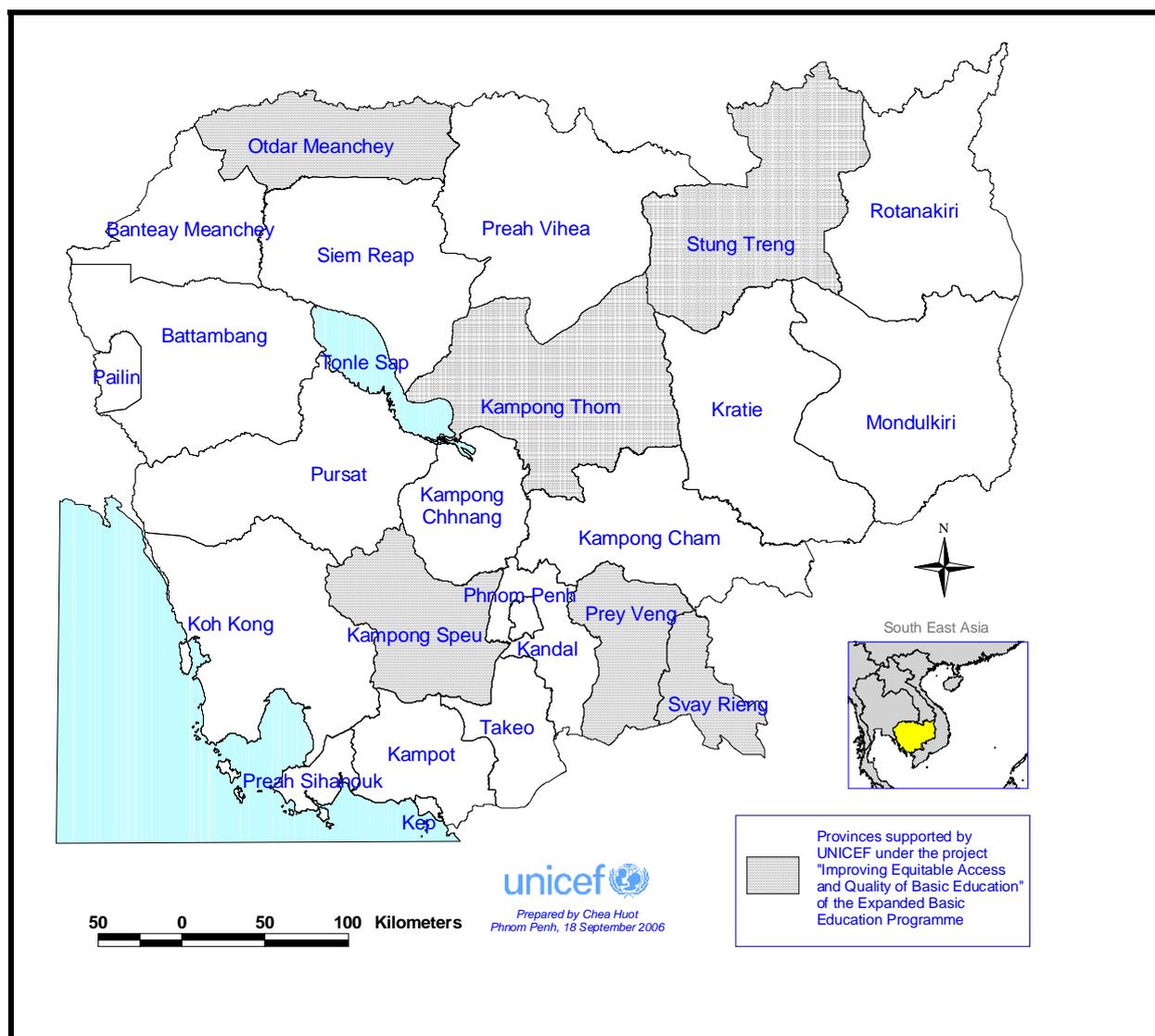


# An Evaluation of Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes in Cambodia

Nirmala Rao and Emma Pearson

with assistance from Veronica Pearson and Mark Constas



For information about this report, please contact Nirmala Rao, Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong, Pok Fu Lam Road, Hong Kong. E-mail may be sent to [nrao@hku.hk](mailto:nrao@hku.hk).

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Background and Objectives**

Over the past decade, governments and non-government organisations have accorded increased importance to and invested in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) because of the compelling needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and research conducted by neuroscientists, economists and child development specialists. Taken together this research suggests that high quality ECCE benefits children, their families, their communities and their nations. Of particular relevance to the work described in this report is that preschool attendance has been shown to improve the school readiness and school performance of children in poverty. This report describes a study which examined the effectiveness of different ECCE programmes in promoting children's preparedness for school.

In 2005 - 2006, the enrolment rate in Early Childhood Care and Education for 3- to 5-year-olds in Cambodia was about 12 per cent. For 5- to 6-year-olds, it was 27.27 per cent (State Preschools 21.23 per cent; Private Preschools 1.43 per cent; Community Preschools 3.96 per cent, and Home-Based programmes 0.84 per cent). State preschools, which are typically located in primary schools, operate a 3-hour programme, 5 days a week during the 38-week school year. Classes are taught by a teacher who has completed a 2-year full-time professional preparation course undertaken after Grade 12. In Community Preschool programmes, educational experiences for 3- to 5-year-olds are provided by a member of the village who has typically received ten days of initial training and who participates in refresher training for three to six days a year. The programme operates for 2 hours a day, 5 days a week, for 24 to 36 weeks a year. Home-based programmes provide educational resources and opportunities for mothers to come together weekly as a group, led by a trained "core" mother, who provides instruction on how to promote children's development and well-being. Meetings of mothers groups and their children are typically held for one hour a week for 24 weeks a year.

The government does not have the resources to expand State Preschool provision. Therefore this study, which was commissioned by UNICEF, considered issues related to the scaling up of Community Preschools and Home-based Programmes for 5-year-olds. This evaluation was undertaken in order to make recommendations for the future improvement of Community Preschools and Home-based programmes and suggest strategies which will contribute to their improved effectiveness, sustainability and expansion.

### **Evaluation Method**

This report is based on the first study conducted in Cambodia to examine the effectiveness of different early childhood programming strategies. Using stratified random sampling, children who had attended State Preschools, Community Preschools, Home-based programmes or no programmes (Control Group) were selected and compared on developmental functioning. Our original sample consisted of 1312 children (including 668 girls) from all six UNICEF- supported provinces. Children's developmental functioning was assessed twice, one year before they started and just before starting Grade 1. We also systematically observed early care and education practices in Community Preschools which were

attended by 24 of the 1321 children in our sample while informal observations were conducted in several others. In each of the six provinces we interviewed Directors or their representatives from the (i) Department of Early Childhood Education of the Provincial Offices of Education; (ii) Provincial Departments of Women's Affairs; and (iii) Provincial Local Administrative Units. We also consulted the Chief of a randomly selected village, the associated Commune Chief and the Commune Council Focal Point for Women and Children. Teachers of State and Community Preschools and "core" mothers from Home-based programmes were also interviewed. Further, discussions about early childhood education in Cambodia were held with specialists from the Department of Early Childhood Education of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and UNICEF's national and provincial offices.

### **Major Findings**

#### **Children's Developmental Functioning**

1. Differences in Developmental Functioning. Children who participated in early childhood programmes (State Preschool, Community Preschool and Home-based Programmes) had significantly better developmental functioning than children in the control group.
2. State Preschools as a Distinct Case. Children in State Preschools had significantly better functioning at pre-test and post-test than children in the other three groups.
3. No differences between Community Preschools and Home-based programmes. There were no significant differences between children in Community Preschools and Home-based programmes at pre-test and at post-test.
4. Growth from pre-test to post test. Children in all groups had significantly higher developmental functioning at post-test than at pre-test. However, children who attended early childhood programmes made larger gains than those in the control group.
5. Educational mediation of provincial differences. There were significant differences across provinces. At the time of the pre-test, children from Svay Rieng performed significantly better than those from Prey Veng, Kampong Speu and Oddar Meanchey and children from Kampong Thom also performed significantly better than those from Oddar Meanchey. There was less variability in developmental functioning across provinces at the time of the post-test. At that time, children from Oddar Meanchey had significantly lower scores than those from Prey Veng and Svay Rieng.
6. Influences beyond the effects of preschool experience. Pre-test scores (which were significantly correlated with preschool attendance at age 4), pre-test programme status and maternal education significantly contributed to prediction of children's post-test scores.
7. Children in remote areas most disadvantaged. Three inter-related factors – maternal education, where the child lives and whether the child is enrolled in an early childhood programme made a difference to children's developmental functioning. Children with uneducated mothers, who lived in remote areas and who did not attend any early childhood programme had the lowest levels of developmental functioning.

While enrolment in early childhood programmes clearly has beneficial effects for children's development, there may be other positive sequelae of attending early childhood programmes which are not reflected in these child outcome measures. These include on-time enrolment in Grade 1, lower grade repetition rates and retention in primary grades. Further, family involvement and community participation in children's early learning may occur with children's attendance in early childhood programmes. These factors may be considered as outcome measures in longitudinal studies of these children.

