This edition of the IBEC Project newsletter reports on events from quarter 17 (Oct-Dec 2013); a quarter which saw IBEC begin its fifth and final year of operation. This is a crucial year in project implementation that focuses on final hand over of all project activities to government and other development partners.

Key Numbers

As Year 5 implementation began, IBEC was working in:

- 145 primary schools
- 147 secondary schools
- 30 new Life Skills Demonstration Sites
- Total of 322 schools

Enrolment estimated at:

- 122,950 students (61,018 girls) in target schools
- 136,383 students (67,519 girls) in all 6 provinces.

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Local NGO and Government Capacity Building, and Advocacy for Sustainability

Capacity-building activities assumed even greater importance as the new school year began, since this is to be the last year of IBEC support to target schools. Accordingly, component personnel focused heavily on strengthening the relationship between schools and Commune Councils. This referred in particular to the integration of school development plans into the Commune Investment Plans (CIPs), where $7,437 was committed by local government for matching grants to 50 schools in target areas. These efforts as well as that schools identified in their sustainability plans for funding from commune grants and others. These included:

- Library services (51 schools);
- Child-to-Child Help Networks (14 schools);
- Replenishment of First Aid Kits (45 schools);
- Support for Girls’ Counselor Networks (32 schools);
- School Fairs to boost enrolment at the start of the year (23 schools).

The WASH Team did a survey of schools whose water and sanitation systems were in need of repair. Following this survey, the team completed repair of:

- 55 wash stations,
- 1 hand well,
- 30 toilet blocks, and
- 17 water systems.

While many schools have been very diligent in maintaining the WASH facilities, some schools have been delinquent with respect to maintenance. The WASH team has tried to provide additional training to these schools and enlist the support of local officials to prevent problems in the future.

More Equitable School Access

**Scholarships:**

School access activities were limited to scholarship support to the last cohorts of vulnerable children earlier selected by the project and scaled down school mapping activities in which schools mainly updated their previously drawn school maps to identify children out of school. Schools reported identifying an additional 57 children out of school in primary and secondary schools of whom 26 re-enrolled (46%). While it is believed that many more children remain out of school, it is believed that these youth have either migrated in search of work or live too far from the school’s catchment area to be counted.

Primary school scholarships continued at a reduced level with support coming from commune-mediated grants and a sustainable School Assistance Fund supported by Thontean Suksa, a social enterprise set up by the project in Year 3 to sell teaching aids. A total 418 children received scholarship support this year. At secondary school level, 712 students received support all of whom are in Grade 9.

**Stakeholder-driven Discretionary School Grants:**

By the end of the quarter, field offices had reported that the project was still supporting schools with teacher shortages with 39 Community Teachers. This represents a significant decline from the original inputs made to help schools address teacher shortages. Although support grants for student councils have now been handed over to commune councils (for the schools that have chosen to apply for such grant support), the project continued to provide capacity-building support. In this regard, District Project Officers provided refresher workshops to 132 schools.

There were several school development activities support for sustainability planning in all schools are key project strategies to ensure sustainability of investments during the project’s previous implementation. There was also a continuing dialogue with the Consultative Group as well as Provincial Working Groups to organize launch and hand over events and to accelerate official adoption by MoEYS of project materials such as the new *Life Skills Curriculum.*
Much Loved Passionate Teacher

A young and committed primary school teacher, Ieng started teaching in 2008. With significant capacity-building support from IBEC, she became an outstanding teacher and has received a great deal of recognition from her local community.

Ieng teaches 1st Grade children in Hun Sen Cheas Primary School, a well known primary school in Kampong Cham Province for its excellent organization, its beautiful landscaping, and good school environment. She teaches both Cham and Khmer-speaking children, which is both challenging and rewarding too. Ieng always teaches her students with a well-prepared lesson plan for all subjects. With the skills in developing learning materials that she learned from IBEC, she has made many innovative learning aids for teaching Khmer and Math subjects as well as enhancing the classroom environment with educational posters and students’ work displays.

All students like Ieng very much because she is kind, compassionate, and truly dedicated to helping children learn. Her children sometimes call her ‘mother’. She has an excellent relationship with her students, some of who sometimes call her ‘mother’.

“Teaching kids is like playing,” she said. “Being a Grade 1 teacher requires a lot of preparation but I keep this to myself because I do really enjoy it,” she continued. Visiting parents say that their children never miss a class because they enjoy coming to her class.

Because she is such a good teacher, Ieng also facilitates peer tutoring activities as part of the Child Help Network programming. This employs Grade 5 and 6 students to tutor younger children in Grades 1 and 2. What is more, she was also appointed as technical grade leader for the entire cluster. Due to such professionalism and the outstanding role she plays in school, she recently received a commendation in the form of a certificate from the Provincial and District Offices of Education. Her Director is so happy with the work that she does and has been a strong advocate for her advancement.

Improved School Management & Community Engagement

As Year 5 implementing began, the School Management and Community Engagement Component Team began the process of randomly conducting an impact assessment of the School Management and Leadership Training Course (SMLTC). The aim of the assessment was to measure the effectiveness of the course in relation to school administrators’ work. In Kampong Cham, 15 secondary schools and six primary schools were assessed.

As for Siem Reap, 36 primary and secondary schools (18 of each) were selected and for Kratie about 15 secondary and 10 primary schools were picked. In all, 82 schools participated in the assessment. The assessment focused on several areas such as the way in which the school directors manage in and outside classroom environments, data and administrative management, and technical matters. The assessment of technical matters was particularly important and took in the degree to which administrators take the lead in technical meetings, doing classroom observations, giving positive feedback to his/her teaching staff, and attending commune meetings. During this quarter also, the component team conducted research on school administrators and co-trainers to find out how many had retired, transferred to other schools, changed position, or became deceased or incapacitated. The results were profoundly disturbing with a loss rate of 16.3% already reported by supported schools.

If one projects outward a loss rate of 16% each year, it would mean that about half of the technical inputs for improved management made by the project for these schools will be lost within three years and nearly all will have been lost within six years. These findings starkly paint the difficulties that capacity-building projects such as IBEC face.
Improved Educational Relevance

Work Force Development through Life Skills

The project continued its strong focus on working with the Ministry to promote an incremental approach to rolling out the life skills curriculum. In all, 96 secondary schools in the original provinces of Kampong Cham, Kratie, and Siem Reap were at various stages of preparation to implement life skills courses during the quarter in addition to another 30 Demonstration Site schools in Svay Rieng, Prey Veng, and Kampong Thom.

Thus, a total of 126 schools were implementing life skills activities using the new curriculum and accompanying materials. This comprises about 8% of the nation’s 1,622 lower secondary schools. In all, there were a reported 588 instances of life skills instruction across 116 reporting secondary schools implementing life skills courses. In terms of the number of topics chosen by schools, it is interesting to note that the selection rate is relatively high with at least four topics chosen by schools (e.g., Kratie) and some provincial rates reaching as high as six topics (e.g., Svay Rieng).

During the quarter, teachers from 116 secondary schools were invited to attend a one-day refresher training to strengthen their pedagogical strategies and discuss any issues that had come up during their life skills teaching.

Educational Innovation for Science & Technology:

During the quarter, the IT Component decided to complete one additional computer lab using residual funds remaining from Year 4. This final lab was established in Kampong Kdei High School in Siem Reap Province. The completion of this final lab brings the total number of computer labs established by IBEC up to 26.

Skilling Students for the Future: Students practice their word processing skills in an ICT lab supported by IBEC in Siem Reap province (left).