



**PLANETE  
ENFANTS &  
DEVELOPPEMENT**

# **EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT IN CAMBODIA**

**1989-2019: 30 YEARS OF PE&D COMMITMENT**





## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## ABBREVIATIONS

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AFD	Agence Française de Développement
ARNEC	Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood
CPS	Community Preschool
CCWC	Commune Committee for Women and Children
EBSS	Enterprise-Based Social Services (Project)
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECRC	Early Childhood Resource Centre (Project)
KrY	Krousar Yoeung
PE&D	Planète Enfants & Développement
MoEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MoSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
NC-ECCD	National Committee on Early Childhood Care and Development
N-ECCD	Network on Early Childhood Care and Development
NEP	NGO Education Partnership
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRP	School Readiness Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

## INTRODUCTION

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The provision of early childhood care and development (ECCD) services has never been so essential. Following decades of extensive studies and experiments, the breadth and the quality of the early childhood sector of a country has proven its efficiency in enhancing socio-economic development, reducing inequalities and promoting the general well-being of the population.

Since its creation in 1984, Planète Enfants & Développement (PE&D) has been recognizing the potential of early childhood for the child development. In its first country of intervention, Cambodia, the organization has tested numerous programmes to enhance access and quality of ECCD services, such as preschools, early childhood centers and healthcare services.

Ten years ago, a team from PE&D has carefully and intelligently collected information on the approach which was used by the organization to implement ECCD programmes. The team has notably attempted to highlight its specificities and its innovative aspects. By comparing data used at that time and the latest developments within the organization, this present document will follow the evolution of the approach over the years and analyze the extent as to how it was influenced by socio-cultural changes, economic opportunities and policy development. This document also aims at reflecting on the skills and expertise gained by the organization in the early childhood sector, as well as at gathering information on the best practices and remaining challenges pertaining to this approach.

This report will first recall the main terms and concepts which will be developed throughout the document. It will conduct a literature review on the latest studies and frameworks which have been developed in ECCD. It will then focus on the evolution of ECCD-related policies and programmes in the specific context of Cambodia. The core of the document will be dedicated to describing, explaining and questioning the approach which has been used by PE&D to implement ECCD projects and structure the ECCD sector in the country. A final section will analyze the challenges and areas for improvement within the sector.



## PE&D'S MISSION

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Planète Enfants & Développement (PE&D) is a non-political and non-profit international organization. Its headquarters are located in Paris, France.

Founded under the name of “SOS Children of Cambodia” in 1984, the organization has gradually gained strength and expertise in the protection and care of children. It has acquired legitimacy from both the communities and the donors it partnered with. Strong of previous successes, it expanded its activities to Vietnam in 1993, to Nepal in 1997 and to Burkina Faso in 2004. In 2016, it opted to merge with another organization sharing its vision and values: Planète Enfants, founded in Nepal in 1992; hence was born Planète Enfants et Développement.

Since its creation, the organization has been committed to provide children, in particular the most vulnerable, with an environment conducive to their safe and healthy development. Its mission is to protect children from violence and exploitation of all sorts and ensure they grow up surrounded by their families and communities. This has been translated, over the years, by the implementation of multiple projects administering a wide range of services to children and their families. With a holistic view, the projects have addressed all aspects of development and well-being, from living conditions, general health, sanitation and nutrition to social and economic integration. PE&D's area of expertise therefore include: family development, social and professional integration, protection against violence, and in particular gender-based violence and maternal and reproductive health. Its prime expertise lays in the provision of ECCD services.



In all of its projects in Cambodia, PE&D promotes a community-based and participatory approach, focusing on accompanying beneficiaries rather than supporting them. Project planning is completed following consultations and focus groups discussions, and activities are adapted to the context throughout the entire project duration. This approach is considered as essential to enhance the autonomy of



beneficiaries and ensure the sustainability and the success of the projects. PE&D also encourages innovation and alternative views in order to adapt to the specificities of each socio-cultural context. It pilots models and programmes to test different approaches and to be as relevant as possible. Projects encourage the respect of fundamental rights, by taking into account the specific challenges pertaining to gender and vulnerability among others. The organization informs and advises beneficiaries on their rights, such as freedom of thought, of expression and of association, as well as it promotes the respect of national and international human rights instruments. Finally, thanks to its long-lasting experience, PE&D has developed strong links with partner organizations, local and national governments. Every project acts in accordance with the latest policy developments and complements other programmes led by non-governmental and international organizations. The organization comes in support to policy-making and is strongly committed to lead advocacy work in governmental and civil society platforms.





## I. THE CONTEXT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT IN CAMBODIA

This section recalls the main terms and concepts related to Early Childhood and conducts a literature review on the latest studies and frameworks developed in this sub-sector. It also focuses on the evolution of ECCD-related policies and programmes in the specific context of Cambodia.

### A. *The concept of Early Childhood and its importance*

#### 1. Important definitions and keywords



A person who is very closely attached to the child and responsible for their daily care and support. Primary caregivers include parents, families and other people who are directly responsible for the child at home. They also include carers outside the home, such as people working in organized day care<sup>1</sup>.



An early childhood educator who instructs children aged from 3 to 5. A preschool teacher is working at least 2 hours (Community Preschool Teacher) and up to 3 hours per day (State Preschool Teacher).



The action of looking after children. The term also refers to the facilities in place to administer, care and supervise young children, often aged between 0 to 3 years old. It is also known as "Day Care".

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, World Bank, World Health Organization, ECDAN, *Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development*, 2018, p.47

Child care is increasingly provided outside the home, by government or private providers.



According to the UNESCO, early childhood can be defined as the period from birth to 8 years old, during which children experience a remarkable growth in brain development. During this stage, children are highly influenced by the environment and the people surrounding them<sup>2</sup>. In practice, early childhood covers the period until 6 years of age, before children enters primary school.



ECCD is multidimensional and encompasses several aspects of a child's well-being: physical, social, emotional and mental (UNICEF)<sup>3</sup>. Activities often focus on enhancing the child's nutrition, securing a safe environment around the child and providing health care services and learning opportunities<sup>4</sup>.



ECCE are services intended for children under compulsory school age, which involve elements of both physical care and education. It therefore involves more than preparation for primary school. It aims at the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs in order to build solid foundations for lifelong learning and wellbeing.



ECCE programmes involve a variety of locations and arrangements, from parenting programmes to community-based child care, center-based provision and pre-primary education in schools. ECCE programs may be publicly funded and delivered (the predominant pattern in the Nordic countries, for example) publicly funded and privately delivered (as in the Netherlands or Germany, for example), privately funded and privately delivered or a combination of all types such as in Brazil as well as in Burkina Faso or many countries of Africa, for example. These programmes may be free, or they may charge income-related fees; in almost all European countries, they are heavily subsidized by the government. The services are voluntary. Access is very limited in most of the countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (UNESCO)<sup>5</sup>.



Pre-primary education is defined as the initial stage of organized instruction, designed primarily to introduce very young children to a school-type environment, that is, to provide a bridge between home and a school-based atmosphere<sup>6</sup>. It covers children from 3 years of age until the start of primary education at 6 years old. Under

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO Website, <https://en.unesco.org/themes/early-childhood-care-and-education>

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF, *The formative years: UNICEF's work on early childhood development*, 2013, p.3

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF, World Bank, World Health Organization, ECDAN, *Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development*, 2018, p.47

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, Sheila B. Kamerman, *A global history of early childhood education and care*, ED/EFA/MRT/PI/19, 2006, p.1

<sup>6</sup> OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms, Pre-Primary Education Definition, <https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=5409>



the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Level 0 Programme categorization, pre-primary education programmes typically focus on interactions with peers and trained educators and the development of logical and reasoning skills, as well as introducing early literacy and mathematical concepts and other school readiness skills. Age of entry to pre-primary programmes and duration of such programmes differ from one country to another<sup>7</sup>.

## 2. The importance of ECCD services

ECCD services are essential to young children. The benefits range from healthy development to cognitive and social stimulation. In the long run, these services serve the society as a whole, by shaping smart and curious individuals. Thanks to their skills and open mind, these individuals will be able to find adequate and skilled jobs and enjoy higher earnings. In the meantime, companies that employ them will become more innovative and efficient, hence enjoying higher productivity. Effects will not only be economic, but also social: the stability of the society will be ensured, by normalizing social interactions and reducing tensions and crimes.

### *Brain grows faster during early childhood*

First, ECCD matters to children's development. Long-term studies have shown that the early childhood period is critical in terms of development: neuronal connections are formed every second within the brain, which, in turn, influence all aspects of body functions, from the endocrine and the immune systems to all mental processes<sup>8</sup>. Brain development, in fact, occurs at all age, but never at such a high speed than during a child's early moments<sup>9</sup>.

Biological evidence has confirmed that brain development during the early childhood period significantly affects children's health throughout their entire life<sup>10</sup>. Life expectancy is increased when children have benefitted from adequate health care services during their early years<sup>11</sup>. Also, only with the right kind of nutrition children will not suffer from stunted growth and their physical and cognitive capacities will not be impaired.

Furthermore, brain development significantly influences a wide range of skills that will become essential in children's future: motor, cognitive, emotional, and social and language skills. Through stimulation and secure social interactions with parents, caregivers and peers, children will rapidly experience and express emotions. These early experiences will affect their abilities to cope with their emotions and to form successful relationships in the future. Surprisingly early, children are notably capable to express guilt, shame and pride and to inhibit these particular emotions whether settings are

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<sup>7</sup> UNICEF and The Lego Foundation, *Learning through play*, October 2018, p.6

<sup>8</sup> The World Bank, *From Early Child Development to Human Development*, 2000, p.26

<sup>9</sup> UNICEF and The Lego Foundation, *Learning through play*, October 2018, p.6

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.6

<sup>11</sup> The World Bank, *From Early Child Development to Human Development*, 2000, p.24

appropriate or not<sup>12</sup>. Early childhood care develops their self-confidence, their desire for learning and safeguards a sound mental health. The regulation of emotions will also highly interfere with cognitive skills, such as their ability to plan, judge and make decisions. By interacting with others and being in contact with objects and toys, children develop their negotiation and problem-solving skills. Children expand their curiosity and creativity through experiences and discoveries. Finally, learning how to share, play and engage in reciprocal and supportive relationships will enable children to develop their communications and language skills<sup>13</sup>.

ECCD services, to be truly effective, need to be holistic and focus on stimulation and learning. Through play and active pedagogy, these services can be provided at home, through parenting sessions and home visits, or in specialized ECCD centers (day-cares or preschools).

#### FOCUS: THE PERIODS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

**From conception to 2 years old:** A child's brain develops neural connections at a pace of, at least, 1,000 per second. The more a child evolved in a loving and protecting environment, the more he/she will benefit from a high socio-emotional development.

**From 3 to 6 years old:** This period is commonly known as the "preschool period". The child develops a various set of skills: language, cognitive, social and emotional ones. The child interacts with members of his/her family, but also gets to learn from his/her peers and caretakers from outside his/her home. Stimulation and learning, through play, songs and conversations, at home or in a specialized early education centre, become essential. The child starts to explore his/her environment and make sense of the world around him/her.

#### *Early education gives a fair chance in life*

Second, ECCD services matter to the effectiveness, the efficiency and the equity of the educational system.