### **ECCE Programmes**

8. Enrolment versus Attendance. Community Preschools were serving children from 3 to 5 years of age as envisioned. However, there were on average fewer children attending regularly (n = 16) than enrolled (n = 26).
9. Free snack as an incentive for participation. Among reasons for non-attendance were difficulties in motivating children to attend and parents lacking the 100 Riel older children wanted to buy a snack at recess if they attended preschool.
10. Less formal nature of Community Preschools. Community Preschools were closed during community events, for example, Commune Council elections and their daily operation depended entirely on the teacher. For example, the Community Preschools were closed for months if the teacher went on maternity leave.
11. Onus on Community Preschool Teacher. The Community Preschool teacher single-handedly managed all the children and there was no assistance from members of the community.
12. Importance of Teacher Background. The quality of the services provided was dependent, to a large extent, on the teacher's background and characteristics, which varied considerably. Teachers differed in terms of their academic background, professional training and motivation. Some teachers had difficulty in reading stories to the children.
13. Inappropriate Physical Settings. In terms of the physical setting for early learning, the majority of Community Preschools observed were located in shelters, which were in unclean surroundings, did not have protective barriers between children and hazards in the environment and had inadequate space for storage of materials.
14. Infrastructure does not affect quality of learning. Physical setting/Infrastructure was significantly related to the presence of Physical Learning Aids and Creative Activities. However, it was not related to Personal Care and Routines; Language and Reasoning Experiences; Gross- and Fine- Motor Activities or Social Development Activities.
15. Appropriate instructional strategies. Teachers provided children with many opportunities for speaking, were skilled at teaching numbers and counting, engaged the children in singing with actions and maintained a pleasant social atmosphere in the preschools. However, we did not observe them use no-cost materials from the natural environment to teach other concepts.
16. No assessment of learning. There was no assessment of children's learning which would have enabled teachers to track children's progress and made them more sensitive to individual differences in rates of development among children.

17. Teacher satisfaction. Teachers mentioned the satisfaction they derived from their work and some had clearly become advocates for the needs of young children in the community. All of them requested more in-service training.
18. Problems in Community Preschools. Teachers identified the major challenges associated with Community Preschools as being inadequate shelter, issues related to transportation and storage of materials, difficulties in teaching mixed-age groups and irregular attendance of children.
19. Community mobilization. From interviews, we discerned that a major strength of the Community Preschool was its potential for community capacity building and the advantages it accorded to children, mothers and teachers.

### **Views of Stakeholders**

20. Support for ECCE. There was universal support for Early Childhood Care and Education programmes by all stakeholders in all provinces. Further the role of UNICEF was greatly appreciated by all of them.
21. State Preschools preferred. All stakeholders preferred the State Preschools to both the Community Preschools and Home-based programmes because of their longer hours of operation, the formal training that teachers received and clear line of management from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. They believed that the State Preschool system was well-established, well-managed and highly functional.
22. Choice between Community Preschools and Home-based programme varies. Support for the Community Preschools or Home-based programmes varied across stakeholders in different provinces depending on the history of the programmes in the commune and province, perceived benefits and issues related to cost and sustainability.
23. Community benefits from ECCE programmes. Stakeholders mentioned the advantages of Community Preschools and Home-based programmes for children while the benefits of the Home-based programmes to mothers and for the community were highlighted by respondents.
24. Concern about Sustainability. Problems related to the infrastructure and learning resources of Community Preschools, teacher attendance and incentives were mentioned. Concern was expressed about the financial sustainability of the Community Preschools once UNICEF phases out the subsidy for the teacher incentive. Several Commune Chiefs pointed out that the Community Preschool was not an infrastructure project and that the commune did not have the budget to support a social service project such as the Community Preschools because of the recurring nature of teacher incentives.
25. Benefits of Home-based Programmes. The Home-based Programme was praised by stakeholders for its role in educating mothers about child development and empowering them to be better parents.
26. Problems with coordination for monitoring. Stakeholders explained the roles of the different ministries in the monitoring and supervision of Community Preschools and Home-based programmes. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports is responsible for providing technical support/monitoring and preparing the curriculum for all programmes. The Provisional Office of the Department of Women's Affairs is responsible for community mobilization and ensuring that the

Community Preschools and Home-based programmes are actually functioning. The Provisional Local Administration Unit is responsible for the commune council budget for the Community Preschools. There was a lack of clear understanding by some stakeholders about their roles. For example, some commune council members said they provided technical support to programmes in addition to seeing whether the programmes were operating. The Community Preschool teachers and “core” mothers of the Home-based programmes were also not able to distinguish the roles of officials from different departments and the reasons they were visited by them.

27. Choosing an appropriate “core” mother. There was a high degree of commitment but large variations in the quality and operation of the Home-based programmes. The “core” mothers were not necessarily the most educated mothers in the village and some had to rely on the mothers in the programme to read the calendar of activities. This is an illustrated, easy-to-read guide of the curriculum to be followed in Home-based programmes.
28. Challenges for scaling up ECCE programmes. There are several challenges associated with the scaling up of both Community Preschools and Home-based programmes. These include maintaining quality with a large expansion in quantity, the lack of leadership and low levels of maternal and teacher education.

There is a strong commitment to ECCE in Cambodia. Community-based programmes that cater for young children’s development and growth have been successful in achieving positive outcomes not only for children and their families but also for the wider community. Given the momentum that exists, effective investment at this time should result in ECCE programmes becoming acknowledged as integral to community development.

### **Summary of Recommendations**

#### **Demand, Access, Enrolment and Attendance**

##### **1. Continue to generate demand for ECCE.**

Children who attended ECCE programmes showed better developmental functioning than those who did not.

##### National, Provincial and Commune Levels:

- a) Continue national level media education campaigns which focus on the positive influence of ECCE on both children’s readiness for school and on the community.
- b) Encourage community leaders and influential community members to recognize the importance of early childhood education and take responsibility to ensure that all children have the right to high quality early care and education.
- c) Work with both parents and other family caregivers to help them understand the importance of early childhood education.
- d) Educate mothers as literate mothers are more likely to seek early childhood services for their children and provide them more intellectual stimulation than are illiterate, uneducated mothers.

##### **2. Increase access and enrolment by providing services close to where the child lives.**

##### National Level:

- a) Develop and enact policies to increase access to high quality ECCE for all children particularly those who are socially disadvantaged. Children in the control group lived in remote areas where there were no preschool programmes and these children had significantly lower developmental functioning than other children. Special attention should be accorded to children who belong to more than one disadvantaged group, i.e., children who live in remote areas and who are poor and from ethnic minorities.

Commune Level:

- b) Provide services in a central location. Enrolment rates in rural villages may be adversely affected by the long distance of the Community Preschools from children's homes and because families can not afford the time or the cost of transport to and from the Community Preschools.

Village Level:

- c) Enhance children's attendance at the Community Preschools by engaging a volunteer from the village to collect children from their homes. This is because some children may not attend even if the preschool is near their home.

**3. Enrol children in early childhood programmes before they are 4.**

- a) Provide children early childhood services as soon as possible. Pre-test developmental functioning was the best predictor of developmental functioning at post-test and this suggests that the effects of experience prior to age 5 continue to have an influence on children at 6. This has very important implications for service provision for young children.

**4. Enrol children in either Community Preschools or Home-based Programmes.**

- a) Encourage attendance in either Community Preschools or Home-based programmes. There were no significant differences in developmental functioning between children who went to Community Preschools and those who participated in Home-based programmes. Our empirical findings suggest that if children can not go to the state preschool class they get similar benefits from Community Preschools and Home-based programmes.

**5. Increase enrolment and regular attendance by providing centre-based services which are free, integrated, have incentives for children's participation and which children enjoy.**

- a) Continue to provide free services and consider providing children with meals, learner materials or other incentives as poverty is a barrier to participation.  
 b) Provide integrated services as parents are likely to send their children to programmes which include a "health" component.  
 c) Increase regular attendance by providing high quality services which children enjoy.  
 d) Continue to carefully monitor and evaluate access and enrolment in ECCE. Attention should be given to the discrepancy between enrolment and regular attendance of children and ways to deal with it.

**Funding Early Childhood Care and Education**

**6. Enhance government and private funding of ECCE**

National level:

- a) Increase government spending on ECCE. Developments and improvements in early education in Cambodia will not be sustained if there is a lack of funding. The government has stated that there will be no new money made available and that funding will come by taking money away from the state system. Currently, the state preschools provide the highest quality of preschool education and the government may be reluctant to stop funding state programmes because of this and other reasons. At the least, a commitment for funds for training Community Preschools Teachers, “core” mothers and supporting the development of teacher trainers is necessary to enhance access and quality of early childhood services.

#### Commune Level:

- b) Encourage Commune Councils to allocate some of their budget to social services projects like the Community Preschools.
- c) Finance improved infrastructure. Feedback from teachers and parents suggest that there is an urgent need for improved and/or purpose-built shelters for many Community Preschools programmes. We are aware that the UNICEF staff are currently engaged in negotiation with a number of Commune Councils to build new shelters in partnership. The benefits of purpose-built shelters are that they (i) enhance and establish the status of Community Preschools programmes in the community; (ii) ensure stability of provision since Community Preschools lessons are less likely to be disrupted by community and religious events; and (iii) provide a more attractive environment conducive to enjoyable learning for children.
- d) Carefully consider whether limited funds should be used for providing shelters, teacher training or learning resources. Based on the data provided here, we would recommend that investment in purpose-built shelters be made only on the basis of careful consideration of the specific needs of individual Community Preschools programmes and consultation with Community Preschools teachers. In some cases, investment may be more effectively made in teacher training and/or provision of learning resources for children.

#### Families:

- e) Encourage families who can do so to pay a token fee for a snack. If families cannot pay, parents can be volunteers in the programme, for example, once a week.

### **Community Involvement**

#### **7. *Encourage community involvement and family participation in ECCE through the development and enactment of appropriate policies.***

- a) Help parents realise that they can indeed contribute to children’s early development and empower mothers so that they are able and effective in participating in and contributing to programmes. We found that parents of children who attended State or Community Preschools typically do not participate in children’s education or support the teachers. Parents of children in Community Preschools felt that they did not have the expertise to teach their children. Stakeholders mentioned that Home-based programmes had a positive impact on the community by decreasing domestic violence. The

mothers' groups provided a form of support for mothers and helped them enhance children's learning and development.

