Commitment to Education and Partnership

US Ambassador Visits Project School

On 28 March 2013, the IBEC Project was honored to host a visit from US Ambassador William Todd and the newly appointed USAID Mission Director Ms. Rebecca Black. Visitors were received at Araignrongsei Lower Secondary School in Siem Reap Province by a combination of students, school managers, teachers and government officials as well as project personnel from both World Education and KAPE.

Visitors were impressed that the school tour was led by the students themselves, which testifies to an important project theme to empower youth. The students showed the Ambassador their new library and computer lab along with life skills education activities that they had been learning during the school year. All of these activities and investments would not have been possible without the support of the US Government.

The Ambassador ended the visit with a tree planting ceremony, and by saying “This is a good sign of our commitment for Cambodia, education, and for partnership”. IBEC is hopeful that the transformation it is helping to facilitate in many state schools like Araignrongsei Lower Secondary School will continue to build the project’s reputation as a major promoter of innovation and stakeholder led development.

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Component 1: Local NGO and Government Capacity Building & Advocacy

SREYROTH

A student in Grade 9, and listening and dialogue Group facilitator said, "I have joined a listening and dialogue group since I was in Grade 8. I gathered my friends to listen to the We Can Do It radio program many times because I think that after listening to the program and joining the group discussion, we will gain a lot of knowledge from the program such as understanding differences of other cultures, cooperative learning environment and life skills practical case studies. Also the program provided us braveness and fun..."  

Moreover, Sreyroth also expressed her ideas related to one topic of the radio program that: "This program topic [understanding the different cultures] educates us not to discriminate against other nations such as Muslims or Americans who are living in our country. As what we heard in the program, we should not force them to eat pork or do something they don’t like or oppose their cultures. In addition, the program also explains to us to stop discriminating against someone, and shows us how to get on well with other people around."

She also mentioned she likes listening to the program because it was good, real, fun, and interesting. With her satisfaction of the program, Sreyroth committed to continue leading the listening club and expanding her group members to other classes in her school.

The Capacity-building Component continued to achieve a number of milestones during the quarter including the accreditation of Buddhist Social Development Association (BSDA), the second IBEC local partner to achieve such accreditation under IBEC support (KAPE was accredited in Year 3). The Component also provided assistance to KAPE to help organize its third RCA Audit under USAID guidelines, thereby better positioning KAPE to receive funds from USG directly in the future.

The Component also continued to make significant progress with transitioning the project from direct grant support to target schools to a regime where school support is topped up and channeled to schools by local government, mainly commune councils. Field Offices reported that between 23% and 54% of school grants to Cycle 1 schools is comprised of matching fund from local sources. Overall, 33% of school grants are now comprised of matching funds from local sources. This is a major first step towards localizing IBEC grant support to schools.

The Component also organized meetings with the Consultative Group and Provincial Working Groups to review project operation.

Component 2: More Equitable School Access

Scholarships

During the quarter, Component personnel reported that 177 schools in the project’s 60 supported clusters received scholarship assistance at primary level this year. This provided support to 3,938 vulnerable children including 1,791 girls and 192 minority children. Scholarship support was again administered in March 2013 and comprised mainly stationery supplies (uniforms were distributed in the previous quarter). A second distribution of scholarship support was also administered in February 2013 for 1,604 vulnerable students at lower secondary school including 1,104 girls and 42 minority students. During scholarship distribution ceremonies, teachers had a chance to meet with parents to discuss such matters as family migration, the dangers of drug abuse, and other bad social influences in students’ environment.