Inequalities start from birth. By providing equal opportunities to all children, regardless of their economic background, sex and other distinctions leading to potential discriminations, early childhood services can help preventing the perpetuation of inequalities, in particular gender barriers. Indeed, girls are more likely to access primary school and gain higher education qualifications if they are enrolled in pre-primary education; their motivation to continue studying is increased and their community and parents tend to be more supportive<sup>14</sup>. ECCD services are also effective

<sup>12</sup> Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child, *Children's emotional development is built into the architecture of their brains*, Working Paper 2, 2004, p.2

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.2

<sup>14</sup> Save the Children International, *Laying the foundations, Early Childhood Care and Development*, 2012, p.4





ways to break the poverty cycle: as children inherit the same challenges their parents face, access to health care services, good nutrition, secure environment, and pre-primary education are essential to create better opportunities for the future.

Pre-primary education, in particular, enhances primary school readiness. When children attend preschool, they learn basic skills (language and literacy), concepts (numbers, time and space) and behaviors (participation, play and communication). They get used to communicate with their peers and to listen to and interact with their teachers. Children from all backgrounds are equipped with the same skills and are equally able to succeed in primary school and throughout their entire schooling period. Professors of Sociology D. R. Entwisle and K. L. Alexander have conducted research on the effects of preschool on children. They consider it as a “critical period” during which an unrelated adult (the teacher) creates a sense of discipline among the attending children (the students), who have to stay focused for several hours a day. Emotionally more mature and better acquainted with a formal learning environment, they are also simply more positive and self-confident about studying. Early childhood care reduces the likelihood of inefficiencies, such as poor academic performance, repetition of grades and drop outs. The OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) surveys have shown that even short preschool programmes already smoothes the transition to primary school. They have shown that children attending just one year of preschool were outperforming those who did not, regardless of their socio-economic background. The longer children spend attending preschool, the better they perform later on.



*Children during the opening of a CPS newly built by PE&D*

## *ECCD services contribute to a prosperous and stable society*

Early childhood care services benefit to the society as a whole by providing the foundations for its social and economic stability.

Thanks to their long-lasting positive effects on children, these services have a high influence on the adults of tomorrow. By attending school, children are more likely to gain skills that are fundamental to their professional development. Qualified, mature, literate and critical thinkers, they will enjoy higher individual earnings than their counterparts who did not attend school or have interrupted their schooling. A study conducted by Nobel Laureate J. Heckman, P. Gertler and others has shown that early childhood interventions increased earnings by 25%<sup>15</sup>. Their qualifications and innovative thinking also undoubtedly benefit the companies employing them, increasing efficiency and productivity. Early childhood services, notably pre-primary education and health care, constitute some of the highest returns on investments a country can make<sup>16</sup>. The productivity of the country is also increased when parents, especially mothers, are able to join the labor force and seek employment after finding appropriate childcare options. Not only a country makes additional national earnings and creates more wealth, but also reduces public spending in the health care sector as individuals are healthier and are less likely to suffer from chronic illnesses. Every dollar invested in early childhood programmes presumably ensures a national saving of thirteen<sup>17</sup>.

Finally, early childhood interventions guarantee social order: by interacting with others from a very young age, and inhibiting basic social rules, children tend to be less aggressive. Warm and affectionate relationships foster empathy and self-control. A 35-year duration study conducted in North Carolina in United States has followed children until they reached adulthood and has demonstrated that those who attended preschools were less likely to show violent behaviors and commit crimes than those who did not<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> The World Bank, Education Global Practice, *Improving Learning Outcomes through Early Childhood Development*, 2016, p.1

<sup>16</sup> Save the Children International, *Laying the foundations, Early Childhood Care and Development*, 2012, p.2

<sup>17</sup> Save the Children International, *Laying the foundations, Early Childhood Care and Development*, 2012, p.6

<sup>18</sup> The University of Chicago, *The life-cycle benefits of an influential early childhood program*, HCEO Working Paper, December 2016, p.50



## B. International legal framework on Early Childhood Care and Development

### 1. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

ECCD is a right given to every child and recognized within the Convention of the Rights of the Child, commonly abbreviated as the CRC. The Convention has been adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989 and has entered into force on 2 September 1990. The Kingdom of Cambodia has ratified the Convention on 15 October 1992, as well as two of its optional protocols, the Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and the Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (both adopted on 25 May 2000), respectively on 30 May 2002 and on 16 July 2004.

The Convention does not explicitly mention the importance of the early childhood period. However, in accordance to its first article, the dispositions of the convention are applicable to *“every human being below the age of eighteen years old unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”*<sup>19</sup>. The Convention details measures related to child protection (Art. 2.2, 19, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37), right to life (Art. 6), identity (Art. 7, 8), freedoms of opinion, expression and association (Art. 12, 13, 14, 15), care from parents, legal guardians or alternative care (Art. 18, 20, 21), access to information and media (Art. 17), health care (Art. 24, 25), social security (Art. 26), adequate standards of living (Art. 27), education (Art. 28, 29) and leisure (Art. 31). As no article is directly addressing early childhood, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has issued, on 1 November 2005, the General Comment no. 7, entitled *“Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood”*<sup>20</sup>, further explaining how to use the convention with issues affecting young children. The General Comment gives concrete proposals to contribute to the realization of rights for young children, through policies, laws, programmes, professional training and research.

### 2. Other key international guidelines

#### *The Education for All Framework (2000)*

The Education for All (EFA) goals have been adopted in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000. Cambodia has subscribed to the goals in 2003 and has formulated an EFA Plan for the period 2003-2015. The framework focuses on six specific actions, such as guaranteeing access to education to vulnerable children, girls and children belonging to ethnic minorities and expanding adult literacy and adult lifelong learning. The first goal of this framework aims at expanding and enhancing the provision of ECCD services in all

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<sup>19</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989, Art.1 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

<sup>20</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Comment no.7, Implementing child rights in early childhood, 20 September 2006, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/460bc5a62.html>



countries<sup>21</sup>. The implementation of these goals should be ensured through the elaboration of a time-bound and action-oriented national plan. The Education for All framework focuses on poverty reduction measures and pro-poor policies.

### *The Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals (2000)*



In September 2000, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Millennium Declaration, exhorting nations to reduce extreme poverty through a series of objectives and targets. Covering a period of 15 years, the eight goals notably focused on nutrition, education and health. No specific goals were related to pre-primary education, some however emphasized on infant health and development. With the goal 4, aiming at reducing the mortality rate of children under five by two-thirds before 2015, nations were encouraged to develop adapted healthcare systems, conduct immunization campaigns and raise awareness on hygiene and good nutrition.

The goals were quite general and were not providing specific recommendations as to how to reach the targets. They also set as a priority to halve extreme poverty but overlooked other issues, such as governance and environmental concerns. In 2015, when the deadline of the goals was reached, the United Nations General Assembly decided to go further and develop a more comprehensive set of goals for the next fifteen years. The Sustainable Development Goals, also known as the SDGs, insist not only on the socio-economic development of nations but also on the sustainability of the actions taken. The Target 4.2 explicitly mentions pre-primary education and qualitative ECCD. It states that, by 2030, countries should “*ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education*”<sup>22</sup>. ECCD is also fundamental to achieving the goals related to poverty, hunger, health, education, gender, water and sanitation and inequality.

### *The Moscow Framework of Action (2010)*

Governments, educational institutions and ECCD experts gathered in Moscow in September 2010 for the first UNESCO-sponsored World Conference on ECCD<sup>23</sup>. The Conference concluded with the adoption of a set of non-binding measures. The framework insists on enforcing human rights conventions and global programmes. It also focuses on specificities of ECCD, such as special intervention, the respect of cultural

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<sup>21</sup> World Education Forum, *Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitment*, 26-28 April 2000, p.15

<sup>22</sup> Sustainable Development Goals Website, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

<sup>23</sup> World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education, supported by UNESCO, Moscow Framework for Action and Cooperation, *Harnessing the wealth of nations*, 27-29 September 2010, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000189882>



and linguistic diversity and the prevention of discrimination of all sorts, in particular those related to gender and disabilities.

### *The Nurturing Care Framework (2018)*

The Nurturing Care Framework has been developed in 2018 by United Nations agencies, notably UNICEF and the World Health Organization, the World Bank and other organizations specialized in early childhood<sup>24</sup>. It was initiated following the gathering of a G20 development working group in March 2018. The framework revolves around five strategic actions aiming at expanding and enhancing the provision of ECCD services. The strategic actions are the following: 1. Lead and invest; 2. Focus on families and their communities; 3. Strengthen services; 4. Monitor progress; 5. Use data and innovate. Furthermore, the framework insists on the interrelation of different aspects of care: nutrition, early learning, health, responsive caregiving and security and safety.

## *C. The Cambodian government's engagement towards ECCD*

### *1. National legislation related to ECCD*

After the end of the civil war in 1991, the Cambodian government, supported by international organizations, has developed legislation and policies in order to enhance the educational system and expand access to school for all children, regardless of their background, sex, disability or other distinctions.

The Constitution, adopted in 1993, guarantees the right to equal access to education. Article 48 states: *"the State shall assure the protection of children's rights as enshrined in the Convention on Children, especially, the right to life, the right to education, the right to protection during wartime and the right to protection from economic or sexual exploitation"*. The Chapter VI specifically focuses on education, culture and social affairs<sup>25</sup>. Articles 65 to 68 cover the main principles on education. Article 65 notably ensures the protection and the promotion of *"the right of the citizen to quality education at all levels"* for *"all the citizens"*. The Labor Law, adopted in 1997, also specifies that enterprises employing over one hundred women *"shall set up, within their establishments or nearby, a nursing room and a crèche (day-care center)"* (Art. 186)<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> UNICEF, World Bank, World Health Organization, ECDAN, *Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development*, 2018, <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/272603/9789241514064-eng.pdf?ua=1>

<sup>25</sup> The Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, 21 September 1993, Chapter VI, <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/kh/kh009en.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Royal Kram No. NS/RKM/0397/01 on the Labour Law, 13 March 1997, Art. 186, <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/travail/docs/701/labour>

An important step is the adoption in 2007 of the Royal Kram no. NS/RKM/1207 on Education<sup>27</sup>. The aim of the law is to build a comprehensive education system, with adequate learning and teaching materials, curriculums and human resources. The law designs the management of all educational programs at all levels. It defines “*early childcare and childhood education*” as services provided for children aged between 0 and 6 years old (Art.16). According to the law, early childhood education is not a level of education but constitutes a preparation to the schooling period (Art.15). Article 31 of the law echoes the Constitution and asserts the right to all children to access to education in stating that “every citizen has the right to access qualitative education of at least 9 years in public schools free of charge”.

The Royal Kram no. NS/RKM/0508/017 on Administrative Management of the Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts and Khans, commonly known as the Law on Deconcentration and Decentralization, adopted in 2008, has also been of utmost importance in clarifying up roles and responsibilities in the set-up of preschools and early childhood programmes. Article 44 allocates budget to each level of the administration, more specifically to the capital, the provincial, municipal and district councils. Article 42 transfers new responsibilities to the Commune Councils and exhorts them to focus on the “*most important development needs*” such as “*basic and necessary services, facilities, materials and public infrastructures*” and “*other needs of women, youth, children and vulnerable groups including poor people and indigenous people*”<sup>28</sup>. In practice, their new responsibilities include, inter alia, the maintenance of the preschool facilities and the disbursement of the salary of the teachers.

## 2. Policies on ECE

In addition to the adoption of framework laws, the Cambodian government has drafted several national policies and action plans.