### **Quality of Programmes**

#### **8. Focus on Teacher Quality**

##### National Level

- a) Extend and Enhance Teacher Training. Children from State Preschools, which clearly had the most qualified teachers and provided the highest quality of early childhood education of all the programmes had better school preparedness than children in the Community Preschools and Home-based programmes. Teachers expressed the desire for more training and teacher quality is one of the best indicators of programme quality.
- b) Ensure that national curriculum, curriculum frameworks and guidelines are available to all teachers and "core" mothers and that they use the curriculum materials and instructional resources which they are given. Use culturally appropriate and gender-sensitive instructional resources.
- c) Show teachers how to use developmentally and culturally appropriate methods to facilitate development and learning. Approaches that are right for the children's age and relate to the child's home and community are at the heart of early childhood development and learning.

##### Commune Level

- d) Select the most suitable members of the community to be Community Preschool Teachers and "core" mothers. Teachers should have completed Primary School as we found that some had difficulty reading stories to children. Our impression is that some Community Preschools teachers were selected just because they had been child-minders or because they were related to influential members of the community and not because they were the most educated women in the village.
- e) Increase respect and appreciation for early childhood educators. Community recognition and appreciation is important to sustain the good work of early childhood educators and to raise the status of this segment of the education profession. Effort is also needed to build community acceptance of male early childhood educators.
- f) Encourage more co-ordination among State Preschool teachers, Community Preschool teachers and "core" mothers. There should be more coordination between State Preschools, Home-based programmes and Community Preschools as they can support each other. Community Preschool teachers operate in a relatively isolated environment even though they have an opportunity to discuss teaching-related issues with State Preschool teachers once a month. Given the limited training that these teachers receive, it is a significant challenge for them to cater for a wide range of children with minimal resources.
- g) Provide more support to Teacher Trainers. Provide more training and support for staff in the Department of Early Childhood at the National and Provincial Offices of Education of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.

#### **9. Emulate Good Practices in Programmes**

- a) Encourage practices which can help provide disadvantaged children an opportunity to have higher quality ECCE. These include: nurturing a positive sense of self in the child; providing a child-appropriate early childhood setting; regarding the child as an active learner who can do things and make things happen; implementing a curriculum so that each girl and each boy, regardless of their differences, feels they are regarded with dignity and worth; creating an effective learning environment by developing and enacting effective curricula; and providing high quality and age-appropriate instruction.
- b) Align the curriculum in ECCE programs with the recently developed school readiness standards for 5- to 6-year-olds, the Cambodian Early Learning and Development Standards. These standards will help ensure that a comparable curriculum will be followed in all ECCE programmes in the country and have the potential to positively influence pedagogy.
- c) Develop and enact a policy on assessment of child development in programmes. Currently teachers do not assess children's early development and learning. Children's holistic development should be assessed at the beginning, middle and end of the academic year. This type of assessment will alert teachers to individual differences among children and the support they need to provide for different children. Further, in the Cambodian context, we feel that assessment can have a positive influence on teacher's instruction. When developing such a policy attention should be given to providing teachers with methods to refer and deal with children with suspected developmental delays.
- d) Consider increasing the length of the CPS programme from two to three hours. The CPS programme is currently 10 hours per week and the programme may need to increase in length to meet all its curriculum objectives. The time available for teachers to give children individual attention and to provide all the activities needed in an holistic programme is currently compromised by the time they have to spend on grooming children and by the large group size.

### **Encourage co-ordination among different stakeholders**

#### **10. *Improve co-ordination in the support and monitoring of programmes.***

##### National Level

- a) Implement policy that encourages coordination among different Departments. Community Preschools must be provided with regular support and encouragement from Provincial Offices of Education and Provincial Departments of Women's Affairs officials, who should work together to ensure daily operation and teacher quality (which are closely related and should not be seen as distinct).

##### Provincial Level:

- b) Implement models and strategies for the Provincial Department of Women's Affairs, Provincial Local Administration Unit and Department of Early Childhood Education of the Provincial Office of Education to work together to develop a plan for support, monitoring and evaluation. Each party's clearly defined, non-overlapping role should be conveyed to teachers. The Provincial Office of Education provides technical support and should provide more concrete and

relevant advice on how to improve the programme and not just focus on pedagogy.

- c) Provide more support to District Offices of Education and programmes in remote areas.
- d) Allocate more attention to dealing with problems identified during supervision and monitoring visits. Clear policies should exist to deal with sub-standard programmes and teachers.

Commune Level:

- e) Ensure that commune council members and the Village Chief are aware of their roles in the ECCE programmes.
- f) Select the most suitable to be the Commune Council Focal Point for Women and Children so that he/she can best fulfil the role and act as a liaison between the Commune Council and Community Preschool teacher.

Scaling up Community Preschools and Home-based programmes

**11. Consider scaling up a hybrid version of the Community Preschool and Home-based programmes.**

Given (i) the inputs required for the Community Preschools; (ii) the challenges identified in the sustainability of Community Preschools programmes; (iii) the fact that children from Community Preschools and Home-based programmes did not significantly differ in their school preparedness; (iv) low levels of maternal education; and (v) low levels of family involvement in the Community Preschools, stakeholders may consider scaling up a hybrid version of the Community Preschools and Home-based programmes. This will allow the community to gain the advantages of both types of programmes while avoiding some of the problems associated with operating and supporting these programmes. That stated, improving the quality of these programmes must be a priority and extreme caution must be exercised to ensure that scaling up programmes does not lead to a decrease in programme quality.

**Conclusions**

During the past decade, there has been a significant increase in access to early childhood services in Cambodia. However, millions of girls and boys still do not have access and quality varies greatly. All education stakeholders have key roles to play to ensure that all children can eventually have access to high quality early childhood education. It is time to act at the policy, community, programme and family levels to make this a reality.

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Nirmala Rao and Emma Pearson

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## List of Abbreviations

CC:	Commune Chief
CCFPWC:	Commune Council Focal Point for Women and Children
CDAT:	Cambodian Development Assessment Test
CECERS:	Cambodian Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale
CPS:	Community Preschool(s)
DOE:	District Office of Education
EC:	Early Childhood
ECCE:	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECCD:	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECD:	Early Childhood Development
ELDS:	Early Learning and Development Standards
ECE:	Early Childhood Education
EFA:	Education for All
EP:	Emma Pearson
HBP:	Home-based Programme(s)
ICC:	International Cooperation Cambodia
KS:	Kampong Speu
KT:	Kampong Thom
MDGs:	Millennium Development Goals
MoEYS:	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
Mol:	Ministry of Interior
NGOs:	Non-governmental Organisations
NR:	Nirmala Rao
OMC:	Oddar Meanchey
PLAU:	Provincial Local Administration Unit
PoE	Provincial Office of Education
PoE- ECE:	Provincial Office of Education – Early Childhood Education
POWA:	Provincial Department of Women’s Affairs
PV:	Prey Veng
SPS:	State Preschool(s)
SR:	Svay Rieng
ST:	Stung Treng
TECERS:	Tamil Nadu Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale
UNICEF:	United Nations Children’s Fund
VC:	Village Chief

## **Chapter One**

### **An Overview of Early Childhood Care and Education in Cambodia Background**

Converging evidence suggests that Early Child Care and Education (ECCE) programmes can help attain the Millennium Development Goals but there is a dearth of studies which have systematically evaluated the effectiveness of programmes, using appropriate research methodology, in the developing world. No studies have examined the effectiveness of the different ECCE programming strategies in Cambodia.

Against this background, the major objectives of this study were to:

- Assess the effectiveness of the Community Preschool (CPS) and Home-based Programmes (HBP) on school readiness developmental outcomes for children who are/have been in these different types of early childhood programmes;
- Observe early care and education practices in CPS and in HBP and assess which of the practices work and which do not to enhance school readiness of children;
- Assess the transfer of children from preschool to primary school;
- Discern the perceptions of key and relevant stakeholders (teachers, parents, commune officials, policy makers) on how the CPS and HBP are currently being implemented; and
- Make recommendations for the future improvement of the CPS and HB programmes and suggest strategies that will contribute to improved effectiveness and sustainability of these programmes.

The study also had some secondary objectives which are associated with UNICEF-supported projects. These include capacity building of those concerned with ECCE, empowerment of women, using research to inform policy and knowledge transfer

This report provides (i) an overview of ECCE policies and programmes in Cambodia, (ii) a description of the research methodology deployed in the empirical study; and (iii) results from observations of early education/child care settings, assessments of children's early learning and development, findings from interviews of parents, teachers, Commune council members and government officials. Based on the empirical findings, the sustainability of Community-Based and Home-based programmes are considered. On the basis of what is feasible and achievable in the Cambodian context, recommendations are made on methods to enhance the quantity and quality of early childhood services.

#### **Education for All**

Cambodia has subscribed to the goals of the 2000 Education for All (EFA) Dakar Framework for Action. The main themes are:

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes. Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
4. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015 with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.
5. Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially literacy, numeracy and essential life skills (National Plan, 2003).

It is widely accepted that the achievement of the goals of EFA must rest on sound implementation of the principles of ECCE and Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD). ECCE adopts an holistic approach to the child, supporting children's survival, growth, development and learning. This includes health, nutrition and hygiene as well as cognitive, social, physical and emotional development – from birth to entry into primary school in formal and non-formal settings. ECCE programmes involve a variety of locations and arrangements, from parenting programmes to community based child care, centre based provision and pre-primary education in schools.

ECCE is not an optional extra. It is a right recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It improves the well-being of young children especially in the developing world where poverty is rife and child mortality rates high. It acknowledges that early childhood is a time of remarkable brain development with a high potential for learning. ECCE contributes to other EFA goals in relation to preparing a child for entry into primary school and reducing the levels of non-completion and repetition of grades in primary school.

