS), Ministry of Health (MoH) & the DHS Program (2022) Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey 2021-22.
- Budget analysis conducted by the Budget Working Group hosted by the NGO Forum on Cambodia (2023)
- Save the Children International Cambodia (2021) Brief: Safe Back to School.
- OECD, PISA 2022 Database: Cambodia <https://www.oecd.org/publication/pisa-2022-results/country-notes/cambodia-371ebd4a/>

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