In June 2000, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) published a document entitled “*Policy on ECE*” which set out objectives and a range of programme options in the early childhood sector<sup>29</sup>. The first National Policy on ECCD was adopted in February 2010<sup>30</sup>. It set up the management of ECCD for children, from 0 to 6 years old, and attempted to establish a coordination structure between all the relevant institutions (civil society organizations, public agencies) and ministries. According to the policy, the MoEYS takes the lead for the design and the monitoring of all educational programmes and curriculums across all levels. A Department of Early

<sup>27</sup> Royal Kram No. NS/RKM/1207/032 on Education, 08 December 2007, <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/86097/96937/F1976996642/KHM86097.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Royal Kram No. NS/RKM/0508/017 on the Administrative Management of the Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts and Khans, 01 April 2008, Art. 42, [http://www.cdc-crdb.gov.kh/cdc/twg\\_network/country\\_systems\\_cambodia/strengthening\\_national\\_systems/documents\\_for\\_reform/sndd/organic\\_law\\_2008\\_en.pdf](http://www.cdc-crdb.gov.kh/cdc/twg_network/country_systems_cambodia/strengthening_national_systems/documents_for_reform/sndd/organic_law_2008_en.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> RODIER Chantal and THORNE Claire, *15 years later: the story of an integrated programme of early childhood support in the villages of Cambodia*, July 2009

<sup>30</sup> National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development, prepared by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2010, <http://www.moeys.gov.kh/images/organigram/ecd/Nation%20policy%20ECD%20English1.pdf>



Childhood Education, under the responsibility of the ministry, has been tasked with the management of preschools. It has no responsibility for direct provision, as, according to the Law on Deconcentration and Decentralization, the commune councils shall implement these services at the local level. Even though the MoEYS has endorsed free education for primary level and state preschools, it has been decided that commune councils will be in charge of raising funds or allocating some of their own budget to the building and maintenance of community-based preschools (CPS). Areas with high financial constraints may be able to receive additional support from the government. The roles and responsibilities of the other ministries are detailed in the policy.

In order to foster coordination and partnership for the implementation of the policy, a National Committee for Early Childhood Care and Development (NC-ECCD) was created in 2013, following the adoption of the Royal Decree 0412/317<sup>31</sup>. The Committee gathers the MoEYS, as well as 12 other relevant ministries involved in ECCD<sup>32</sup>. The NC-ECCD convenes meetings at least twice a year.

The government has subsequently adopted several action plans (Action Plans 2011-2013, 2014-2018). The most current action plan sought *“to improve birth outcomes, parenting skills and child development, in order to realize the full potential of all children in Cambodia and alleviate the social inequality stemming from inadequate health and nutrition services and poor education outcomes”*<sup>33</sup>. Another priority issue for the plan was to ensure *“timely school entry at six years of age, (improve) educational achievement, and (reduce) internal inefficiencies of the education”*. The action plan aimed at expanding all forms of early childhood education services for children from 3 to 6 years old. The plan included the provision of alternative services, such as parenting sessions and community preschools.

The draft of next action plan, for the period 2019-2023 (not published at this date) formulates three priority issues: 1. Home-based care, 2. Community Preschools and 3. Integration of ECCD across all ministries. The draft acknowledges the need for the authorities to disseminate the policies, in particular at sub-national level, to clarify the roles and responsibilities of each relevant stakeholder, to build their capacities and finally, to develop a clear budget allocation method. The document also emphasizes on the need to monitor and evaluate the activities.

A parenting handbook has been developed in 2019 by the MoEYS; it is composed of 5 volumes addressing different aspects of care of young children, such as nutrition,

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<sup>31</sup> Royal Decree No. 0412/317 on the Organization and Functioning of the National Committee for Early Childhood Care and Development, 08 April 2013, <https://data.opendevlopmentmekong.net/dataset/5c1135a8-9c04-472f-8779-a76dc0792b48/resource/736429bc-5773-4b79-9f4a-cad46cb33e2e/download/5d975d00-5d17-4a63-8501-305294aabca9.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> The 12 different ministries are the following: (1) Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, (2) Ministry of Environment, (3) Ministry of Economy and Finance, (4) Ministry of Health, (5) Ministry of Interior, (6) Ministry of Information, (7) Ministry of Planning, (8) Ministry of Rural Development, (9) Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, (10) Ministry of Women's Affairs, (11) Ministry of Industry and Handicraft and (12) Council for Agricultural and Rural Development.

<sup>33</sup> National Action Plan on Early Childhood Care and Development 2014-2018, endorsed by the National Committee of Early Childhood Care and Development, 13 August 2014, p.5, <http://www.moeys.gov.kh/index.php/en/policies-and-strategies/838.html>

hygiene, disease prevention, child protection, game creation, pre and post-natal care, access to health care services.

Other policies, non-specific to early childhood, have been developed by ministries. For instance, a Fast Track Road map for nutrition 2014-2020 and a Fast Track road map for reducing maternal and new-born mortality 2016-2020 have been developed by the Ministry of Health.

#### FOCUS: THE ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTOR IN CAMBODIA

**Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS)** and its Department of Early Childhood Education: in charge of the provision of ECE across the country. It prepares curriculums, educational programmes and policies.

**Ministry of Interior (Mol):** in charge of budget allocation under the framework of the Decentralization and Deconcentration law. At municipal level, the Mol allocates 30,000 USD per commune per year for their budget and encourages a minimum allocation of 10% for social services.

**Ministry of Women Affairs (MoWA):** supporting the implementation and the monitoring of social services for women and girls at local level.

**Ministry of Health (MoH):** in charge of the provision of healthcare services for women and children. Developing policies and programmes on health and nutrition for children under 6 years old.

**Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA):** in charge of social protection.

**National Committee on ECCD (NC-ECCD):** gathering all the relevant ministries to discuss about challenges and areas for improvement in the early childhood sub-sector.

**Commune Councils:** in charge of the management and the maintenance of early childhood services available in their jurisdictions.

**Commune Committees for Women and Children (CCWC):** promoting local governance and advising commune councils on key issues affecting women and children.

**NGOs (PE&D, Save the Children, World Vision, etc.):** implementing early childhood programmes and supporting the authorities in the fulfilment of their duties and the development of further policies.

**NGO Education Partnership (NEP):** coordinating dialogue and cooperation at national level among key stakeholders involved in the early childhood and education sectors.

**Private Institutions:** setting up early childhood centres.

**International organizations and other development partners (UNICEF, the World Bank, and UNESCO) and regional organizations (ARNEC):** setting up programmes, designing curriculums and policies in partnership with the government.



### 3. ECE programmes supported by the government

Governmental policies have been implemented through different programmes. International organizations, such as UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank, have supported the government in rebuilding the educational system. A grant of 20.6 million US dollars from the Global Education Partnership has, for instance, been allocated to Cambodia in 2018, with the aim of strengthening teacher training and the efficiency of the educational system.

The government has gradually built facilities and developed curriculums for preschools. “*State Preschools*” were the first educational services provided to young children across the country. However, due to budgetary and human capital constraints, the provision of state preschools was limited and concentrated around urban and peri-urban areas. State Preschool Teachers have to pass a two-year pre-service training. Hence, the government, with foreign technical assistance, has chosen to invest in cost-effective alternatives in order to reach a greater number of children.

The School Readiness Programme (SRP) was established in 2004 to provide a first schooling experience to children soon entering grade 1 (first year of primary school). The 8-week programme, covering 12 provinces by 2006, demonstrated good results: children enrolled in the programme showed more readiness skills and were less likely to drop out of school or repeat a grade than those who did not benefit from the programme<sup>34</sup>. The programme focused on building foundational skills, promoting the classroom environment and strengthening the learner’s confidence and engagement.

Another programme, supported by PE&D and later UNICEF, was related to the set-up of community-based preschools (CPS). The community-based preschools provide early childhood education at an affordable cost. Intended for children from 3 to 6 years old, teaching is usually conducted by a community member, for 98% female, who has received a shorter and less demanding training than state-preschool teachers holding a state diploma. Initially operating two hours a day, community preschools now run for three hours a day, preferably in the morning. Pedagogy is similar to the one promoted within state preschools but the school environment differs, as there is often no proper facility (teaching is conducted within the pagoda compound or at a villager’s home).

The government has adopted in 2017 the sub-decree No. 245/ANKr.BK on CPS Management<sup>35</sup>. Its aim is to define the management of CPS and develop minimum standards. The standards include distance considerations: the CPS must be located in an area where children cannot access to the state preschool. Safety and hygiene are also addressed: the facilities must be “*clean and safe, as well as have toilet and clean water, reasonably equipped washing facility and learning resources*” (Art.6). When the CPS meets the requirements specified in the sub-decree, and if they passed minimum of 33 score indicators as indicated in the CPS Minimum Standard Evaluation Tools, the

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<sup>34</sup> Nimala Rao and Veronica Pearson, *Early Childhood Care and Education in Cambodia*, International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy 3-1 (2009), p.24

<sup>35</sup> Sub-decree No. 245 on Community Preschool Management, 28 December 2017

MoEYS will grant the CPS the right to be “*standardized*” and therefore to benefit from nearly similar funding than state preschools. With the standardization, a CPS teacher can expect a salary of USD 160 per month, instead of USD 50 to 100 per month if the preschool is not standardized. A handbook has also been developed in 2019 in order to give further guidance on the set up of these types of preschools<sup>36</sup>.

### FOCUS: THE MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR CPS

Community Preschools (CPS) minimum standards aim to improve the quality, efficiency and sustainability of CPS management for children from 3 to under 6 years old to receive equitable and inclusive educational services. To be standardized, CPS need to go through an evaluation process conducted by a national evaluation team lead by the MoEYS with the involvement of other relevant ministries. The requirements are divided into 6 standard areas and 33 key indicators:

- **Standard 1:** Planning and monitoring of CPS
  - **6 indicators** including on CPS development plan, regular observation, meetings and technical support from local offices of EYS.
- **Standard 2:** Teacher, teaching and learning
  - **12 indicators** including on teaching plan and material, classroom preparation, 5 years old children primary school readiness assessment, training for teachers, parenting education for parents.
- **Standard 3:** General Management
  - **5 indicators** including on CPS management committee and monitoring of commune.
- **Standard 4:** Reporting and feedback
  - **4 indicators** including on children's attendance list and teachers' report.
- **Standard 5:** Inside and outside playground and class environment
  - **4 indicators** including on cleanliness and safety of playground, access to drinking water and WASH facilities.
- **Standard 6:** Material and furniture
  - **2 indicators** on quantity and suitability of furniture and teaching and learning material.

<sup>36</sup> CPS Management Handbook





Finally, a third programme, the home-based programme (HBP), initially developed by Save the Children Norway, has been endorsed by the Cambodian government to deliver early childhood education. The programme relies on the training of one “core mother” who, in turn, provides instructions to fellow mothers as to how to look after their young children and boost their learning potential. The training explains basic skills to mothers.

An extensive evaluation of early childhood care and education programmes, led by Professors Rao, Pearson and Constan in 2007, has shown that alternative programmes to state preschools were meeting the needs of young children. Children participating in an ECCD programme had better developmental results than those who were not benefiting from any. Although the study demonstrated that children enrolled in state preschools were outperforming the other children, it also showed that CPS and HBP were having equally good results<sup>37</sup>. The evaluation also raised concerns over each type of preschool programmes, highlighting inefficiencies and a lack of technical and financial support for the informal preschools<sup>38</sup>. The evaluation showed that various stakeholders (parents, community members, commune councils) still preferred the set-up of state preschools, which are more sustainable and easier to manage thanks to the support of the MoEYS.



1. *His Excellency Dr. Hang Chuong Naron, Minister of Education, Youth and Sport, handing over to Nathalie Dupont, Country Director of Planète Enfants & Développement in December 2019*
2. *His Excellency in visit in one of the CPS built by PE&D*

<sup>37</sup> Nirmala Rao, Emma Pearson, *An Evaluation of Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes in Cambodia*, 2007, p.4

<sup>38</sup> See table below.