Field offices reported that most secondary school scholarship recipients were demonstrating high pass rates on their first term examinations with 95% reportedly passing their exams. However, field offices also reported that 58 students dropped out during the quarter or about 4% of those receiving assistance. According to tracer studies, 28% of those leaving school did so in order to seek work in Phnom Penh while 26% left in order to migrate to Thailand or Ratanakiri Province. Another 22% left in order to seek local employment. Altogether, 76% left school for reasons of migration or paid employment. In January to March 2013, IBEC disbursed stipends to 120 second-year students who were recruited for entry into Provincial Teacher Training Colleges last year (51 in Kg Cham, 21 in Kratie and 48 in Siem Reap). Stipend support consists of $60 per quarter per student. No dropouts were reported during the quarter. Since startup, the project has supported 360 FTTC candidates who were locally recruited and who will have major impacts on reducing teacher shortages in village schools with too few teachers.

The CG added some new members to the committee and replaced retiring members as well as provided approval for joint Ministry-IBEC certificates that will be issued to all school directors completing the School Management & Leadership Training Course (SMLTC).

In addition, Component personnel helped to organize exchange visits involving 23 Beacon Schools to maximize the cross-fertilization of ideas and sharing of best practices. Host schools were encouraged to prepare formalized PowerPoint presentations about their schools highlighting best practices and areas of success. After considerable technical support during the last two quarters, the Component also reported that 105 Cycle 1 schools out of 143 schools have so far submitted Sustainability Plans for review. This comprises 73% of the total. Several schools that have not yet submitted their plans indicated that it was difficult to find time to meet with the Commune Councils since the latter tend to be very busy, particularly as they prepare for the national elections that will occur in July.

With respect to radio programming and other media outreach, MEDIA One achieved its planned outputs, including production and broadcast of youth radio programs on life skills, We Can Do It, and community engagement activities.

Opportunity for a new life through education: Thyda, 20, receives a scholarship to attend the Provincial Teacher Training College in Kampong Cham, made possible by USAID and the Cambodian Government. Once Thyda completes her studies, she will return to her home village to teach where there are teacher shortages.

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Component 2 organized a reflection workshop with the remaining 12 Bilingual Classroom Assistants (RCAs) in minority areas to review problems and solve challenges. In particular, the project discussed with schools how to sustain this very special service for the Cham minority in state schools when IBEC funds are no longer available. The Component also continued to do monitoring of Youth Councils at secondary school and Children’s Councils at primary level, especially since Cycle 1 schools will no longer be receiving direct funding for council activities from the project. In all, 164 primary schools have operational Youth and Children’s Councils but only 77 Cycle 2 secondary schools and 62 primary schools are receiving direct funding from the Support. Schools also reported that readership statistics continue to be commensurate with earlier reported levels including 151,159 users at secondary school level and 269,988 incidences of usage at primary level for a total of 421,147 instances of usage since the start of the school year. This bodes well for efforts to sustain earlier project investments in libraries. Field office reports indicated that Girls’ Counselor networks continued to be highly active during the reporting period. In this respect, schools reported that 1,198 secondary level peer counselors provided 1,139 incidences of counseling to the service population resulting in 817 girls with consecutive absences eventually returning to school; at primary level, 437 peer counselors provided 635 incidences of counseling resulting in 616 girls returning to school. This is the last year that IBEC will be making large investments in such activities making it important for the team to get things right.

During the quarter, the WASH team completed installation of 55 wash stations, 4 drilled wells, 27 new toilet blocks, 12 water tanks and piping networks in 20 schools. The team also continued to provide model toilet blocks and experimental wash stations to Tier 1 schools, which have been very well received by schools. In addition, the engineering team also completed repairs to 48 classrooms, and then provided 562 new filters to target schools.