### **Goals and principles of ECCE in Cambodia**

#### ***Goals***

1. To enhance survival, growth and development status of all Cambodian children.
2. Enhance all Cambodian children from birth to school entry to benefit from improved care so that they may achieve optimal physical and psychosocial development both at home and through participation in integrated and inclusive community-based health, hygiene, nutrition, development and early education programmes of good quality.
3. Enhance readiness of all Cambodian children to begin school at 6 (National Plan, 2003).

However, the Cambodian EFA Assessment Report (2000) commented that progress towards these goals had been slow, especially in the area of ECCE and ECCD which are generally limited to formal preschooling. However, as we shall see, there has been measurable progress since then. Programmes for children between birth and 3 years are scanty and undefined.

#### ***Principles***

The government has outlined 6 guiding principles within which these goals must be achieved (National Plan, 2003).

1. **Low cost:** Effective high-quality programmes do not depend on expensive toys, materials or equipment but make maximum use of the objects and interactions available in conjunction with routines of daily living.
2. **Inclusivity:** Inclusive education can begin in community-based groupings of young children. All programmes operate on the principle that all are included, none are excluded.
3. **Readiness:** Infancy and early childhood are critical periods for the development of brain pathways, neuro-endocrine and neuro-immune systems and sensitive periods for perceptual and language development.
4. **Efficiency:** Community-based programmes need to maximize the opportunities for child-to-child and adult-to-adult interactions and thus group size and caregiver-to-child ratios should be as small as possible to minimize the need for special facilities and supervisory arrangements.
5. **Equity:** Limited resources to ensure that all children are 'ready to learn' when they enter school imply that resources must be directed to those children and families least able to afford to pay for services but most likely to benefit from some form of school readiness.
6. **Integration:** Sectoral and ministerial boundaries must not impede good community-based programming, management and monitoring. Integrated, regular child-monitoring can help bridge traditional disciplinary and administrative barriers to integrated services and programmes.

#### **A profile of young children's health in Cambodia**

The ability of children to learn is directly related to their health status and in a country as poor as Cambodia improvements in education and learning opportunities cannot occur without concomitant improvements in health and nutrition. The Cambodian government's acceptance of this view is expressed in the following statement:

'New approaches and financing strategies are needed if ECCD programming is to flow from care of mothers before, during and after birth, to quality care of infants and young children, to integrated, community based and family focused programmes that address health, nutrition, nurturing and education within ECCD' (National Plan, 2003, p. 72).

#### ***Infant and child mortality***

Over a quarter of Cambodia's population (projected to be 14 million) are aged nine or less. Recent national health surveys (National Health Survey, 1998; Cambodian Demographic Health Survey, 2000, cited in National Plan, 2003 and Cambodian Demographic Health Survey, 2005) indicated continuing high early mortality rates and an increase in post-neonatal mortality rates (95 and 66 deaths per 1000 live births in 2000 and 2005, respectively; under-five mortality of 124 and 83 deaths per 1000 in 2000 and 2005, respectively). Despite the decline in infant and child mortality in recent years, they remain the highest in the East Asia and Pacific Region (UNICEF, 2006). Furthermore there are significant differences between the infant mortality rates of families in the poorest and richest economic quintiles; 110 compared with 50 per 1000 live births as of 2000 (UNICEF, 2006). The major causes of death are diarrhoea, pneumonia and neonatal disorders.

### ***Failure to thrive***

Fifteen per cent of children are born with low birth weight (less than 2.5kgs)<sup>1</sup> the consequence of malnourished, underweight, mothers giving birth to underweight babies. Only 46 per cent of mothers receive any ante-natal care at all (UNICEF, 2006) and according to the Cambodian Demographic Health Survey (2005) the maternal mortality rate is very high (472 deaths per 100,000 live births). Malnutrition significantly contributes to early childhood mortality and morbidity and it is estimated that 54 per cent of childhood deaths are associated with insufficient food. This is exacerbated by micro-nutrient malnutrition, particularly the lack of vitamin A, iodine and iron – all essential for healthy growth and development. In addition, Cambodia has high rates of stunting (low height for age), wasting (low weight for age) and underweight children (less severe low weight for age). About 49 per cent of children have been stunted and their development compromised by the age of 2, a figure that declines slightly to 44 per cent by the age of 4. About 13 per cent of children suffer from severe malnutrition and 37 per cent from moderate malnutrition (a figure calculated based on rates of stunting).

Growth falters typically around 6 months of age (and sometimes earlier) which is when breast feeding mothers begin to introduce complementary foods that may be inadequate, inappropriate and unhygienically prepared. The government lists the causes of malnutrition as multiple including: disease, inadequate food intake, poor caring practices, lack of access to health and basic services including safe water and sanitation, and poverty. They also comment that caretakers' level of education and knowledge concerning the care of children is a significant factor.

### ***Improvements in health services but only slight decline in statistics***

There have been successes. As a result of intensive immunization efforts the number of measles cases was reduced by 97 per cent between 2000 and 2004. Cambodia has been polio free since 1997 and vitamin A prophylaxis increased from 57 per cent in 2000 to 70 per cent in 2004. The Cambodian government issued a sub-decree on the iodization of all edible salt in 2003 and a salt producers' association was formed in 2004 leading to a rapid increase in the production of iodized salt to meet the full national requirement in 2004. The number of health centres providing a minimum package of health care services has increased from 386 in 1998 to 833 in 2004. We are beginning to see drops in diseases such as measles and neonatal tetanus which are associated with decreasing infant and child mortality rates (Cambodia Demographic Health Survey, 2005).

### **Government policies regarding ECCE and ECCD**

#### ***The inter-ministerial approach***

As we have seen from the above discussion successful learning cannot be achieved in isolation and as stated earlier, ECCE has to adopt an holistic approach to the child widely accepted to include components of health, nutrition and care as well as education. All have an impact on learning outcomes. Such an approach cannot be achieved by one government ministry alone and requires sophisticated co-ordination to design and implement successful strategies (National Plan, 2003), particularly in relation to the psychosocial development milestones which the

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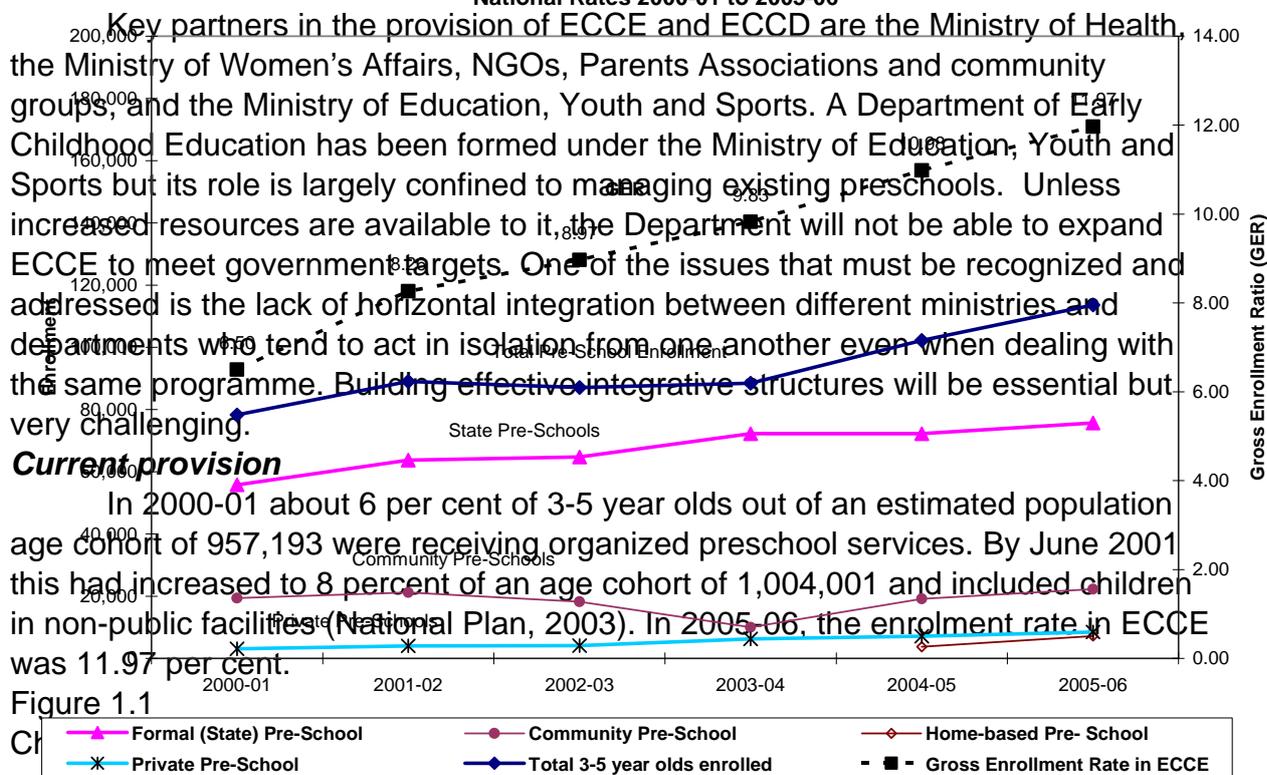
<sup>1</sup> Except where stated the figures are taken from the National Plan, 2003

Cambodian government has identified as currently lacking (National Plan, 2003). In recognition of this, an Integrated Childhood Development Sub-committee of the Cambodian National Council for Children was formed to facilitate, monitor and coordinate actions of all ministries responsible for implementing child health, growth and development activities. These include the Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Ministry of Women and Veterans Affairs.

As a shared ministerial responsibility the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports' role in ECCD will be to encompass not only 'preschooling' in whatever form but also the technical inputs to psychosocial components of community-based programmes aimed at enhancing parental nurturing as part of everyday living, and to combine health, nutrition, and all-round developmental activities' (National Plan, 2003, p. 69).