## TYPOLGY OF THE DIFFERENT PRESCHOOL PROGRAMMES IN CAMBODIA

Type of preschool	State Preschools	Community-based Preschools (CPS)	Home-based Programmes
Definition	Preschool established, maintained and monitored by the government, more specifically by the MoEYS.	ECCD center/preschool established by the commune, hence at local level. Funding and monitoring are also ensured by the commune councils, or by international organizations.	Early childhood development programme established by the commune, hence at local level.
Duration	4 hours per day (from 7:00 to 11:00 a.m.), 5 days a week, for 38 weeks a year.	2 to 3 hours a day (from 7:00 to 9:00 or 10:00 a.m.), 5 days a week, for 24 to 36 weeks a year.	One hour per week, 24 weeks a year.
Establishment	Responsibility of the MoEYS.	Responsibility of the Commune Council.	Responsibility of the Commune Council.
Teacher status	Certified preschool teacher, recruited by the MOEYS.	Community member: volunteer recruited and paid through an allowance by the Commune Council, usually a woman.	Community member: “core” mothers who have been identified as having experience with children and selected by villagers.
Duration of the teacher training	2-year professional preparation course after Grade 12.	35 days of initial training and a refresher training for 3 to 6 days a year.	Core mothers attend monthly meetings.
Content of the teacher training	Future preschool teachers follow the curriculum developed by the government for preschools.	Community members are trained to use the curriculum adapted to CPS. They are also coached in training methodologies. Finally, they are trained to ECCD in its holistic aspect: health, nutrition, psychosocial, early child development, etc.	During the meetings, core mothers are given advices on all aspects of ECCD (nutrition, early stimulation and early learning, language development, hygiene, etc.), followed by practical exercises and can benefit from peer support.
Training provider	Public institution (Preschool Teacher Training College)	Department of Early Childhood Education/Provincial Department of Education and NGOs.	Department of Early Childhood Education/Provincial Department of Education and NGOs.
Teacher salary	Teachers are enrolled in the government payroll system and receive up to USD 300 per month.	Small stipend from the commune councils (around USD 50/month). If the school is standardized, the teacher receives USD 160 per month from the MoEYS.	Core mothers receive a stipend only while in training. The stipend is usually given by international organizations supporting the programme.
Facilities	State Preschool Facility.	Villager’s home or pagoda compound.	Core mother’s home.





## II. PE&D'S EARLY CHILDHOOD PROJECTS IN CAMBODIA

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This section is dedicated to describing the main interventions implemented by PE&D in the country and their chronology.

### *A. PE&D ECDD's projects by type of intervention*

Since its first intervention, Planète Enfants & Développement (PE&D) has acknowledged the potential of qualitative ECCD services. In order to have the greatest impact on children and communities' development, PE&D, in partnership with local association Krousar Youeng (KrY), has been trying to support particularly the development of a pre-primary education under all of its aspects, but has been also working on a more holistic approach when appropriate. Since the 1990s, the focus of PE&D on ECCD in Cambodia has been translated into the following activities:

#### *Preschool development*

The organization has expanded early childhood education to rural and low-income communities by promoting alternative and non-formal learning environments, such as community preschools.

As the government was unable to meet the needs of all children aged 3-6 due to technical and financial constraints, PE&D, with its local partner Krousar Yoeung, has opted for the set-up of community-based ECCD centers to complement state preschools. Around 150 CPS have been set up since. Creating preschools is the first step: projects have also focused on preparing and designing pedagogical materials for both the children and the teachers, teacher training and the provision of pedagogical materials.

With this, CPS have been recognized by the government and the training for teachers has also been officially certified in 2008 by the MoEYS, before the setting up



of their own curriculum for CPS teachers training. In 1996, pre-mathematic and pre-writing manuals for preschool have been created and certified, and these manuals were revised in February 2015.



*Newly built CPS (ECRC 2)*



*Opening ceremony at newly built CPS (ECRC 2)*







*Children using outside playground at newly built CPS (ECRC 2)*



*Inside classroom of newly built CPS (ECRC 2)*

## *Parenting Education*

As early as in 1999, specific projects have set up parenting education programmes. Sessions targeting parents have had a double ambition: creating a demand for preschool education, by raising awareness on the importance of education and stimulation at an early age, and educating parents to age-appropriate and positive care. Comprehensive parenting documents have been created by PE&D, KrY and other organizations like Plan International or Save the Children. They cover a range of topics from hygiene and nutrition to loving care. In 2018, the government has prepared their own hand book for parenting education.



*Parenting education session (ECRC 2)*

## *Child-led pedagogy*

In order to gather and disseminate documents, tools and materials useful for ECCD centers, preschools, parenting education sessions, PE&D and KrY have decided to create an Early Childhood Resource Center (ECRC) in 2010. The ECRC aims at being the first platform of exchange on ECCD-related topics in Cambodia. The center specifically compiles knowledge capitalizations and evaluations, resource documents, reports, regulatory documents, pedagogical tools and education teaching and learning materials, such as pedagogy manuals, newsletter for CPS teachers, toys and games. The ECRC was also set up to serve as a training center for CPS teachers, core parent educators, pre-school support committees and a forum for local and national ECCD actors networking.

## *Day-care development*

A first project has been set up in the 1990s with the objective of offering day-care services to female workers in public factories. The project was building facilities, providing care and stimulation materials for children and training for caregivers. Since that time, few facilities were opened by private companies, often with poor qualities. In





2015, a new pilot project has been launched to provide again these types of services to private companies in the Phnom Penh area and Kampong Speu province. At the same time, the project has also for objectives to create an official programme for caregiver trainings and to participate in the drafting of regulations in this sector, particularly a joint *Prakas* (law) on enterprise-based ECCD services and development of operation guidelines as stipulated in the National Action Plan 2019-2023 of the National Committee on ECCD (NC-ECCD) in Cambodia.

*Before PE&D's intervention:*



*A very poor qualitative day care center in a factory: lack of simulation, lack of hygiene...*

*After PE&D's intervention:*



*Fully renovated daycare center of TRAX apparel factory in (Phnom Penh, December 2019)*

## *Advocacy and policy-making*

PE&D has put a strong emphasis on raising awareness on the importance of ECCD for child development and for the country as a whole. The organization has notably assisted the government in the creation of curriculums, trainings and parenting programmes. It has encouraged debates among the civil society and other organizations involved in this sector, by creating a Network on Early Childhood Care and Development (N-ECCD) in 2011, which is gathering over 38 ECCD actors today and is still active, convening meetings at least four times a year. The network members elected five representative members (ECCD Executive Committee) to represent at ECCD-related policy platforms; PE&D is part of the ECCD Executive committee and also participates in the meetings with the different ministries, gathered as the NC-ECCD since 2013.

PE&D strives to play its role in the development of the ECCD sector and the related institutions in Cambodia. After participating in policy developments, the organization aims at enforcing and disseminating the agreed policies across the country through its programmes and projects.



*PE&D is supporting the structuring of Civil Society Organisations (ECRC 2)*



## B. PE&D ECDD's projects in key dates

### Key milestones of PE&D ECDD projects in Cambodia

<b>1989-1996</b> Support to the creation of curriculum and textbooks for State preschools	<b>2002</b> Registration of Krousar Youeng as an independant NGO	
<b>1984-1999</b> Enhancement of the national system of preschools	<b>2001-2005</b> Life Opportunities Programme <b>Kampong Speu &amp; Takeo</b>	
<b>1984</b> Creation of SOS Children of Cambodia	<b>1997-2004</b> Community-based Programme of parenting education and preschool in rural areas 100 CPS set up <b>Kampong Speu &amp; Takeo</b>	
	<b>1994-1997</b> 15 ECDD centers opened <b>Kampong Speu &amp; Takeo</b>	
	<b>1994</b> First experiment of non-formal ECDD centers <b>Kandal province</b>	<b>2006-2011</b> Empowerment of vulnerable families in rural areas <b>Kampong Speu</b>

**1992**  
Ratification by Cambodia of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989

**1993**  
Adoption of the Cambodian Constitution which guarantees the right to equal access to education

**1997**  
Royal Kram no. NS/RKM/0397/01 on the Labour Law provides that enterprises employing over 100 women "shall set up, within their establishments or nearby, a nursing room and a day-care center".

**2000**  
Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) publishes a document entitled "Policy on ECE" which sets out objectives and a range of programme options in the early childhood sector

**2003-2015**  
Subscription to the Education For All (EFA) goals and formulation of an EFA plan

**2004**  
Establishment of the School Readiness Programme (SRP)

**2006-2010**  
Education Strategic Plan

**2007**  
Royal Kram no. NS/RKM/1207 on Education designs the management of all educational programs at all levels and gives definition of early childhood

**2008**  
Royal Kram no. NS/RKM/0508/017 on Administrative Management of the Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts and Khans (Law on Deconcentration and Decentralization) clarifies roles and responsibilities in the set-up of CPS and EC programmes

Official certification of training for CPS teachers

### Development of the ECDD sector in Cambodia



**2013**

PE&D is part of the N-ECCD Executive Committee and participates to the NC-ECCD meetings

**2011-2015**

Early Childhood Resource Center (ECRC) project Phase 1  
33 tools developed  
Policy development, curriculums and textbooks for state and non-state preschools, parenting programme  
Creation of the Network on Early Childhood Care and Development (N-ECCD) gathering 38 actors

**Phnom Penh & Kampot**

**2016-2019**

ECRC project Phase 2  
12 CPS facilities built, 14 CPS improved  
Games catalogue and production

**Phnom Penh & Kampot**

**From 2020 onwards**

100 CPS 3-year project with local partner Bandos Komar  
PE&D Kidora daycare center  
Community Based Childcare Centers for garment factory workers 4-year project

**Kampot, Pursat, Kampong Speu, Sihanoukville & Phnom Penh**

**2019**

Cambodian childcare landscape study - a research on the existence and needs among employers and employees for daycare services solutions in 5 economic sectors in Cambodia

**2017-2020**

Enterprise-based social services (EBSS) project  
Draft of general framework for enterprise-based daycare center  
SRH services for 10,000 women  
80 children of garment workers access to a quality day care center

**Kampong Speu, Kandal & Phnom Penh**

**2010**

First National Policy on ECCD gives the lead to the MoEYS for the design and monitoring of all educational programmes and curriculums across all levels

**2013**

Royal Decree 0412/317 creates the National Committee for Early Childhood Care and Development (NC-ECCD) which gathers the MoEYS and 12 other ministries involved in ECCD

**2014**

Government may provide 35-day training for CPS teacher at district level

**2014-2018**

National Action Plan expands all forms of ECE services for children aged 3 to 6

**2014-2020**

Fast-Track road map for nutrition

**2015**

Revision of certified pre-mathematics and pre-writing for preschools

**2016-2020**

Fast-Track road map for reducing maternal and newborn mortality

**2017**

MoEYS drafts 5 parenting education handbooks

**2017**

Sub-decree no. 245/ANKR.BK on CPS Management defines management of CPS and develop minimum standards

**2018-2019**

MoEYS develops its own handbook for parenting education

**2019-2023**

NAP with 3 priority issues: home-based care, CPS and integration of ECCD across all ministries





### III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICIES AND THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE “COMMUNITY PRESCHOOL” MODEL

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When implementing projects on early childhood care and development, PE&D has followed a rigorous but adaptable methodology. The organization has relied on communities’ strength and knowledge and has given them a voice. Communities and their representatives have been seen as long-term partners and have supported the organization in all steps of a project, from the assessment of the needs to the conduct of activities. PE&D has also placed quality and innovation at the heart of its projects, eager to find solutions which would be easy to set up and scale up, while creating tools which would benefit the most to children’s development.