Component 3: Improved School Management & Community Engagement

Component 3 completed the implementation of a catch-up workshop for newly appointed school directors who missed School Management & Leadership Training Workshops 1 and 2 in previous years. The 51 school administrators attending this workshop will now be eligible for certification as trained administrators in the next quarter. In order to facilitate this key workshop and other activities during the quarter, the Component team organized a Training of Trainers (ToT) for District-based Project Officers (DPOs) and Provincial Working Group members (government officers) to implement key activities during the quarter. These activities included additional workshops for School Support Committees (SSC) that promote Reading Accountability in local schools, improved SSC governance, especially as this relates to transparent elections, and a higher profile role for Commune EFA Committees in organizing these elections. In order to strengthen the use of Beacon Schools as models of good practice, Component personnel organized exchange visits between beacon schools in the three provinces to maximize the cross-fertilization of ideas and sharing of best practices. Seven host schools were encouraged to prepare formalized PowerPoint presentations about their schools highlighting best practices and areas of success. School directors, teachers, and community members from 16 visiting Beacon Schools actively participated in these visits and have been implementing replications of what they saw upon their return to their own schools.

Stakeholder-driven Discretionary School Grants:

Veasna is now in now in Grade 9. He has been a physically challenged child since birth with one normal leg and a short stinted leg. His living situation was made all the worse because his parents got divorced and remarried, leaving him with his grandmother to raise him. His grandmother, Mouri, is now 84 years old and lives with her youngest daughter who has four children of her own and is currently unemployed. Veasna was supported by KAPE with a primary school scholarship since he was in Grade 1 under the US Government supported OPTIONS Program. Even though OPTIONS ended in 2007, KAPE managed to find other donors to help Veasna. However, when he reached Grade 7, he had no prospect of further support – that is, until the IBEC Project started in 2009.

After receiving a request from the School Director at his school for continued assistance for Veasna, the IBEC Project agreed to make him a target student. Not only has he received scholarship assistance including uniforms and stationery, but the project has been able to advocate for him with Handicap International, which has now provided him with a prosthesis to help him walk better. Because of the difficult situation of the family, IBEC has been providing him with a stipend of $20/month to help keep him in school. It is really hard for Veasna to walk the 2km to school making him absent often; as a result, the project has also worked with local village leaders to get a neighbor to help him so that they can bicycle to school together.

Veasna with his grandmother, aunt, and IBEC staff. (Right)

Now Veasna comes to school more regularly and has been getting marks in the top rank of his class. His teachers have also taken a special interest in his difficult situation and provide free tutoring for him in Math, Khmer, and English. As it turns out, Veasna has a drawing talent and wants to be an artist when he grows up. But he also has a practical side and helps his grandmother raise chickens, which he learned about in his life skills class. He also has decided to study bicycle repair at the local Training Center for Disabled Persons. Veasna is very grateful to IBEC, his grandmother, and his teachers who all encourage him to persevere and try his hardest. His story shows what can be accomplished when we all work together to help.
Component 4: Improved Educational Relevance

Teacher Education:
During this quarter, teacher education activities supported child friendly school principles. Teachers at both the primary and secondary school levels attended refresher workshops on incorporating child friendly methodologies into their teaching, such as using cooperative learning, subject classroom organization (secondary), and effective teaching and learning (primary). 204 secondary level and 512 primary level teachers and school directors attended these trainings.

In addition to training Child Friendly School teachers, IBEC conducted a one-day refresher workshop for 40 Community Teachers to introduce them to the concept of cooperative learning and help them identify and address challenges encountered in the classroom. The project also trained 7 new remedial teachers at the primary level and 57 at the secondary level to provide additional instructional support to students with special learning needs. These remedial teachers have supported 4,423 students.

At the request of schools, the project provided a workshop to 51 primary school teachers and 23 school directors to help them improve their early grade reading and writing instruction. The workshop covered such topics as reading stories, using peer tutoring, and establishing Khmer language learning corners with various learning materials to promote reading and writing skills.

In addition to trainings and workshops, IBEC continued to monitor the use of science labs during this quarter. Out of the 24 science labs supported by the project, IBEC randomly selected eight labs to use in a sample survey regarding lab utilization. 161 students and nine teachers across these eight labs shared their impressions of the labs in the survey. 44% of teachers and 59% of students surveyed reported being “Very Satisfied” with the quality of science instruction in the science labs.