**Early Childhood Care and Education Enrollments and GER**

National Rates 2000-01 to 2005-06



Source: MoEYS Education Management Information System

Figure 1.1 illustrates this trend. In 2005-06, there were 75,669 children enrolled in State Preschools, 22,265 children in CPS, 7,181 children in HBP and 8,512 children in private preschools. There has been a marked increase in enrolment in all types of programmes since 2004-05. Among 3- to 5- year olds, there were 19,172 children in CPS and 3,750 children in HBP in 2004-05.

Table 1.1 below illustrates the differences between three types of programmes: State Preschools (SPS), CPS and HBP.

Table 1.1

A Comparison among State Preschools, Community Preschools and Home-based Programmes

	SPS	CPS	HBP
Year started	Before 2000	2004	2004
Age range of children	3-6 years (3 classes L1-L3)	3 – 5 years	Birth to 6 years
Number of children covered in 2005 - 2006	75,669	22,265	7,181
Hours per day/week Weeks per year	3 hours per day/ 5 days a week 38 weeks/year	2 hours per day/ 5 days a week 24 – 36 weeks/year	Mother groups and the children typically meet once a week but this varies across projects 24 weeks/year
Establishment	Responsibility of the MoEYS	Responsibility of Commune Councils	Responsibility of Commune Councils
Curriculum	MoEYS to be aligned with the ELDS	MoEYS to be aligned with the ELDS	MoEYS to be aligned with the ELDS
Staffing	A teacher who has undergone professional training	A locally recruited and trained teacher	Mothers led by a “core” mother
Staff Training	A 2-year full-time teacher training course after Grade 12	Initial training for 10 day Annual refresher training for up to 6 days a year	Refresher training for 6 days a year
Salary/Incentives	MoEYS Monthly salary of USD 20	Teacher incentive of USD 7.5 per month	Not Applicable

The timings and the months of operation of the CPS and HBP take into account the fact that many parents are farmers. For example, the CPS programme finishes at 9.00am and the CPS and HBP do not operate in the harvest seasons. As shown in Table 1.1, there are considerable differences among the three programmes in their dates of establishment, size and modes of operation. These differences, which clearly affect programme quality, will be elaborated upon in subsequent chapters.

There is some inconsistency in the reported current numbers of children enrolled in preschool programmes. As mentioned earlier, the enrolment rate for 3- to 5- year-olds was 11.97 per cent in 2005-06 by the MoEYS. However, another report by the MoEYS puts it at 13.6 per cent (ECED Report for 2005-06). This is the only source of information on enrolment rates for children between 5 and 6 years. According to this report, the enrolment rates for 5- to 6-years-olds in 2005-06 was 27.27 per cent (79,454 children including 39,884 girls), which represents an increase

from 24.56 per cent in 2004 -06. Table 1.2 shows enrolment rates in 2004-05 and 2005-06 for the different programmes.

Table 1.2

Enrolment Rates in Preschool Programmes for 5- to 6-year olds

Types of Preschool Programmes										
	SPS		Private Preschool		CPS		HBP		Total	
	2004- 05	2005- 06	2004- 05	2005- 06	2004- 05	2005- 06	2004- 05	2005- 06	2004- 05	2005- 06
3-5 years	7.65%	8.59%	0.58%	0.96%	1.98%	2.52%	0.59%	1.52%	10.89%	13.60%
5 years	17.97%	21.23%	4.98%	1.43%	0.40%	3.96%	1.28%	0.84%	24.56%	27.27%

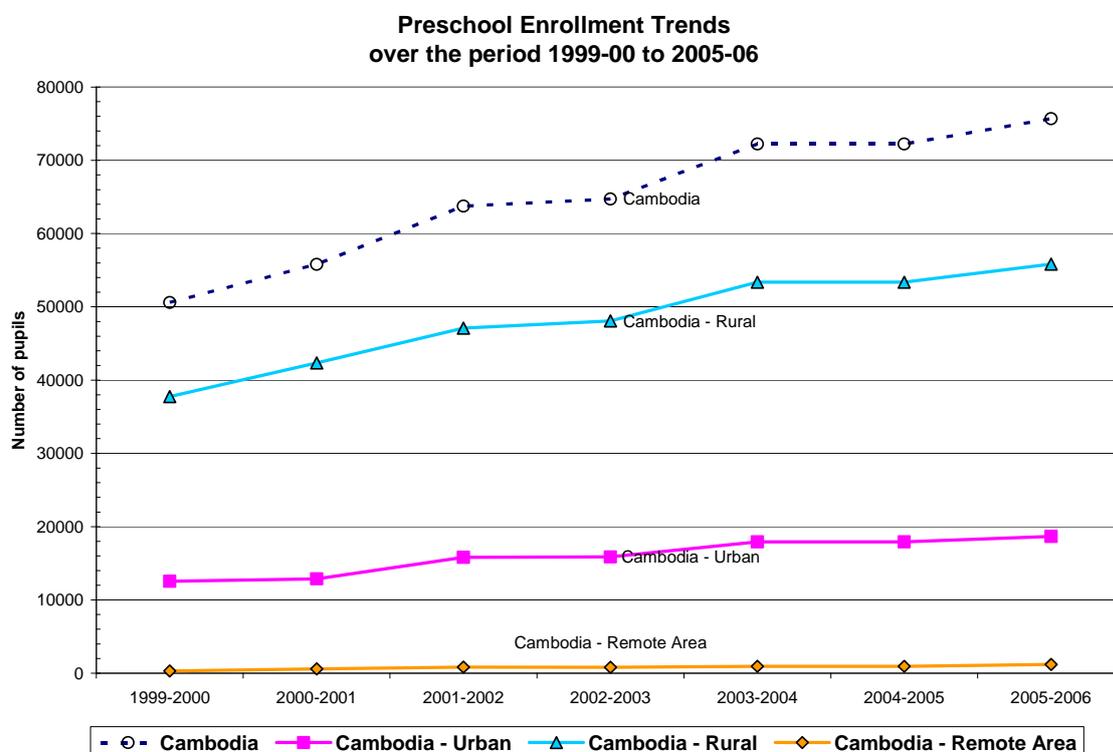
Source: ECED report for Education Congress (End Year Report)

Very few alternatives or provisions for children under 3 years exist. It is probably safe to conclude that there has been a considerable increase in provision over the last decade (bearing in mind that it started from a very low base figure) and that currently about 12 per cent of children aged 3-5 receive preschooling of some kind.

Figure 1.2 shows the number of children enrolled in ECCE in urban, rural and remote areas. As about 80 per cent of Cambodia's population lives in rural areas, we can expect higher enrolment rates in rural areas. However, as Figure 1.2 shows, almost no children are enrolled in early education in the remote areas. This is a concern as children living in these areas may have multiple disadvantages, e.g., poverty, poorly educated mothers and ethnic minority status.

Figure 1.2

## Changes in Enrolments in Early Childhood Programmes in Urban, Rural and Remote areas



Source: MoEYS Education Management Information System

### ***Proposed provision***

The Cambodian government has recognized that current preschool is 'too little, too late', for the vast majority of 3-5 year old Cambodians. The broad policy target will be to increase the net enrolment into ECCE of 5 year olds to 50 per cent by 2010 and 75 per cent by 2015 (National Plan, 2003). The government does not envisage a downward expansion of the primary school cycle of 6 years to include pre-primary education for 5 year olds. This target is to be achieved through the provision of home-based, playgroup style programmes, community/centre based programmes and school based programmes. However, there are already signs that this target will not be reached. At least according to one report, between school years 2003-2004 and 2005-2006 the numbers of children attending ECCE activities increased by only 2.18 per cent, reaching a total of 21.32 per cent in 2005-2006 (UNICEF/PoE, 2007). It seems unlikely that provision will increase by the necessary 28 per cent in the next four years

### ***Responsibility for implementation***

The role of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) focuses on curriculum development and materials, staff development and quality assurance. It has no responsibility for direct service provision and as part of the policy of decentralization, the Department of Early Childhood Education, while acting as a catalyst, also does not implement services directly (other than the state run preschools). The provision of services has been left to NGOs, parents, community

workers and particularly Commune Councils at the local level. The assumption is that having a deep understanding of local needs and culture they will be able to choose and finance models most appropriate for their locality. The Department of Early Childhood Education has been active, in conjunction with UNICEF, in developing training teams in each province for improving the quality of newly evolved community preschools. Training focuses on thematic learning and the development of weekly activity plans. Learning objectives are linked to the child's domains of development appropriate to age; physical (gross/fine), motor, sensory, cognitive, language, emotional/aesthetic, social and personal development.

### ***Funding mechanisms***

This perception of ECCE as a responsibility of each locality has funding implications. It is noticeable that while the government is prepared to commit itself to central funding of primary education it states clearly that it cannot make the same commitment to ECCE. Thus villages are expected to find their own resources supplemented by NGO and donor partners `to evolve new approaches that will lead to universal preschooling but without reliance on the scarce budgetary resources of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports' (National Report, p. 31). The exception is in poorer areas where it is accepted that `public funding of high-quality, community programmes of integrated childcare will be necessary for some time to come' (National Report, 2003, p.29). Parental, private and community contributions are expected to lead to the achievement of 75 per cent non-government funding of ECCE programmes by 2014.

The funding model proposed is not without problems. It has been pointed out that the decision to encourage community and private sector funding for the provision of preschool services risks leaving poorer communities with restricted access, thus perpetuating the cycle of inadequate school preparation, class repetition, eventual drop-out and adult illiteracy. The MoEYS has said that they cannot afford to increase the amount they currently spend on preschooling most of which benefits the wealthier sectors of society. The safety net for poor children will consist of re-directing the money currently spent to deprived areas. The assumption is that parents in the wealthier, urban areas will be left to fund provision for their children. Whether this will be enough to achieve the extensive goals of ECCE in a country where the majority of children live in severe poverty is debatable.