The following section will detail the different aspects and steps, of the approach which has been adopted by PE&D within its projects throughout the years. It will particularly emphasize on the changes that occurred between the first years of the implementation of the approach, which were highlighted in a previous document<sup>39</sup>, and the most recent developments. In the past 15 years, the approach has been adapted to the needs of the communities and the orientations of the government.

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<sup>39</sup> RODIER Chantal and THORNE Claire, *15 years later: the story of an integrated programme of early childhood support in the villages of Cambodia*, July 2009

## A. Communities, networks and authorities as partners and actors of change

### 1. Collaboration with a local organization

In order to develop a technical expertise and to be as close to the beneficiaries as possible, PE&D has opted to create a local organization.

After the success of the first projects in ECCD in the 1990s, notably with the set-up of community preschools (CPS) and the development of related curriculums, members of PE&D have joined to create an organization which would be entirely dedicated to early childhood, the first at the time in Cambodia. Krousar Yoeung (KrY) is officially registered as a non-profit organization since 13 August 2002. Since that time, KrY has been working hand-in-hand with PE&D on early childhood projects: from 1997 to 2004, on the parenting education project, from 2006 to 2011 on the project of CPS in peri-urban areas and since 2011, on the early childhood resource centre project (ECRC). This collaboration ensures a greater knowledge of local communities and safeguards the sustainability of the activities. KrY has developed a specific expertise in the set-up of CPS, the creation of pedagogical materials (toys, games), the design of curriculums, the training of caregivers and preschool teachers and the conduct of parenting education. KrY is particularly specialized in non-formal education, at home or at community centers.

Krousar Yoeung was, during the first projects in the 1990s, an implementing local partner. It partnered with PE&D on multiple projects and has set up around 100 preschools from 1997 to 2004. By gradually gaining technical expertise in the sector and legitimacy among development actors, it has also started to partner with other organizations, such as UNICEF and Plan International. However, evaluations have shown in 2010 that the organization could still gain in governance and an efficient management structure. Since the start of the early childhood resource center project (ECRC) in 2011, the focus of PE&D is therefore to enhance its leadership competencies. The approach has evolved from supporting a local organization for the implementation of projects to giving it the lead and full financial and management autonomy. PE&D was supporting KrY to formalize its practices and decisions and to expand its reach of action. At the end of the first phase of the ECRC project in 2015, KrY has, for instance, gained competencies in recruitment processes and task allocation, monitoring tools and financial track-keeping tools<sup>40</sup>. The second phase of the ECRC project had for objective to respond to the remaining organizational challenges, such as the long-term sustainability of the ECRC, now set up as a social business, the capacities to document and report, and the creation of a long-term strategy for the organization<sup>41</sup>. The results at the date of this capitalization show that KrY has today a strong strategy and full capacities to raise

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<sup>40</sup> HENARD Fabrice and CHEA Vannet, *Evaluation of EU/AFD/E&D funded project in early childhood education and development in Cambodia*, June 2014, p.39

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p.40



funds from donors. They are developing strong projects in Siem Reap, Ratanakiri and Preah Vihear provinces by themselves. However, the marketing action of the ECRC has still to be improved for making it totally sustainable on a long run, in a context of new services offered by the government and other organizations, for teacher's trainings and for pedagogy games production, respectively.

## 2. Engagement of communities and building of their capacities

Early childhood projects, including the set-up of preschools and/or the conduct of parenting education, have been implemented following a thorough analysis of the context. Since the 1990s, communities have been consulted, through individual interviews and focus groups, on the best way to bring and provide ECCD services in their village.

The social and cultural specificities of the local population have also been taken into consideration: in 1999, Chantal Rodier, a staff member of PE&D at the time, has conducted a comprehensive study on the perceptions of parents and communities on young children and the way these perceptions influenced their behaviors. The report, entitled *"Practices, Beliefs and Values regarding the education of infants and young children in Cambodia"*, has laid the foundations and framed early childhood programmes of PE&D. The study demonstrated the importance for parents to have children, as they were considered as "the epitome of wealth, a symbol of vitality, happiness, and prosperity"<sup>42</sup>, and therefore to take great care of them. Children were expected to look after their parents when they are getting older<sup>43</sup>. The study showed that girls were prepared to accomplish domestic chores and raise a family at a very early age<sup>44</sup>. It also revealed the predominant role of the mother during the first years of life of a young child, punctuated by very little time of outside care, from the grandmother or the eldest daughter<sup>45</sup>. All these socio-cultural traditions were essential when considering the participation and attendance of children, both girls and boys, to preschool, and the perception of parents to external support in terms of education of children at an early age. The concept of CPS also seemed more appropriate, closer to the population, and, in turn, more likely to gain their trust and acceptance, than an external ECCD provider.

Understanding local communities is still today a priority for PE&D, even though it published less sociological and socio-economic studies in the recent years. In 2016, a study conducted in the Kampong Speu Province by PE&D and the World Bank has confirmed some societal changes. Although Chantal Rodier was insisting on the importance for mothers to look after their children, this other study, over a decade later, has shown the increasing demand from mothers for childcare services

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<sup>42</sup> RODIER Chantal, *Practices, Beliefs and Values regarding the education of infants and young children in Cambodia*, December 1999, p.10

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.10

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p.11

<sup>45</sup> RODIER Chantal, *Practices, Beliefs and Values regarding the education of infants and young children in Cambodia*, December 1999, p.14



due to their entrance on the job market. Caution still exists towards preschools and childcare services, but it is more and more accepted and even requested.

The consultations and the studies which are conducted in preparation and throughout the projects have also for objective to gain knowledge on human and material resources available within each community and, in turn, to adapt the activities accordingly. PE&D's ambition is to create early childhood services which are available and accessible to all members of the community and which can easily be managed by them. For this very reason, CPS seemed the appropriate solution as they were taking into account the few financial opportunities in rural areas and the general lack of qualifications of the population.



*Meeting to present the project to the inhabitants of the commune and future beneficiaries*

PE&D does not only consult the populations and consider their needs and potential: it also aims at engaging them during all the steps of the projects. The long-term goal is that local communities feel responsible for the creation and the maintenance of CPS in their village. This way, the preschool becomes sustainable and the services provided have long-term impacts on children and their families. Involving parents and families is also an effective way to protect children and ensure they evolve in a safe and loving environment.

Since the first projects in the 1990s, PE&D and its local partner KrY have provided a technical and financial support to communities. This support takes different forms: trainings, raising awareness sessions, cooperation in the sharing of resources and in planning, implementing and monitoring, etc. Community members are asked to identify their needs, their resources (material, cultural, financial, etc.) and to assign people and leaders to complete the different activities. This support does not replace existing resources but reinforce them. They are informed of their rights and duties towards their neighbors, their family and their children. Community engagement revolves around four main activities described below:



## *Community Preschool support committee*

In the first projects, a preschool support committee was created in each targeted village at the very start of the implementation phase. The role of this committee was to assist in the conception and the maintenance of the preschool and mobilize resources for it. More specifically, their main duties were to plan and supervise the set-up of the preschool, the construction of its facilities if enough funds, advice on the necessary equipment, select a CPS teacher among the community members and receive donations and grants for the preschool. The committee was working on a voluntary basis and received a training from PE&D and KrY on how to run a preschool and an income-generating activity, which will be described later in this document<sup>46</sup>. In the first projects, the training was composed of four modules of five days each. From 2006 to 2011, the committees gathered around 4-5 people who were appointed by the community. Since 2011, the committees gather an average of 5 to 10 people, who have an interest in ECCD. Members of the committees differ from villages, but the chief of the village, the principal of the primary school, commune council members and monks are often represented.



*Commune Committee meeting*

The modalities of the committees' functioning are still the same in the most current projects; however, their duties have gradually been reduced as more responsibilities were given to the commune councils in the supervision of the preschools since the adoption of the Decentralization and Deconcentration law in 2008. For instance, they do not have to mobilize as much resources for the preschools anymore as limited funding is provided by the commune councils.

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<sup>46</sup> See part III. b) 3., p.35

## Preschool infrastructure and maintenance

The committee acts as an adviser for the set-up and the maintenance of the preschool. With the profits generated from an income-generating activity, preschool facilities could be built. From the 1990s to 2014, facilities were not always built. Preschools could be run in a villager's home or at the pagoda. The location was decided by the committee. When facilities were being built, parents and community members were requested to help in the construction. If there were additional funds, wells, latrines, a playground and a kitchen could be built as well.

This method had advantages and drawbacks. By making the building of a facility an additional feature of the projects, preschools were easy to set up and did not require important resources. However, based on the evaluations on the projects, the teaching locations were not always deemed as safe both by communities and auditors. Sanitation and hygiene equipment were also lacking<sup>47</sup>.



*Newly built CPS (ECRC 2)*

After the adoption of the sub-decree n. 245 in 2017 and the gradual move of the government towards the standardization of CPS, the latest project on early childhood has decided to build facilities for the preschools it was already supporting, equipped with latrines and hand-washing stations, as this is required for the schools to be standardized. Twelve facilities have been built in 2019. This time, the participation of the community to the preschool construction is not required, but it is conducted by an external service provider. The community remain engaged for local resource mobilization such as identification of land plot for CPS construction,

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<sup>47</sup> Nirmala Rao, Emma Pearson, *An Evaluation of Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes in Cambodia*, 2007, p.64-65 ; HENARD Fabrice and others, UNICEF, *Evaluation of community preschool modality in Cambodia April-December 2015*, May 2016, p.34



and land preparation to be ready for the construction work. Furthermore, join monitoring the construction quality.

### *Preschool teacher identification*

Since the first projects, the committee identifies the future preschool teacher. The teacher is often selected among the parents living in the village and is often a woman. The teacher is then supported in her/his work by a training. Up to 2014, this training was provided by PE&D and KrY, (it will be further described in the document<sup>48</sup>), but since 2014, it may be provided by the government at the district level, with a 35-day curriculum. This new involvement of the government in the CPS teachers training clearly shows their recognition of the model. However, the training is not for free and the affordability may be a challenge. The role of the preschool support committee in this matter has therefore been reduced, as commune councils today possess a greater role and take the final decision when it comes to appointing and sending the teacher for training.



*Teacher in new CPS*

### *Parenting education*



*Child during parenting education session*

A parenting education programme is an essential component of the projects and supports community engagement. PE&D's vision is that parents are the primary caretakers and tutors of children. It is within the family environment that children make their first learning experience and acquire basic social rules. Children become members of their community thanks to their interaction with their family. The organization has therefore informed and trained parents on their role and responsibilities to meet the needs of their children: care and education start in the household, and not at the preschool. Parenting education sessions also aim at increasing parents' self-confidence, developing their ability to detect abnormalities that may occur in the development of their children and intervening as early as possible and encouraging their collaboration between each other when they need support. Finally, the sessions ensure the participation of the children in pre-primary education, by raising awareness among parents on the importance of

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<sup>48</sup> See part III. b) 2., p. 32



education even at an early age. Facilitation methods encourage dialogue between families and respect the specific contexts and circumstances.



*A parenting education session (ECRC 2)*

The format of the sessions has not changed up to 2018. The sessions are held in the village by parent facilitators. The number of parents is limited to around 15 parents to encourage participation. Sessions are also conducted at convenient times for most of the parents. The parent facilitators follow a parenting programme covering a range of topics, which will be described later in the report<sup>49</sup>, and are here to respond to concerns expressed by parents. In the first projects, until 2004, parent facilitators were receiving 10,000 Riels (2.5\$) per month from KrY. With this compensation, they were conducting 3 sessions every two months. PED&D and its implementing partner organization developed a curriculum for training parenting educators. Since 2011, parent facilitators do not receive financial compensations anymore and are selected on a voluntary basis. They run sessions every month.

