IBEC has completed two years of intervention since its launch in October 2009. During this second year, IBEC has been successful in generating significant impact on a number of fronts. IBEC made a huge number of improvements in local school environments during the year ranging from improved water systems and toilets, scholarship support to thousands of vulnerable children, and enhanced classroom environments.

One of the most important achievements during Year 2 relates to the development of a new life skills curriculum that has the potential to have far reaching national implications for enhancing educational relevance in Cambodia. It is believed that the efforts to develop improved curricula in this area will contribute greatly to putting Cambodian youth in a much better position to deal with the social and economic challenges they will face when they finish school. Initial responses of the Cambodian education sector to these efforts in life skills education have been extremely positive with hundreds of requests for recently developed curriculum materials. As a particularly important endorsement for the project, the Government agreed to place the Ministry logo on the modules as they went to press, indicating both stakeholder interest and ownership in what the project has been doing in this area.

IBEC successfully met several other key challenges during the year, such as the expansion in programming from 156 schools to 303 schools, and the launch of the School Management & Leadership Training Course for over 500 school administrators. Following the completion of preparations for program expansion to new schools, the project was able to disburse over $848,000 in direct grant assistance this year, not counting over $200,000 in technical support activities that were successfully implemented to assist schools in effectively using their grants.

With regards to specific capacity-building interventions, the project has had some notable successes such as enabling two local partners to apply for CCC accreditation, linking school administrator certification to the completion of concrete task work in their schools, and preparing commune councils for their role to take on many project support roles in the future. Standards for performance in this regard have been rigorously enforced ensuring that the ‘outputs’ are meaningful and not just indicators of mechanical attendance at workshops.

In the spirit of the principles and guidelines outlined in USAID Forward, one of the flagship activities implemented by IBEC is the improvement of school access to ICT using specialized technologies appropriate to the Cambodian context. This involves developing software and solar panel configurations that work with thin client technology, a low energy and low maintenance alternative to more conventional computers. The project also developed special documentary materials to facilitate improved science education along with support for science lab development, establishment of science clubs, and provision of locally available substances that allow hands-on science instruction.

This newsletter aims to provide an overview of IBEC activities, and to highlight the most important outcomes achieved by IBEC’s four project components during Year 2.
IBEC Year 2 Impact Highlights

Component 1
IBEC has successfully enabled two local partners, BSDA and KAPE, to apply for accreditation from Committee for Cooperation in Cambodia (CCC) which operates a special division called the NGO Good Practices Program (GPP). The accreditation process for both partners was initiated in Year 2 and should be finalized early in Year 3. In fact, KAPE has already passed two of three stages of review successfully with recent communication from CCC indicating that the agency would receive its formal accreditation by the end of 2011. This effort is part of IBEC’s overall design, with a component dedicated towards focusing on the development of local institutional structures, especially local NGO partners and local government. As part of the capacity-building process, IBEC provides assistance to NGOs to do self-assessments, set benchmarks for improvement, and review progress towards stated goals.

Component 2
IBEC made significant investments in high-performing schools to provide more advanced special purpose facilities that greatly enhance the quality of education in these schools. During the year, IBEC constructed 14 Science Labs and 7 ICT Labs for a total of 21 new lab facilities. IBEC has decided to greatly increase its investment in science education as a means to address a mandate under USAID Forward to increase investments in innovative science and technology for the enhancement of work force development.

Component 3
In June 2011, IBEC organized a very successful national seminar with its partner NGO Education Partnership (NEP). The seminar was designed to share Best Practices and lessons learned based on the IBEC experience with other NGOs working in the education sector. The seminar was attended by 59 local and international agencies, and was followed by a study tour to several schools in Siem Reap Province. All in all, IBEC was successful in animating a wide range of activities with regard to sharing information about best practices and lessons learned.

Component 4
IBEC completed the development and revision of life skills curriculum with over 30 modules. Manuals are color-coded by the learning theme that they represent such that ‘blue’ indicates Socially Relevant Life Skills Themes; ‘green’ indicates Pracitical Livelihoods; and ‘yellow’ indicates Business and Economic Studies. Color-coding will help teachers to easily distinguish between the many booklets being distributed to schools.

A total of 539 School Administrators (30 females) participated in two scheduled School Management and Leadership Training Course (SMLTC) workshops. Since these foundational workshops were delivered in a district-based manner given the large number of schools involved, the project relies on Core Trainers who are themselves school administrators recruited from Provincial Working Groups and District Offices of Education to deliver the SMLC Course. The School Management Team provided a four-day Training of Trainers (TOT) to 22 Core Trainers on both content knowledge and facilitation skills.

As a result of school community outreach, IBEC has successfully assisted 329 vulnerable families in adopting livelihood activities such as food processing, chicken/ pig/ fish raising and small business endeavors. Addressing Family Engagement Issues is a part of the CPS Policy Framework wherein these outreach activities are designed to address issues that cause student dropout, such as poverty in the family and parental perception that education is irrelevant to their lives. The livelihood skills are provided to these vulnerable families as part of the scholarship package that their children receive, also linking with life skills topics being learned at school.