On the same subject, it is worth noting that at the Fifth E9 Ministerial Meeting on ECCE that took place in Cairo in 2003 it was stated quite clearly that ECCE cannot be achieved through a community mobilization strategy alone. They point out that it is already difficult to persuade the relevant ministries at central government level of the importance of giving priority to pre-primary services. It is even harder to ensure that local authorities and townships allocate sufficient money out of what must already be a restricted and over-stretched budget. They suggest that delivery and management of services at a local level is appropriate but that sufficient funding has to come from the central government and to suppose otherwise is a sign of naivety or insufficient commitment to ECCE.

### **Inclusion and equity**

It is clear from government statements (see earlier) that their formal policies espouse education for all children. None are to be excluded on the grounds of

gender, poverty, disability or ethnic minority status, or, indeed, for any other reason. These statements are made within the framework of acceptance of the human rights of the child and cross-cut all aspects of Education for All policies. However, overcoming discrimination against such groups is a highly complex matter involving not only money (which is at least straightforward) but centuries of cultural attitudes and belief, which are not. An examination of the formal documents (National Plan, 2003; UNICEF, 2006) shows that the two groups most frequently mentioned as being excluded are children in poverty and girls. Children with disabilities and ethnic minorities are much less frequently identified. The broad policy thrust is to reduce the cost barriers to access to high quality basic education for all through a combination of systemic developments (like abolishing informal payments) and targeted interventions (incentives for the poor, girls and ethnic minorities) to attend school (National Plan, 2003). For instance, in 2001 the abolition of start of year parental contributions for grades 1-6 contributed to an increased primary school enrolment from 2.35 million to 2.68 million in twelve months (National Plan, 2003).

### ***Exclusion on the grounds of gender***

The stated goal of the government is to 'eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education... and achieve gender equality in education by 2015 with a focus on achieving girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality' (National Plan, 2003, p. 26). The numbers of girls and boys in preschool are more or less equal. However, that involves only about 20 per cent of the relevant age cohort. In school year 2004-2005 the enrolment rates in primary school were 91 per cent for girls and 93 per cent for boys. In 2001-2002 the enrolment rates were 84 per cent and 90 per cent, respectively. Improvements in enrolment rates were seen most amongst girls and boys from the poorest economic quintile. The picture becomes gloomier the further up the education ladder one goes. At lower secondary level 37 per cent of students are girls; at upper secondary level, 32 per cent and very few girls complete secondary school.

The traditional role expectations on school age girls function to keep them out of school because they are expected to perform household chores and childcare (thus enabling their mother to participate in a wage economy) or take on household income generation activities themselves (National Plan, 2003). The introduction of garment manufacturing, taking advantage of lax labour laws and cheap female labour, has provided an income earning opportunity for young girls that may keep them out of school.

### ***Exclusion on the grounds of poverty***

No one is more likely than a child to live in poverty in Cambodia (UNICEF, 2006). The representation of the poor is much greater in the primary than in the secondary or tertiary student population. In Cambodia 20 per cent of primary students but only 2 per cent of upper secondary students are drawn from the poorest 20 per cent of the population. In contrast, 61 per cent of the upper secondary students come from the richest 20 per cent of the population. The representation of the poor in tertiary education is zero whilst the richest 20 per cent account for 57 per cent of tertiary level students. As has already been discussed, poor children are currently rarely found in preschool provision and the MoEYS has identified them as a target group on which to spend its limited resources for ECCE in order to ensure

equity of opportunity. It acknowledges that this is likely to be challenging as the poorest communities lack good models, infrastructure and experienced providers.

### ***Exclusion on the grounds of disability and ethnic minority status***

The National Plan (2003, p.40) states in the case of children with disabilities that national policy and strategies should be formulated 'to assure equitable access to education opportunities including specific programme interventions e.g. school buildings design, specialized teaching and learning materials'. With regard to ethnic minorities it says that targeted facilities, programmes and curriculum reform should be provided, with special incentives for minority area staff deployment as well as the hiring of local teachers. There is a suggestion that inclusion in the life of the community can be pursued through access to education and that this is therefore a priority for the government. However, little detailed information is given about how this can realistically be achieved. UNICEF has been involved in starting the first preschool for deaf children in Cambodia in 2004, located in Krousar Thmey. The goal was to teach children sign language so that they had a language with which to communicate when they entered primary school. The project has created a Khmer Braille code and set up a committee to work on creating a uniform Khmer sign language.

The Early Childhood Education Department (2006) reported that three staff had participated in training for the education of children with special needs (i.e. with a disability or from ethnic minorities) for 14 days with International Cooperation Cambodia (ICC). The department also developed materials for parents on early interventions for children with a disability. Fifty six people were trained at national level to be trainers. 264 District Office of Education level staff responsible for Early Child Development and core mothers from home based projects in the 6 UNICEF supported provinces were given training on disability in children.

As part of a study carried out for UNICEF on child rearing practices Covar (2006) asked questions about disability. It is notable that when his 196 respondents were asked whether children with a disability should go to school the majority (154) said they should not. When asked whether children with a disability should be treated differently to normal children 153 out of 199 respondents said they should not, but a significant minority (36) thought that they should. Covar concluded that there was an undercurrent of discrimination and lack of acceptance towards children with a disability.

### **Preparation for and entrance into primary school**

It is widely accepted that preschool experiences, by preparing the child academically and socially for school, lowers repetition and drop-out rates. The benefit is felt most by children in the poorest communities. Yet in Cambodia, children with the greatest need of the chance to learn in groups, mix with others, acquire pre-academic and language skills before they begin primary school are the ones that have the least access. Thus preschool and ECCE are not only intrinsically important. They provide experiences and preparation that give a child a much better chance of succeeding in school and completing at least 6 years of primary school. ECCE is a vital component of a successful Education for All strategy.

### ***Primary school repetition and drop out rates***

Although the initial enrolment in primary school has improved significantly, the drop-out rate remains stubbornly high and one of the main reasons is poverty. Families are often unable to pay the cost of schooling that can amount to 79% of per capita non-food expenditure of the poorest 20 per cent of families. Another significant concern regarding children in Cambodia is that at the formal age of enrolment into primary school, 6, many are too immature in their physical, social, linguistic and cognitive development. This is reflected in delayed enrolment and high repetition rates in Grade 1 leading to high drop out rates (National Plan, 2003). They are simply not ready for school as a result of malnutrition and lack of preschool experiences. Only 58 per cent of Grade 1 students are 6 years old, the prescribed school entry age. Only 45 per cent of children in Cambodia who start primary school will complete Grade 6, and only 38 per cent will enter lower secondary school. It takes an average of 10.8 years for a child to complete the six-year primary school cycle (UNICEF, 2006). A study carried out by a group called Kampuchean Action for Primary Education on student repetition found that 25 per cent of non-repeating students had attended preschool, while only 12.2 per cent of repeaters had had that opportunity.

### **Examples of Practice**

The previous section dealt with the macro issues of policy, administrative structures, funding and national statistics on the health and development of young children. This section examines how the policy on ECCE and preschooling has been developing in reality. Of particular importance is the principle of decentralization which pushes responsibilities down to the commune council levels and the decision that preschools should be funded locally, not centrally, except in areas of special hardship.

#### ***Community Preschools***

According to a report produced by the Department of Early Childhood Education 22,265 children attended community preschools in school year 2005-2006. Losert (2005) on behalf of UNICEF has produced a manual outlining all the administrative and funding procedures that should be followed in setting up a preschool, although it has nothing to say about curriculum issues. Of particular importance is the emphasis on involving all stakeholders, from Commune Council officials, to representatives of local Women and Children's Committees, to officials of local Departments of Education, parents and village chiefs and representatives. The manual outlines the needs of a preschool (e.g. suitable shelter, volunteer teacher, instructional materials, snacks for the children etc.), monitoring procedures and standards, qualifications expected of what are described as 'volunteer teachers who will be paid an incentive', the terms of the contract that such volunteers should sign, and the further training that should be provided. The overall objectives of the Community Preschools are stated as improving Grade 1 school performance and age 6 enrolments and decreasing Grade 1 drop-out rates. Grade 1 students will be evaluated at the local primary school following the preschool year.

UNICEF assisted over 900 Community preschools in 6 provinces as part of Seth Koma, its Community Action for Child Rights Programme. Preschool classes are generally held for two hours a day, five days a week, for 24 to 36 weeks a year. The teaching methodology follows the same basic routine every day to give students

a sense of predictability and security. Teachers, who are volunteers but receive a small stipend, are given training in areas related to health, nutrition and psychosocial early child development as well as various teaching methodologies. On-going training is encouraged through refresher courses, teachers meetings and the technical monitoring provided by staff from the MoEYS (information taken from a UNICEF Cambodia document on Seth Koma, 2005).

*An example – Oddar Meanchey Province joint project between UNICEF and the Provincial Office of Education (information is taken from a document produced by UNICEF/PoE, 2007).*

UNICEF has supported the Early Childhood Programme in Oddar Meanchey province since 2004. It is a shared responsibility between the Provincial Office of Women's Affairs (POWA) and the Provincial Office of Education (PoE), with the support of UNICEF/Seth Koma and UNICEF/Education working with the Commune Council. In this province in school year 2005-2006 100 per cent of children enrolled in either Community Preschools, home based preschooling or formal state preschools were successfully enrolled in Grade 1 in primary school. Home based and preschool classes have increased significantly between school years 2003-2004 and 2005-2006; from 70 to 86 for Community Preschools and 81 to 178 for home based preschooling. Children are reported to have learned well in arithmetic and language as well as hygiene and sanitation and to have done it all through child-friendly methods involving games, singing and recreational activities. However, those involved are aware that research is necessary to identify whether children who have received preschooling perform better in Grade 1 than those who have not.