Parenting sessions have had great success since the implementation of the first projects. They have increased the enrolment in CPS, even among 3-year-old children. Based on an evaluation conducted in 2004, facilitators and authorities have noticed a general progress in hygiene conditions of children, a decrease in violent behaviors towards children and a greater interest of parents for the development and the education of their children. Some facilitators have also reported greater support between families<sup>50</sup>. Parents acting as facilitators are those who benefited the most from the programme, as they have completed a training and have shared those messages within their communities. As the participation during these sessions has been high, it has shown a real community engagement for ECCD. Parents felt more self-confident in the education of their children<sup>51</sup>. The evaluation of 2004 has also raised challenges regarding the efficiency of the programme as the quality of the programme is heavily dependent on the

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<sup>49</sup> See part III. b) 2., p. 32

<sup>50</sup> RODIER Chantal, *Education parentale*, Rapport d'évaluation des activités, May 2004, p.8

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p.19



facilitation skills of the parent facilitator. Some are still not looking at interacting with the families, but rather transmit/repeat the information learned during the training. Exchanges can still be difficult, as parents fear being judged when sharing their experiences and concerns. Mothers are also more likely to participate in the sessions than fathers. The evaluation advised to proceed to the selection of parent facilitators with caution and to introduce selection criteria such as good communication, observation and critical thinking skills, good literacy, and extensive availability to conduct the sessions<sup>52</sup>. Further training was also considered to ensure facilitators have a good understanding of the main information and objectives of the programme. The following projects, in 2006 and 2011, have therefore focused on better monitoring the conduct of the sessions. Due to a lack of facilitation skills of parent facilitators, PE&D has considered changing its approach and request preschool teachers to conduct the sessions rather than selected parents for future projects.



*Parenting education session (ECRC 2)*

### *Village forums*

This activity has been implemented more recently. It is ongoing since 2016. Forums aim at raising awareness among the community and local stakeholders on the importance of early childhood. The forums have for main objectives to reassert the roles and responsibilities of the authorities, promote community participation in the development of their CPS and also explain to parents and families how to stimulate their children, make them learn and play. During village



*Village forum*

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p.16

forums, project staff explain to families how to easily produce toys and games using existing materials. Village forums are also an opportunity to request donations from communities to maintain the preschools and other resource mobilization such as land space donation for CPS construction.



Village forum

### 3. From non-formal to institutional: Empowering local authorities

The set-up of CPS and parenting programmes have been an informal answer to a lack of educational and care services for parents and their children across the country and the financial and technical incapacity of national authorities to implement them.

Village chiefs and commune councils have been involved in the implementation of the projects since the very start. They have been consulted during the selection of the villages the most in need of preschool services. They have become members of the preschool support committee. However, project evaluations and feasibility studies, such as the one conducted in 2004, have been highlighting the lack of engagement of the authorities in the maintenance and the monitoring of the preschools, therefore threatening their sustainability<sup>53</sup>. Another report has expressed the need for District and Provincial Offices to provide additional trainings to the teachers and regularly monitor their teaching and the standards of the schools<sup>54</sup>. As a result, over the years, the focus has gradually changed to increase a sense of ownership among commune councils and other authorities (district and provincial offices) for the management of the CPS. From

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<sup>53</sup> THORNE Claire, *Expansion of Community-based ECCD centers as a national strategy for ECE: a feasibility study*, November 2005, p.27

<sup>54</sup> HENARD Fabrice, UNICEF, *Evaluation of community preschool modality in Cambodia April-December 2015*, May 2016, p.62



2006 to 2011, advocacy work has been conducted towards local authorities, but still resulted in poor supervision and monitoring.

A real shift has occurred with the adoption in 2008 of the Royal Kram no. NS/RKM/0508/017 on the Administrative Management of the Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts and Khans, commonly known as the Law on Deconcentration and Decentralization.

The law has transferred an important range of competencies to local authorities. As mentioned in the first section of this report, commune councils have been tasked to maintain “*basic and necessary services, facilities, materials and public infrastructure*” and meet the needs of “*women, youth, children and vulnerable groups*” (Art.42). These new responsibilities have meant great changes for the projects: CPS shall, from now on, be maintained by commune councils; salaries of the preschool teachers shall also be disbursed by commune councils.

#### FOCUS: THE DECONCENTRATION & DECENTRALISATION (D&D) LAW (2008)

The Royal Kram no. NS/RKM/0508/017 on Administrative Management of the Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts and Khans’ main focus has been to assist local authorities in their new role and responsibilities in the set-up of early childhood programmes and making the preschools financially sustainable:

**Article 42** transfers new responsibilities to the Commune Councils and exhorts them to focus on the “*most important development needs*” such as “*basic and necessary services, facilities, materials and public infrastructures*” and “*other needs of women, youth, children and vulnerable groups including poor people and indigenous people*”. In practice, their new responsibilities include, among others, the building and maintenance of the community preschool (CPS) facilities and the disbursement of a higher salary to the teachers, which both encourage the sustainability of the preschools, by guaranteeing the safety of the facilities and the regularity of the disbursement of the teacher salaries.

**Article 44** allocates budget to each level of the administration, more specifically to the capital, the provincial, municipal and district councils. The MoI is in charge of budget allocation. At municipal level, it allocates 30,000 USD per commune per year for their budget and encourages a minimum allocation of 10% for social services.

When a new project started in 2011, it therefore looked at informing local authorities on their roles and responsibilities and how to perform them. Local authorities have received trainings on the new legal framework and have been encouraged to draft action plans. Since 2016, the projects, notably through the



preschool support committee, have encouraged commune councils to disburse the salaries of the preschool teachers.

This is why the most recent project, the second phase of the ECRC, from 2016 to 2019, has strongly change its approach and focus on increasing the capacities of the commune to play their responsibilities in the set-up of ECCD services. The project has provided coaching and monitoring support to commune councils in order to increase governance, managerial efficiency and transparency. They have been engaged to set up 14 CPS and 6 parenting education services and were put in their responsibilities at every stage: recruitment of the teacher and request for the district to provide training and coaching, increase by their own efforts the equipment and pedagogy material of the schools, monitor the CPS building.

In parallel, another legal development has increased commune councils' responsibilities in the early childhood sector. With the adoption in 2017 of the sub-decree no. 245/ANKr.BK on CPS Management, the national government has for objective to institutionalize CPS and gradually integrate them to the formal education system. To this end, a standardization process has been established and the government intends to evaluate the entire number of preschools. The specificities of the standardization process have been detailed in the first part of this document<sup>55</sup>. Non-formal education is therefore gradually recognized by the authorities. Commune councils have been tasked to follow the entire standardization process, notably request for an evaluation, monitor preschools and if the standardization is approved, receive allowances from the MoEYS and disburse salaries to the teachers.



*Children in new CPS*

The most recent projects, which have included greater support for local authorities, have encountered a great success.

However, challenges regarding their management still remain. Evaluations have shown that very few commune councils exactly know their role. The provision of social services is still not a priority topic on the councils' agenda. Good practices are not systematically shared between the different commune councils. They also still lack managerial and budget management skills. In 2015, an evaluation has expressed concerns over the lack of participation of Provincial and District Education Offices. Decentralized governmental authorities shall be more involved in the assessment of the children's enrolment and access to the preschools and the quality of teaching provided<sup>56</sup>. Monitoring activities are still overlooked by the authorities.

<sup>55</sup> See part I, c) 3, p. 17

<sup>56</sup> HENARD Fabrice, UNICEF, *Evaluation of community preschool modality in Cambodia April-December 2015*, May 2016, p.62





#### 4. Politically committed: acting for long-term policy change

In addition to supporting local communities, authorities and the civil society, Planète Enfants et Développement considers the national government as a partner in every step of the implementation of projects. Memorandum of Understanding have been signed with all the ministries relevant to the ECCD sector, such as the MoEYS and the Mol.

The first projects in the 1990s were implemented in order to respond to the need of the government to expand access to pre-primary education through other channels than state preschools. PE&D has acted in favour of the different policies enacted at the time (such as the Education Strategic Plan 2006-2010 and the National Policy on Early Childhood in 2010) with the objective to increase enrolment rates. PE&D has also supported the government in establishing the first curriculums and programmes regarding preschool education. The set-up of an early childhood resource centre in 2010 has also responded to a governmental willingness to gather all educational and policy resources in one location and assist with their dissemination<sup>57</sup>.

The very first projects, in the 1990s, were targeting grassroots actors to implement ECCD services. When the CPS model started to be successful and well implemented in the 2000s, a multiplicity of civil society actors has followed suit. The government has also started to be interested in the initiative. In order to better structure the ECCD sector, harmonize the interventions across the country and provide qualitative services, PE&D's approach is now to conduct advocacy work and prompt exchanges between all the different actors.

To this end, the organization has, for instance, created a civil society Network on Early Childhood Care and Development (N-ECCD) in 2011. This network was created as a forum, to exchange, share experiences, innovate and further develop the ECCD sector. In 2011, the network was still at its premises and not necessarily well known. Evaluation in 2016 has demonstrated the gradual importance of the network<sup>58</sup>. The most recent project, from 2016 to 2019, has set for objectives to build the long-term strategy of the network and to improve coordination with the government. Members have also been invited to conduct field visits and attend provincial events to learn about initiatives in early childhood. The N-ECCD leadership has been transferred to the NGO Education Partnership (NEP) in 2017 to ensure its sustainability and to be officially recognized by the government. The network counted, in 2019, 35 members and is convening meetings every quarter. Its presence in governmental meetings and congresses has also considerably increased. Representatives of the network (such as PE&D) regularly attend NC-ECCD meetings and the MoEYS's technical workshops on early childhood and

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<sup>57</sup> HENARD Fabrice and CHEA Vannet, *Evaluation of EU/AFD/E&D funded project in early childhood education and development in Cambodia*, June 2014, p.23

<sup>58</sup> CERRUTTI Manuel, *External Evaluation of the project "Reinforcement of the public actors' capacities engaged in the promotion of non-formal preschool education in disadvantaged outer city communities of Burkina Faso and Cambodia, 2011 - 2015*, March 2016, p.26-27

annual seminars. Advocacy work conducted during these meetings aim at encouraging the government and the civil society to enforce national plans and ECCD-related legislation and reflect on services which could be sustained. PE&D has also supported civil society organizations to obtain the GPP certification (NGO Governance and Professional Practice), which guarantees their recognition from the government, their good governance and the quality of their practices. During the project from 2016 to 2019, four organizations have been certified, including Bandos Komar, PE&D's new implementing partner.

The network has still to develop a real medium- and long-term strategy and to build strong advocacy work.

Lastly, PE&D took also some opportunities of supporting the official curriculum's improvement in collaborating with other partners. For example from 2018 to 2019 PE&D participated actively in the "Early Grade Reading" research program managed by the RTI agency as part of a bilateral program with MoEYS funded by USAID. The objective was to improve the learning of the basics of reading and writing and to promote the transition to primary school. The program revised and created a new visual approach around 30 letters and created 38 supporting history books. This material was then tested in the provinces of Battambang and Kampong Thom. PE&D made an expert in kindergarten pedagogy available to this working group, where she was particularly noted.