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IMPROVED BASIC EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA (IBEC) PROJECT
Component 1: Local NGO and Government Capacity Building & Advocacy for Sustainability

The establishment of a component dedicated exclusively to building the capacity of civil society organizations involved in education and local government is a new innovation in USAID programming in the sector that seeks to replicate the successes achieved by the USG in the health sector. The component focuses on a number of local organizations including Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE), Women and Children’s Rights Development (WCRD), Economic Development Association (EDA), Buddhist Social Development Association (BSDA), and NGO Education Partnership (NEP). The component also works closely with local government including Provincial Working Groups (PWGs) who help project personnel oversee the project and Commune EPA Committees (CEFACs), which are responsible for working with schools to promote access to education. IBEC works closely with counterparts at the national level who sit on the Consultative Group, which is an interdepartmental body charged with overseeing the project from a national perspective and ensuring liaison with senior management in the Ministry. The Component has a mandate to promote sustainability of project inputs through building institutional capacity as well as the dissemination of best practices.

An important milestone reached during the year relates to the significant progress KAPE and BSDA have made towards formal accreditation by the CCC. IBEC also worked with three of the previously mentioned NGOs responsible for implementing interventions in areas where they have specialized expertise, such as scholarship administration (WCRD) and Life Skills Education (BSDA and EDA). IBEC employs a participatory and consultative process to help partner agencies to set their own performance benchmarks and assess progress towards these benchmarks through introspection and self-assessment. BSDA, the strongest of the three agencies, has also applied for CCC accreditation along with KAPE and there is considerable hope that they will be successful in their application.

During the year, IBEC provided capacity building support to a total of 36 communes focusing on members of the Commune-level Education for All Committees (CEFACs). The assistance provided focused on a number of technical areas of organizational structure, building strategies, data collection and analytical skills. The capacity-building process for IBEC focuses strongly on the inclusion of local government in the management and oversight of the project, in the form of Provincial Working Groups (PWGs), a body representatives from the Provincial and District Offices of Education in each province. PWGs assist in planning, reviewing, monitoring and also provide a consultative forum for the selection of schools that receive major investments from the project. Year 2 saw extensive involvement by PWGs in various capacity building activities. PWG members attended spot check orientations and monitoring visits, to witness the successes (and problems) in target schools. Overall, IBEC observed that the activities done with PWGs this year has strengthened provincial ownership of the project and increased overall understanding of project interventions.

Component 2: More Equitable School Access

Component 2 focuses on a wide range of activities that promote sustained enrolment by all children, as well as transition from primary to secondary school. These activities include scholarships at all levels, children’s councils through which to mobilize children, infrastructure upgrading to enhance educational supply, water and sanitation facilities in schools, outreach to vulnerable groups such as minorities and the disabled through child-to-child help networks, and others. The Component has two subcomponents, a) Scholarships, for children in primary and secondary schools and candidates studying at Provincial Teacher Training Colleges (who return to their communes of origin to address teacher shortage there), and b) Discretionary stakeholder-driven grants, which are funds largely programmed by stakeholders themselves in order to promote increased ownership of the intervention, e.g. schools do their own plans based on local needs assessments and choose activities that best address these needs.

This year IBEC completed major expansions in both primary and secondary school sectors. Year 2 implementation saw IBEC begin support to 69 primary schools (or equivalent based settings), most of which are based in Siem Reap, bringing the total number of learners enrolled at target schools to 89,221 (46% girls) across 202 primary schools in 3 provinces. In terms of secondary school sector, 25 schools were added to the project, resulting in a total enrollment of 46,274 students (49% girls).

A new batch of 120 students (82 female) from remote and high priority areas were selected to receive scholarships to attend Provincial Teacher Training Colleges (PTTCs). New scholarship candidates were recruited from communes designated by the Ministry as suffering from severe teacher shortages. Upon completion of two years of study, they will return to schools in their communes of origin according to an agreement carefully negotiated with the Teacher Training Department and the Personnel Offices of each Provincial Office of Education.

IBEC provided primary school scholarship support to 1,110 new recipients this year, bringing the total since start up to 4,125. An additional set of scholarships were awarded to 830 new lower secondary students who were identified as vulnerable or of minority groups. Most assistance is focused on children in the upper primary grades as a means to promote transition to secondary school.

IBEC provided significant discretionary funds to target schools during this year. Schools used the project’s resources to engage in simultaneous investments in improved water supply and sanitation facilities, as they usually go hand in hand at target schools. During the current year, with a total investment of $163,244 going toward supplies and materials, the project built or repaired another 16 wells and established water systems in 53 schools, bringing the total number of beneficiaries since start up to 63,961 students. IBEC personnel reported that the project had repaired 148 toilet blocks and had built 45 new ones during Year 2 implementation. These facilities are linked with school water systems so that there is running water in toilets to ensure that they are properly maintained and will not be locked up due to a lack of water as in so many other schools.
Component 3: Improved School Management & Community Engagement

Following the development of the School Management and Leadership Training course during Year 1, IBEC planned to disseminate the course material over four foundational workshops. Component personnel organized two SMLTC foundational workshops during Year 2, with the remaining two slated for Year 3. This is a key capacity building initiative that will be essential to the success of the implementation of IBEC interventions across all components, since effective implementation of interventions requires competent school managers. The SMLTC will lead to certification, upon satisfactory completion of course work, therefore requiring thoughtful engagement from participants in addition to attendance of workshops. The delivery of the workshops and follow-up work for task work is done by Core Trainers provided by the Ministry. These arrangements help to build local capacity and ownership of the process by the government.