The identified challenges consist of:

1. The uncertainty of financial support to teachers
2. A diminution of support from the villagers for Community Preschools after the initial enthusiasm.
3. Some of the monitoring activities of the Provincial Office of Education and the Provincial Office of Women's Affairs were not linked to the requirement to improve the functioning of classes and capacity building among teachers.
4. Many Community Preschool classes were held under teachers' houses. Such settings posed problems in terms of hygiene, lack of clean water and sanitation, and nowhere for children to play. In such circumstances some parents were afraid to send their children to school.
5. Government officials and villagers lacked faith in the sustainability of the Community Preschool programme.
6. Villagers tended to send all their children, including those less than 3 years of age, to the Community Preschool making the job of the teachers very difficult.

### **Home based Programmes**

In the National Plan (2003) home based programmes were envisaged as an important part of the structure of ECCE but were not well-conceptualized, other than to be described as 'play groups'. While the MoEYS, with UNICEF support, has recently developed and distributed a Calendar of prescribed activities for the HBP, there seems to be a lack of formal documents about home based preschooling. This is different to the situation described above for Community Preschools. However, in the previous section it will have been noted that home based classes for 3-5 year

olds in the UNICEF supported province of Oddar Meanchey increased more rapidly than Community Preschool classes, possibly because they are easier to finance. So far, however, home based preschools reach only a small number of children; 13,447 of whom 6,770 are female in school year 2005-2006, although this is an increase of 7,893 (58.69%) over school year 2004-2005 (Department of Early Childhood Education, 2006). So, for the moment at least, home based preschools are the fastest growing sector, albeit they represent a small proportion of the total pre-school provision. Two differently organized home based projects are described below to give a sense of the diversity of provision and organization.

*An example: home based preschooling in Kompong Chhnang Province* (details are from the description of the programme in an unpublished UNICEF document)

This is a project supported by Save The Children Fund with the active co-operation of the PoE. The emphasis has been on developing basic education competencies using local contexts, resources and parents' own skills and capacities. Part of the programme involved deliberately working with parents to help them understand how they could help their children to learn and assisting them to design child development activities that are comprehensive, holistic and culture-specific. In addition to activities around the home, twice a month an activity session for mothers and their children was conducted by a preschool teacher and held at a home-based centre. These sessions introduced parents to the importance of children learning to socialize with people not in their immediate family group and outside of the home, as well as giving opportunities for them to participate in group games and activities. The objectives of the project were to:

1. Provide holistic early childhood interventions, especially in disadvantaged environments, in the homes of children, by parents/caregivers, using items, events and activities in every day life, in and around the home
2. Assist parents/caregivers to use a child-friendly approach in the development of the young child

The content component in the child's home was used to encourage the development of a loving, caring, safe and secure environment, routine health habits, routine cultural habits, daily home-life activities, periodic activities such as story-telling, visits to the market, pagoda etc., special events and celebrations e.g. around the harvest, religious festivals.

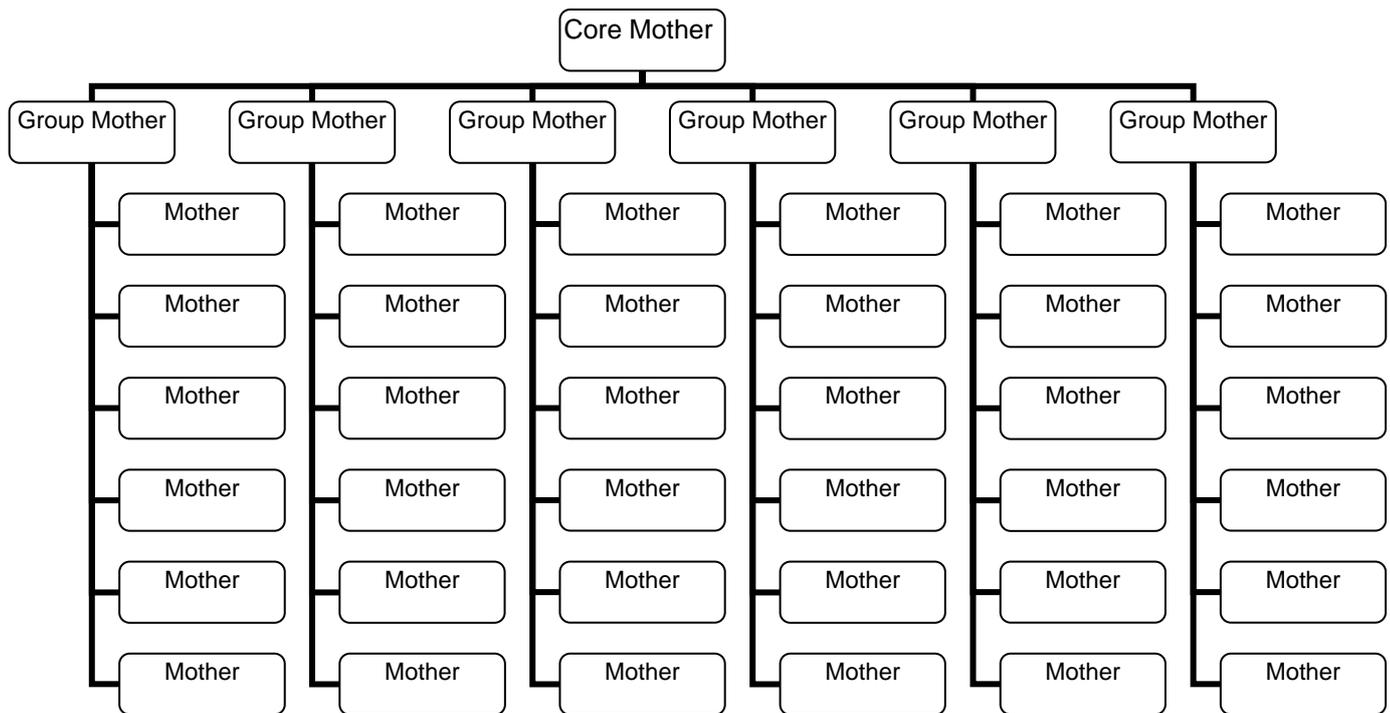
Although 'parents' are the formal targets the key player is almost always the mother. Within the project "core" mothers were identified as women with more experience, selected by villagers, but from the same villages and socio-economic circumstances as the other mothers. They received training from preschool and primary teachers and attended monthly meetings where they were given hand-outs and hands-on practice with children in homes, peer support and co-operative problem solving. They were also given 'justifications' as to why some interventions were better or worse than others so they developed a theoretical understanding of the reasons behind preferred actions. Core Mothers led groups of 3-5 mothers. The figure below illustrates the organisation of the Home-based programmes.

The programme as it is operating now has a core mother and Group mothers who assist the core mother in working with the groups. The Group mother is herself a mother with a young child and a beneficiary of the programme. The advantage of

this programme is that it required little money to run and the capital costs were zero. It is thus replicable in other poor, isolated and remote communities. It established networks of information and support between mothers and between villages and government officials from the Provincial and District Education Offices. Simple games, lessons and learning activities were developed using materials and resources easily available in the village.

Figure 1.3

The organisation of Mother Groups in the Home-based programmes



An impact study needs to be carried out on the effects that the programme had on children and adults in the community, in particular whether and how it improved children's readiness for primary school. For example, traditionally social interaction is restricted to close family members and the programme expanded their contacts. Did such exposure produce a measurable, beneficial effect on school readiness? The report also identified factors that it describes as common to the 'sullen mould of poverty' that proved to be impediments to the programme and to ensuring school readiness. Playfulness and expressions of joy were sometimes frowned on as being irresponsible. Curiosity, spontaneity, exploring, experimenting, discovering, lateral thinking were sometimes discouraged as they challenge well-established and accepted ways of behaving and thinking.

*An example: mothers' group project in Kampong Thom Province* (details are from the description of the programme in an unpublished UNICEF document)

Kampong Thom is one of the UNICEF-supported provinces but the entire province is not covered by UNICEF's preschool projects. In such areas the only classes had been for adult literacy and were run by the MOWA. Mothers attending these classes often brought their young children with them as they had no one to leave them with. Out of this grew a realization for the need for childcare 'classes'.

Ultimately a pilot project, described here, initiated by the PoE was started to fill the gap in services available to young children outside the Seth Koma coverage area in poor and remote villages. They wanted to address the developmental needs of 3-5 year olds by providing childcare activities and learning opportunities through 'mothers' groups' and began by encouraging mothers to stimulate their children by playing games with them. From that mothers began to identify other issues of importance to them, like nutrition, sanitation, income generation and cultural activities. The main objectives of the Mothers' Group Project were to:

1. Raise awareness of parents, communities and local authorities of the importance of early childhood education and development
2. Assist parents to better care for and educate their children and to reduce both physical and verbal abuse to young children
3. Educate and prepare children aged 3-5 years old for entry to formal education at Grade 1 level at age 6.

Seven such childcare classes have been established in the targeted district and are run by community volunteers known as "The Mothers". We will refer to them as Core mothers the term that is now commonly used to refer to them. 150 children are enrolled with about 20 children in each group. Classes are held between 7am and 9am, at which point mothers go to work in the fields. The PoE has provided supplies such as plastic mats, blackboards, locally made-puppets and study games to the classes. Under the core mothers' guidance the children play games, sing songs and draw to help them learn pre-reading and writing skills, numeracy and hygiene. By being with other children they also develop more advanced communication and social skills, necessary for school preparedness. Mothers' receive training and feedback through a system of monthly monitoring of their classes by Provincial and District Office of Education staff. A monthly technical meeting is also provided at a local school where mothers are taught to improve their teaching skills and to use teaching aids. In 2006, UNICEF distributed calendars with a timetable of developmental stimulation activities for children to The Mothers' groups. Initial reports suggest that mothers find them very useful.