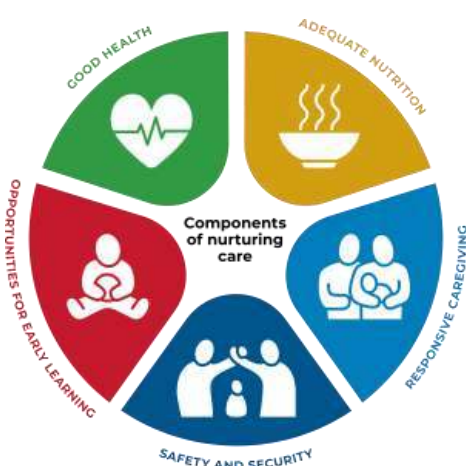
*Child running to a renovated CPS*



## *B. Focus on quality and innovation: inside the preschool center, the parenting education sessions and the teacher trainings*

### 1. Holistic: a comprehensive understanding of Early Childhood

Since the first projects in the 1990s, the organization conceived projects that take into account the well-being of children and their overall development. As a result, the organization has focused on the following needs of children:



*Nurturing care for early childhood development*

In order to implement integrated projects, PE&D has involved parents, families and communities when addressing these different needs. In practice, this holistic approach was experimented during three specific activities: during classes at the community preschools, during parenting education and during teacher trainings. At the preschool, special attention was paid to sanitation and hygiene, with children learning how to wash their hands for instance.

During the first projects, not all preschools had hygiene and sanitation facilities. The availability of these equipment depended on the location of the preschool classes and the amount of funds raised for the construction or the set-up of the preschools. From 2016, PE&D opted for the construction of preschool facilities. All newly-built facilities have latrines and hand-washing stations. This decision was based on previous evaluations which have shown that hygiene and sanitation equipment and training were highly effective for children and parents were reporting better practices in terms of hygiene<sup>59</sup>. During the first projects, a meal was also prepared for the children by the educators on a daily basis (a rice soup with added vegetables and meat when possible). For practicality (the parents' availability to pick up their children from school at midday) and financial reasons, the meals

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<sup>59</sup> RODIER Chantal, *Education parentale*, Rapport d'évaluation des activités, May 2004, p.8; BRUN Jean-Marie and NEE Meas, *Final evaluation of "Empowerment of vulnerable families in rural areas" project/Enfants et Développement*, February 2011, p. 28



*New WASH facilities in CPS*

ceased to be provided in 2004. Nutrition advices were given to parents during parenting sessions instead. In terms of health, the first projects, and until 2011 or 2012, ensured the provision of an annual medical examination conducted by the District Health center. This particular activity of the previous projects was no longer organized in the following programs for sustainability reasons.

During parenting sessions, from the first projects until today, facilitators have raised awareness among parents on the multiple aspects of children's development (cognitive, physical, emotional, and social) and given guidance on the activities to conduct to stimulate and care for their children. The parenting programme had eight main themes: *"hygiene", "nutrition", "a secure environment", "well-being", "love and affection", "behavior management", "being a parent" and "being a parent of an adolescent"*<sup>60</sup>. The parenting programme has been adapted over the years, notably because other organizations and the government have also set up their own. The most recent parenting programme has therefore been established by a consortium of NGOs (Plan International, Save the Children, World Vision and PE&D), based on the guidelines of the government. The programme is composed of multiple images showing practical situations, simple affirmations and questions to make the programme interactive. It has been used during the projects from 2011 to 2019. In 2017, the MoEYS has drafted 5 parenting education handbooks, covering health, behaviors, stimulation, protection, nutrition, communication and language development, disabilities and school readiness.

Finally, during teacher trainings, attention is paid on the different aspects of the development of children and how teachers can teach children good hygiene, nutrition during school breaks (regarding unhealthy snacks for instance) and respectful behaviors.

<sup>60</sup> RODIER Chantal, *Education parentale*, Rapport d'évaluation des activités, May 2004, p.4



## 2. Content-focused: driving change through innovative pedagogy



Games

PE&D has been focusing on the quality of the programmes carried out. This was translated in the creation of a wide range of pedagogical materials, the support in the creation of curriculums for children, teacher trainings and parenting education and the face-to-face coaching of the teachers.

First, while setting up early childhood centers and preschools, PE&D has insisted on improving the quality of the pedagogy. It was not only a question of access and availability of the preschools, but also of success of children and their academic progress to ensure their readiness to primary school. From 1989 to 1996, PE&D has supported the creation of curriculums and textbooks for state preschools. Later on, PE&D and its partner KrY have supported the creation of curriculums for CPS.

With its partners, KrY and Chemin d'Enfance<sup>61</sup>, PE&D had notably created a set of pedagogical materials such as books, toys and games, which had for objective to increase knowledge of care of young children, stimulation techniques (through active pedagogy) and the different aspects of their needs.



Games

These materials also aimed at expanding free-play and other child-centered methodologies. These methodologies insist on the environment of the child and on self-discovery. The child is encouraged to touch, hear, explore and interact with

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<sup>61</sup> Chemin d'Enfance is a French NGO committed to develop free play pedagogy - <http://www.cheminsdenfances.org/>



his/her environment and peers. The organization has notably been inspired by the Montessori methodology.



*Children playing with games*

From the 1990s, PE&D and KrY have created textbooks on pre-writing, pre-reading and pre-maths and more innovative books on philosophy, yoga and alternative ways of teaching (songs, role plays and work-in-group sessions for instance). In a report in 2005, it was already reported that the implementation of child-friendly methodologies gave successful results in the preschools managed by PE&D. According to the evaluation, children were “more active; they are encouraged to speak and think, and handle objects”. They also “*show(ed) more pleasure in activities*”<sup>62</sup>. After its independence in 2002, KrY has taken over the activities of materials’ creation. The local organization has since created three methodological textbooks, 15 storybooks, 4 DVDs and 55 toys and games. The thematic covered by these materials are the following: pre-writing, pre-reading, pre-mathematics psychomotor education, songs, the Environment pedagogy, hygiene and nutrition, discipline and the management of small groups. These materials are, today, disseminated to other organizations and schools via the Early Childhood Resource Centre (ECRC). In the project of the creation of the ECRC, the objective was also to compile documents (books, journals, worksheets, curriculums, DVDs) developed by other organizations in order to obtain as many contents as possible on early childhood and guarantee the development of qualitative services in Cambodia. An evaluation has shown the innovative aspect of creating an ECRC and the success of the materials created by KrY (notably through the building of a partnership with Plan International to create additional materials for ethnic minorities), but has also insisted on the necessity of building a management structure for the center. The director, the librarian and the project manager needed to have more specific duties

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<sup>62</sup> RODIER Chantal and THORNE Claire, *15 years later: the story of an integrated programme of early childhood support in the villages of Cambodia*, July 2009, p.35



and monitoring tools for management and progress of the center<sup>63</sup>. A second phase of the project, which started in 2016 and is ended in 2019, had therefore for objective to strengthen the management capacities of the center (in terms of human resources, finances, marketing and communications) and to change it into a social business able to recover its own costs. Therefore, it was necessary to have a policy of price for each product and to set up a business and a marketing plan. At the end of 2019, the resource center was quite autonomous, even if fragile.

Outside the classroom, quality has also been an important aspect of the parenting sessions. Not only the sessions have aimed at providing a holistic view of the child's development, but also have insisted on stimulation techniques (games, active questions) and positive parenting. Also, in the way that lessons were taught, parents were encouraged to participate and interact with the trainers. Key messages were shared through multiple supports (games, group works, radio and TV shows). In the first projects, a TV show called "Krousar!" was produced in 2002 and its 23 episodes were aired on two television channels in Cambodia. A radio programme of 27 episodes, inspired by the TV show, was also created and aired on Radio Bayonne in Cambodia. Today, parenting sessions rely mostly on programmes and tools which have been developed by the government with the support of international organizations. PE&D, with other NGOs, has participated in making these new programmes as interactive as possible, by producing additional supports such as images, posters, surveys and small games. The main objectives are to make families better know each other and learn how to listen and talk to each other in a pleasant atmosphere. The long-term objective is to facilitate information retention and strengthen parent-children relationships. An evaluation in 2004 has explained that games were the privileged medium to use to fulfil these objectives<sup>64</sup>. In order to ensure the implementation of these methodologies during the sessions, the role of the facilitator has been deemed as essential. In a feasibility study conducted in 2005, there was still need to better train facilitators in content and methodology. Technical visits and peer meetings were advised<sup>65</sup>. In the future projects, another approach has been considered: instead of parents, trained teachers could become facilitators during parenting sessions. Indeed, teachers possess experience in teaching and learning.

Finally, quality has been a great focus of the CPS teacher trainings. In the 1990s, a comprehensive training has been developed by KrY: it was composed of two



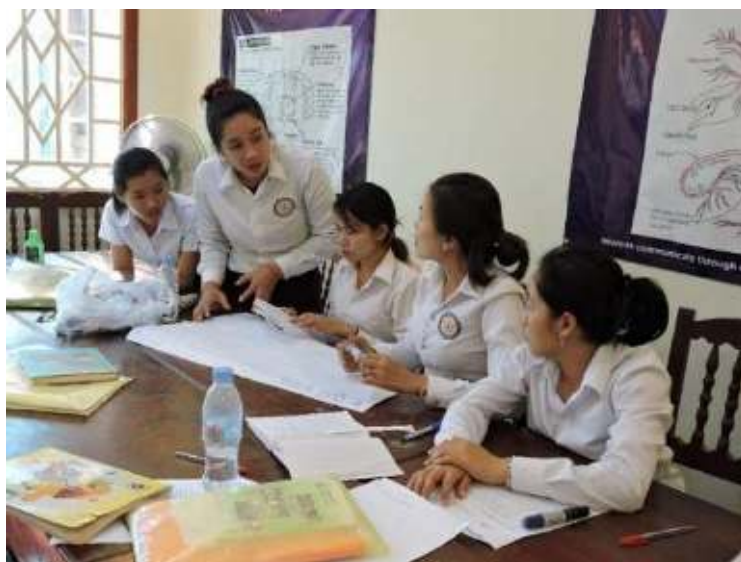
*Child reading in CPS classroom*

<sup>63</sup> HENARD Fabrice and CHEA Vannet, *Evaluation of EU/AFD/E&D funded project in early childhood education and development in Cambodia*, June 2014, p.40

<sup>64</sup> RODIER Chantal, *Education parentale*, Rapport d'évaluation des activités, May 2004, p.5

<sup>65</sup> THORNE Claire, *Expansion of Community-based ECCD centers as a national strategy for ECE: a feasibility study*, November 2005, p. 18

training modules and a refresher module. The first and second modules lasted 5 and 4 weeks respectively and were accompanied by a practical training in the KrY preschools.



*CPS teachers training*

Lessons were taught on the different needs of children, stimulation techniques and creation of educational activities. The refresher module lasted 3 weeks and focused on the analysis and the evaluation of the work of the educators. The trainings were slowly formalized by the government and, from 2004, were organized also by staff members of the MoEYS. However, because the trainings lasted only 13 days, KrY continued to provide additional training<sup>66</sup>. In 2008, this training was officially recognized by the Cambodian government; and this certificate is still today the only one recognized in the provision of non-formal early childhood services. The training is today composed of three modules (including one refresher module) of 22 days each, and conducted every 6 months. A participative approach is used during the trainings, with discussion sessions and practical exercises. A feasibility study in 2005 praised the advantages of teacher trainings but insisted on some remaining challenges, such as the low level of education of teachers, their difficulty to learn and teach, their isolation and the lack of adequate monitoring of the teachers<sup>67</sup>. An evaluation in 2011 has confirmed these challenges and has shown that teaching



*CPS teachers training*

<sup>66</sup> The training has, in 2019, been extended to 35 days

<sup>67</sup> THORNE Claire, *Expansion of Community-based ECCD centers as a national strategy for ECE: a feasibility study*, November 2005, p.25



quality within a preschool was highly dependent on the competencies of the teacher. Thus, it has advised to create a community of teachers. This evaluation has also insisted on an important teacher turnover which can impede their motivation and children's success<sup>68</sup>.