IT Access:
The IT team completed the installation of all new labs during the quarter. The number of labs to be installed this year was quite small requiring one lab to be built in Kampong Cham Province and another in Siem Reap. The completion of these two labs is a major milestone, as it signifies the completion of a major lab building program by the project. Altogether, the project has completed the installation of 25 labs, two of which were co-funded by the Oaktree Foundation since start-up. In combination with labs built under previous USAID funding, World Education and KAPE have installed a total of 36 computer labs providing IT access to 38,495 students (18,083 girls).

Life Skills Education:
The Life Skills Team focused heavily on working with MoEYS to complete the approval process for 27 life skills manuals that were submitted for approval and official adoption. During the present quarter, 12 manuals returned by the Department for Curriculum Development with suggestions for revision have been completed and re-submitted for approval. Another 15 manuals are still with the DCD pending review. Although the approval process has taken much longer than anticipated, IBEC is still confident that the remaining manuals will be approved quickly so that they can all be reprinted by WE for the next academic year.

As part of the exit strategy in life skills development, IBEC has been working with 30 new schools in demonstration sites in Sre Reng, Kampong Thom, and Prey Veng to adopt life skills programming based on the successful pilot that occurred last year. During the quarter, the Life Skills Team has helped train two counterparts from the Vocational Orientation Department (VOD) as well as the Provincial Offices of Education in each of the three new provinces to oversee the process of adoption.

In all, 98 secondary schools are still receiving direct material and technical support, and a total of 11,111 primary and secondary school students (5,348 girls) are currently learning about IPM topics ranging from rice and vegetable cultivation, bio-gardens, and fish and frog-raising. Due to the teacher shortage in Kratie, it was not possible to organize IPM activities this year. The Life Skills teams have also been working closely with other development partners to foster the adoption and integration of the new life skills curriculum into other programming, namely the ADB and GIZ, as well as LeVallo School, Bookbridge, and Aredoc.

One of the strategies that IBEC is using to ensure sustainability of life skills programming are Life Skills Innovation Grants. Some schools have reported generating on average $451 each per year from such activities, which bodes well for the ability of schools to maintain life skills education in selected areas (mainly agricultural) using home-grown income.

BSDA Achieves CCC Accreditation
A symbol of professionalism, integrity, and inspiration

For Mr. Thorn Vandong, Director and Co-founder of Buddham for Social Development Action, achieving Cooperation Committee for Cambodia accreditation means transparency, good governance, and professional implementation in the areas of finance, administration, and human resources. CCC is a leading membership organization for local and international NGOs in Cambodia, and acts as an enabling agent to facilitate civil society organizations to collectively, responsibly and accountability work together to effectively advance the pace of development in Cambodia.

As per its mandate to advocate for USAID, Forward themes relating to the empowerment of local organizations, IBEC sought to ensure accreditation of at least two local agencies. BSDA has received capacity building support from World Education and Kampuchean Action for Primary Education since January 2010, and is the second organization to achieve accreditation after KAPE was certified last year. World Education developed an Organizational Assessment Tool to assist BSDA in building their capacity as a local partner. For BSDA to improve their processes, this involved monthly annual planning and management meetings to assess the progress of the organization. Out of 3,700 NGOs in Cambodia, approximately 40 of those NGOs have achieved CCC accreditation. Therefore, earning CCC accreditation demonstrates a very high standard, and now other organizations wish to learn from BSDA on how they achieved this accomplishment as a small organization.

BSDA is run by Buddhist monks, and led by local people to empower and support women, children and marginalized people, especially in health, education and livelihood promotion. BSDA has inspired organizations in Kampong Cham – and Cambodia more broadly – as BSDA and KAPE are the only local NGOs in Kampong Chum to achieve CCC accreditation. Through this accreditation process, Vandong hopes that BSDA will continue to build its capacity to implement effective participatory development work so that the organization will be sustainable and continue long after he is gone.