In addition to the preparations and activities related to strengthening the capacity of school directors, the component also focuses on strengthening Parent Teacher Associations (or School Support Committees, SSCs, as they are called in Cambodia) through a process of standardized assessment and training based on perceived needs. These committees help to administer many access-focused interventions in schools, including an outreach program to vulnerable families to apply life skills in practical livelihoods that their children learn at school. Component personnel provided support to 146 new associations that just recently joined the project, and also refresher trainings to 155 previously trained SSCs. The training for SSCs involved an introduction to IBEC’s background, its program goals, interventional approaches, summarized child friendly school attributes, roles and responsibilities of SSCs, and relationships among schools, parents, communities, and children. The workshop also sought to stress the importance of parental and community engagement and the responsibilities of SSCs, as a partner in school improvement activities.

In the area of improved management information systems, IBEC personnel provided capacity-building to help schools record important data such as school efficiency statistics, enrolment, grant expenditure, numbers of activity beneficiaries etc., using standardized forms. During the year 201 educational institutions (primarily schools) received technical support in information management, thereby achieving the performance standard. To facilitate these capacity-building efforts, the project distributed materials that will be useful to schools in organizing their data including box files, chronos, plastic pocket folders, and file labels.

In the interest of encouraging schools to learn from each other, IBEC organized a study trip that enabled 29 Beacon School Directors’Vice Directors (4 women) to visit the British International School in Phnom Penh to learn about modern practices of school management and instruction. The visit lasted the whole day and included visits to classrooms to observe learning games and teaching methodologies, observations of remedial interventions, and student-led conferences designed to keep parents informed about what is going on at the school. For many of the school directors, it was the first time for them to see an international education standard. The debriefing meeting after the visit showed that school directors had a flurry of ideas that they wanted to try out in their schools. IBEC plans to follow-up to determine how it can facilitate the process of replicating some of the activities that school directors observed.

Component 4: Improved Educational Relevance

Component 4 is divided into two subcomponents, life skills development and teacher education, each of which develops and implements relevant interventions aimed at achieving improved quality of basic education. An important reason why students leave school after completing primary school is that secondary education has little relevance for the rural or urban poor. IBEC has responded to this by placing a significant focus on the development of life skills activities, all the while ensuring that they are consistent with MoEYS policy as well as educationally relevant to target populations.

Component personnel dedicated to the teacher training subcomponent facilitate a series of teacher training workshops in the target areas and organize numerous activities that support teachers at different levels via the implementation of quality enhancing interventions.

IBEC’s goal is to assist in the preparation of a comprehensive life skills curriculum for lower secondary schools, IBEC’s consultation workshops with counterparts in the government and NGOs successfully generated increased interest and involvement of the Ministry and its partners in life skills-based approaches. Once the conceptual framework and initial set of teacher training manuals were completed in Year 1, IBEC was able to conduct the planned life skills pilot slated for Year 2. Students had opportunities to learn different life skills throughout the year, which were demonstrated during such activities as Market Simulations. Combined with a revision of 11 Year 1 manuals, the development of 19 new Life Skills Manuals, the Life Skills Team is now credited with a total of 30 ready-for-use manuals. The manuals provide teachers with step-by-step descriptive instructions on how to teach about any given topic, and were developed specifically to promote cooperative learning style practices and promote active learning. IBEC staff also provided support to teachers in their regular classroom instruction to foster child-centered learning and in some cases, provided intensive technical support in selected subjects such as Chemistry, Physics, and ICT.

With all curriculum development finished, albeit in draft form, IBEC is looking forward to see how this material will be received by teachers in target schools.

To follow up on initial training workshops conducted in Year 1, IBEC organized reflection sessions designed to give primary and secondary level teachers an opportunity to share their experiences of implementing new approaches of Life Skills education and Child Friendly Schools concepts. Lower Secondary School teachers received teacher orientations on Subject Classrooms (with a corresponding provision of educational materials) which is an important feature of Child Friendly Secondary Schools (CFSS), because they facilitate easy access to learning materials for students during lessons. Another important step towards quality enhancement of classes in secondary schools was the establishment of 14 IT labs and 7 science labs along with an orientation for teachers on how to optimally utilize these new facilities. In response to a need for a strong support network to guide teachers, IBEC established Technical Support Groups (TSGs) in both primary and lower secondary schools as a mechanism to provide ongoing technical support to teachers.