Therefore, the next project has attempted to respond to these challenges by creating a network of teachers by organizing meetings every semester and producing a quarterly information letter to be shared with all the teachers to prompt innovation and disseminate more pedagogical supports. Unhappily, it did not continue after the period, due to lack of funds.



*Training*

### 3. Cost-effective: considering communities' resources

The first projects were developed in order to respond to a lack of infrastructure, financial and human capital in the early childhood sector in Cambodia. The Cambodian government being in difficulties to build an appropriate number of preschools, PE&D had to develop its own cost-effective alternative. The CPS projects did not require an important amount of resources. Indeed, they relied on existing resources. Most of the time, facilities were not provided: teaching to children was provided at a community member's home or in the pagoda compound. A community member was trained to become a teacher for a short period of time compared to carrying out studies at university. Recruitment criteria were also less strict. In terms of pedagogical materials, special attention was paid to the creation of easily-made games and toys, in order to reduce costs to the minimum.

The remaining costs were expected to be covered by income-generating activities, such as rice banks and microcredit systems, and small donations from

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<sup>68</sup> BRUN Jean-Marie and NEE Meas, *Final evaluation of "Empowerment of vulnerable families in rural areas" project* *Enfants et Développement*, February 2011, p. 29



parents and villagers. This way, the CPS could become fully independent (after three years of support). The rice bank system was in place in projects from 2000 to 2011. The activities were managed by the support committee which collected the funds and used them for the functioning of the schools (the provision of meals for lunch for instance). A seed capital (in rice) was provided by the project, and loaned to villagers. The interest rate was about 20% and was used to supply the rice for the running cost of the school, notably complementary food to children and payment of preschool teachers. Poorer families could make an in-kind contribution to the rice bank (for instance fuel wood)<sup>69</sup>. In 2011, an evaluation has shown that, despite the advantages of this funding system, because it was not mandatory for all parents to contribute to the rice bank, there could be a disconnection between the preschool users and the preschool financiers<sup>70</sup>. The system was also not monitored effectively, which could cause a loss in capital and general dysfunction. It also noticed that these income-generating activities did not necessarily make the preschools financially secured, as KrY or PE&D and support committees did not have enough time and human resources to review and advise on financial planning and did not monitor enough the functioning of the banks.



*Teuk Kraham CPS in Kampot province*

Despite the cost-effectiveness of this model (compared to other models of preschools, such as state preschools), the rice banks' system was abandoned with the launch of a project in peri-urban areas in 2011. The system was not adapted to these specific areas and micro-credit activities were launched instead. The system gradually became unnecessary with the increasing responsibilities of the commune councils since the adoption of the decentralization and deconcentration law in 2008. Preschools were managed with commune councils' budget.

<sup>69</sup> BRUN Jean-Marie and NEE Meas, *Final evaluation of "Empowerment of vulnerable families in rural areas" project/Enfants et Développement*, February 2011, p.27

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p. 28



#### 4. Sustainable: creating an ever-lasting tool

All projects aimed at being sustainable, self-sustaining and completely owned by the communities and the authorities. All the activities mentioned below serve the same purpose of ensuring a long-term outcome of the projects and giving the means to communities to manage and maintain early childhood services.

At the starting, the sustainability was trying to be reached through the use of existing material resources for the set-up of the preschool (facilities, objects and materials to use as pedagogical tools, games and toys). It was also possible with the assistance from the communities (for example local volunteers for the facilitation during parenting sessions). In terms of finances, the maintenance of the preschool was expected to be achieved through the set-up of rice banks or microcredit system. With the adoption of the law on Decentralization and Deconcentration and the new responsibilities given to commune councils, the sustainability of the preschools has reached a further step. Although there are other challenges threatening the sustainability of the preschools, such as the low salaries of the teachers and, as a consequence, a high turnover, the disbursement of the teacher salaries by the commune councils have encouraged the sustainability of the preschools, by guaranteeing teachers a stable job with a regular paycheck. The sub-decree on CPS management, initiating the standardization process, has also encouraged the sustainability of the preschools, by raising the salaries of the teachers and the standards of the preschools (the safety of the facilities for instance). The most current projects have therefore encouraged local authorities to fulfil their duties by managing the salaries of the teachers. In the last project, from 2016 to 2019, school facilities have also been built to allow the CPS to pass the standardization evaluation.



*Child playing in new CPS*



## IV. LESSONS LEARNED, PERSPECTIVES AND REMAINING CHALLENGES

Despite a general increase and the multiplication of national policies and action plans, the net enrolment rate remains low. This general figure also does not reflect the disparities across regions, wealth and the number of levels proposed per preschool. Finally, the increase in enrolment does not ensure the quality and the efficiency of the services proposed. Children are still very likely not to complete pre-primary or primary education, repeat grades and/or score poorly.

In terms of ECCD, three main challenges still stand out:

First, in Cambodia as well as in other developing countries, there is a general lack of budget allocation to support and strengthen ECCD. As the public sector does not provide enough funding to the early childhood institutions, the private sector is able to thrive and sets its own requirements (and costs), which, in turn, becomes out of reach for the children from the poorest backgrounds, even though they would be the ones who benefit the most from preschool. The challenge is not only about the funding, but also about a more general investment made by the government to monitor, innovate, give orientations, develop and enforce policies. In addition to financial constraints, a possible reason for this underinvestment can be the complexity of ECCD<sup>71</sup>. Governments, in particular in developing countries, have difficulties to design policies that are multisector, holistic and efficient. Another factor includes the lack of awareness, even from policy-makers, on the importance of ECCD for their country's development and their population's well-being. Furthermore, NC-ECCD ministerial members are not well harmonized and do not allow sufficient budget allocation to produce the expected outputs as indicated in the result framework of National Action Plan (NAP) on ECCD.

<sup>71</sup> The World Bank, Amina D.Denboba, Rebecca K.Sayre and others, *Stepping up Early Childhood Development*, 2014, p.1



Second, despite the increasing availability of preschool facilities in Cambodia, the access and the participation in pre-primary education remains low and inequitable. Indeed, access to pre-primary education is also ensured by giving parents and children the means to go to school, in terms of transportation options, to obtain school supplies (textbooks, stationary, uniforms) and give financial guarantees for the parents in exchange of their child not working and supporting them. Access and participation are a lot higher in urban areas and within wealthier households, as they often can afford sending their children to school and for the entire duration of the schooling period<sup>72</sup>. Several factors hence hinder the participation of children from remote villages, such as distance and budget constraints. In Cambodia, preschools operate in the morning and parents or relatives need to pick the child by midday. If the school is far from their workplace or their home, parents prefer to keep the children at home or by their side. Furthermore, parents lack information on the functioning of preschool and its importance. They rely on “*kinship care*”, asking relatives, in particular grandparents, to look after their children. They believe it is the safest and the most cost-effective way of providing care to their children when they are young. Finally, they sometimes do not know the exact age of their child, due to a lack of registration of the child at birth, and believe their child is too young/too old to be enrolled to preschool.



*Children and teachers in front of CPS after training*

Third and final point, neither availability nor accessibility nor affordability guarantee the quality of the services provided. The teaching, the materials and the facilities remain insufficient to address the needs of the young children. In regards with teaching, there is a difficulty in Cambodia to recruit teachers, motivate and

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<sup>72</sup> UNESCO, Education for All Global Monitoring Report, *Expanding equitable early childhood care and education is an urgent need*, Policy Paper 03, April 2012, p.5



retain them. More than one-third of teacher training centers (TTCs) reported difficulties in recruiting qualified candidates and had a low caliber of enrollees<sup>73</sup>. Entry requirements are not however high. Factors contributing to the unattractiveness of the profession notably include the lack of adequate salary, the limited hours of work (which compel many teachers to find another part-time job) and the long-lasting cultural views on teaching, which make it less prestigious than medicine or engineering. It is also difficult to foster innovation and play-based pedagogical methods: teachers are not prepared to use these kinds of methods, have to deal with crowded classrooms, or do not possess the necessary pedagogical supports. As a result, the teaching can be very limited and constrained to mere memorization. Last, the District Officer of education have too many preschools to monitor and usually do not integrate the CPS in their interventions, if not the ones standardized.

The lack of quality control and assurance within the Cambodian educational system have significant repercussions for the academic success of children during their preschool years. Indeed, repetition of grades and poor academic performance are still common features in Cambodia. Repetition rates in primary school can be a good indicator of the capacity of the preschool to prepare children to further learning in higher grades. In Cambodia, the repetition rate in primary school across all levels was still of around 7% for boys and 5% for girls in 2017<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> The World Bank, Prateek Tandon and Tsuyoshi Fukao, *Educating the next generation, improving teacher quality in Cambodia*, 2015, p.34

<sup>74</sup> World Bank Data, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.REPT.MA.ZS?view=chart> ; <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.REPT.FE.ZS?view=chart>



## CONCLUSION

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In Cambodia, significant progress has been made regarding the provision of Early Childhood Care and Development services. Policies and programmes have been developed since the 2000s in order to provide guidance to all relevant public institutions, like the ministries, as to how to meet the needs of young children. Roles have also gradually been assigned to public actors and at different levels of government in the management of the services. In practice, the number of services proposed to families with young children in Cambodia has steadily risen, although at a slow pace, boosted by the availability of non-formal services, such as community-based preschools and home-based programmes. The enrolment rate has also increased, prompted by important sensitization campaigns and civil society engagement in this sector.

Planète Enfants & Développement has been supporting the government in its efforts to develop the early childhood sector. Through different activities, such as the set-up of qualitative, holistic and cost-effective preschool and parenting education services, and the partnership with a local organization Krousar Yoeung, PE&D has engaged communities and authorities to build their own services. In parallel, the organization has promoted the development of policies and networks to ensure the formalization of the sector. Over the years, the approach adopted by the organization has been adapted to policy developments, economic opportunities and socio-cultural changes. The first projects mainly focused on community engagement. Management, maintenance and financing of the preschools were all conducted by communities, in an informal manner, with the support of PE&D and KrY. With the gradual decentralization process and a political willingness to institutionalize the early childhood sector, the most recent projects have still supported communities, but have also focused on making local authorities accountable for the provision of services and enhancing governance. The main focus has been to assist authorities in their new role and making the preschools financially sustainable. In terms of content, PE&D has been active in developing programmes and materials using qualitative and innovative pedagogies. With the creation of a local organization, KrY, and later a Resource Centre for Early Childhood (ECRC), the production of these materials has been entirely transferred to KrY.

Multiple challenges remain. Despite a political willingness to support the early childhood sector, there is still a general underfunding from the national government and a lack of integration between the different actors involved in the sector. Children from the poorest backgrounds and living in the most remote areas still cannot afford to access to a preschool. Quality of the preschool services also

remains inadequate: greater investments need to be done, in terms of teacher retention, facility safety standards, monitoring and quality control...and for all types of childcare services such as state preschools, community preschools, private preschools and other type of childcare centers (day-care). Pedagogies still need to be more child-centered and play-based. This can be done through advocacy towards national authorities and the development of further studies on the topic. The standardization process of CPS offers an opportunity to enhance the quality of these preschools and to ensure their maintenance in the long-term with regular monitoring and financial support. The standardization process is only starting and PE&D is at the forefront of this process to assist local authorities in their new role.

Lack of holistic and integrated ECCD interventions implemented by ministerial NC-ECCD members led to fragmentation within ECCD sub-sector. This challenge can be improved if NC-ECCD is allocating more budget and improve coordination and harmonization of actors' interventions.



*Preschool building Thvear Thmey, 26 October 2018*



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