This project has reached a large number of children who would otherwise have had no access to preschooling of any sort. Participation in the project has been an empowering experience for mothers who have acquired new skills themselves and been able to pass them on to other mothers in their villages, introducing them to the idea of children's rights and the need for Education For All at the same time.

As usual, however, there have been constraints. Insufficient supplies were provided for the Mothers' Groups as storage was a problem; the classes were generally held under the core mothers' homes in less than ideal circumstances; core mothers' were inexperienced volunteers whose teaching skills were limited by lack of training; no stipends or incentives were provided and the authors of the report comment that volunteerism is not a sustainable way to operate a childcare project; the villages were affected by a drought that severely affected their financial condition which in turn meant that local contributions to the project dried up, and participation was low. The report concludes that while villagers in marginal communities with limited income can contribute many things to this kind of project, total reliance on the locality for financing is precarious. Ways need to be found to encourage greater

community participation in and ownership of the outcomes of childcare and learning activities.

It is obvious from these examples that much can be achieved without a large infusion of outside funds. But it is equally obvious that without some additional funding such projects are unstable. In addition the reliance on volunteers who already have many demands on their time as wives, mothers and farmers with no recompense is almost certainly a limiting factor. It also remains to be seen how effective these home based projects are in preparing children for school and for preventing high drop out rates. Evidence from India suggests that even quite basic preschool programmes that are not well resourced by international standards can achieve a great deal (Rao & Li, 2007). Both these projects have been guided by major international NGOs (UNICEF and Save The Children Fund) and doubtless their expertise and enthusiasm have been vital in providing momentum to start and continue home based preschooling in the villages. However, as the report on The Mothers' Group makes plain, unless the local community is able to own and sustain that momentum, the future for such home based schooling may not be rosy.

### **Recent Initiatives**

In considering early childhood programmes and policy, it should be noted that the Cambodian government has initiated two projects. The first one, the School Readiness Programme, was designed to compensate for children's lack of access to ECCE programmes prior to school entry while the second one is designed to enhance children's readiness for primary school. Each of these will be considered briefly.

The MoEYS developed and implemented a very successful School Readiness programme. This 8-week programme, which was established in 2004 – 2005, and designed for children who have had no preschool experience, is offered at the beginning of Grade 1 in primary schools. The goal of the programme is to reduce the high rates of primary school repetition and drop out and increase student achievement. Evaluations indicate that the programme has been successful in meeting its objectives. The programme has now been expanded to cover a longer period in Grade 1

Another relatively recent development in Cambodia that has implications for the curriculum and instruction in ECCE programmes is the development of the Cambodian Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS). These fall into the following 5 domains: Physical and Health Development; Moral and Cultural Development; Social and Emotional Development; Cognition and Reasoning; and Language Development. The MoEYS is responsible for documents and curriculum for all ECCE programmes and it is currently revising the curriculum for all ECCE programmes so that it will be aligned with the ELDS, which were finalised in August 2007. Hence, all 5-year-old children in Cambodia, regardless of whether they attend the SPS, CPS or HBP will shortly have access to the same basic curriculum.

### **Summary**

EFA policies at the central level unequivocally support the need for ECCE as a means to improve the health, well-being and school readiness of children below 6 years. These policies are framed to be inclusive of all disadvantaged children,

particularly those in extreme poverty, girls, children with a disability and those from ethnic minorities. At the moment, Cambodian children have some of the worst health indices in the East Asia and Pacific region, including stunting and severe malnutrition as well as high mortality rates. The government accepts that children who are underfed and understimulated are unlikely to make the transition to Grade 1 in primary school successfully. This accounts for the very high levels of drop-outs and grade repetitions that are common in Cambodia. On average it takes 10.8 years for a child to complete 6 years of primary school.

In school year 1998-1999 only around 6 per cent of children received any preschooling. In school year 2005-2006 it was estimated to be 11.97 per cent for children between 3 and 5 years and 27 per cent for children between 5 and 6 years. The government's target is to ensure that 50 per cent of all 3-5 year olds are in some kind of preschool by 2010, a figure they wish to increase to 75 per cent by 2014. Preschooling includes Home-based programmes, Community Preschools and State Preschools which are typically attached to primary schools. The organization is perceived to require a multiplicity of stakeholders involving many government ministries as well as NGOs, Commune Councils, villagers and parents. Funding is an issue. Whereas the government accepts responsibility for funding free primary school education for all, it anticipates that most of the funding for preschools will have to be generated locally. The only funding responsibility that it accepts is for those children from the very poorest communities. This will not increase the central budget for preschool as the government intends shifting its funding from formal state preschools (attached to primary schools) to the poorest sector. Parents with children in formal state preschools will be expected to pay for their child's preschooling. While much has been written in various reports about bureaucratic procedures concerning the structures of formal organizations involved in providing preschooling, funding models and monitoring procedures, very little emphasis has been given to the integration of health improvement strategies (like state funded supplementary feeding programmes) into preschooling contexts. It is only recently that attention has been directed to the curriculum of ECCE programmes.

There are a number of successful models of preschools, often supported by major international NGOs (e.g. UNICEF and Save the Children Fund). They demonstrate that much can be achieved with simple facilities and basic resources in the villages. However, they tend to report the same problems regarding lack of funds, unqualified/untrained teachers and difficulties in sustaining momentum. Some also identified that parents and villagers were not wholly in sympathy with some of the goals and strategies of preschooling which contradicted traditional beliefs.

If the momentum generated by the identification at the national level of ECCE as an important foundation for education is to be sustained, it is vital to demonstrate through properly conducted research that the programmes being implemented are producing the desired outcomes. Are children who have experienced preschooling better prepared for primary school, as demonstrated by an increase in enrolments at the appropriate age, by fewer drop outs and fewer repetitions of grades? Does the kind of preschooling make a difference to outcome? Are Community Preschools more effective as well as more expensive or does home based preschooling produce

a similar outcome more cheaply? The research described in the following chapters addresses these questions.

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## Chapter Two

### Description of Research Methods and Procedures

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this study was to evaluate early childhood care and education policies and programmes in Cambodia. We were interested in both the macro and micro factors which influenced the form and implementation of early childhood programmes hence we used multiple methods and sources in our data collection strategy.

We felt that it was necessary to understand the contextual background of early childhood education in Cambodia prior to conducting an empirical study. Hence, we began by conducting a documentary analysis of national and state educational policy priorities and policy implementation. Further, the consultants, NR and EP had several opportunities to learn about ECCE in Cambodia from their discussions with MoEYS and UNICEF personnel prior to the study as they had been involved in the development of Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) in Cambodia. The results of the documentary analyses, which are presented in Chapter 1, enabled a better understanding of the role of the state and International NGOs on early childhood policy and practice.

The major objectives of the empirical study were to:

- (i) Assess the effectiveness of the Community Preschool (CPS) and Home-based programmes (HBP) on school readiness developmental outcomes for children who are/have been in these different types of early childhood programmes;
- (ii) Observe early care and education practices in CPS and in HBP and assess the extent to which various practices influence children's school readiness;
- (iii) Discern the perceptions of key stakeholders (teachers, parents, commune officials, policy makers) on how the CPS and HBP are currently being implemented; and
- (iv) Make recommendations for the future improvement of the CPS and HB programmes and suggest strategies that will contribute to improved effectiveness and sustainability of these programmes.

As mentioned earlier, the study also had some secondary objectives that are associated with UNICEF-supported projects. The attainment of the secondary objectives will be considered separately in UNICEF evaluations of this project. This chapter specifies the methods and procedures used to meet the primary objectives.

#### Objective 1

*Assess the effectiveness of the Community Preschool (CPS) and Home-based programmes (HBP) on school readiness developmental outcomes for children who are/have been in these different types of early childhood programmes.*

The study was conducted in the following six UNICEF supported provinces: Kampong Speu (KS), Kampong Thom (KT), Oddar Meanchey (OMC), Prey Veng (PV), Svay Rieng (SR) and Stung Treng (ST). A randomly selected sample of children from CPS (n = 548), HBP (n = 292) and those not in school (n = 352) from the 6 UNICEF supported provinces was assessed. Additional children from L3

preschool classes in one state preschool in each province were assessed ( $n = 120$ ) to form a comparison group. Hence, a total of 1312 5-year-old children ( $M = 64.12$  months,  $SD = 2.24$ ) were administered a test which assessed developmental functioning and school readiness in October/November 2006, at the beginning of the school year. The same children were assessed again in late May/June 2007 towards the end of the school year. There were no significant age or sex differences across programmes or provinces at the pre-test. At the time of the post-test, it was possible to locate and assess only 1184 of the original 1312 children. Attrition from the different provinces was as follows: KS - 10 children, KT - 9 children, PV - 33 children; OMC - 44 children; ST - 9 children and SR - 23 children. Attrition from the different programmes was as follows: SPS 20 children; CPS – 53 children; HBP 17 children and Control group – 38. The attrition rate was 9.75 per cent. Table 2.1 provides details about the sample.

Table 2.1

Number of children in the 6 provinces who were assessed in the pre-test and post-test

		Community Preschool	Home-based Programme	Control group	State Preschool	Total
Kampong Speu	Pre-test	103	53	75	20	251
	Post-test	100	51	72	18	241
Kampong Thom	Pre-test	107	21	30	20	178
	Post-test	103	19	30	17	169
Oddar Meanchey	Pre-test	94	43	62	20	219
	Post-test	81	37	42	15	175
Prey Veng	Pre-test	104	32	66	20	222
	Post-test	87	29	59	14	189
Svay Rieng	Pre-test	66	77	75	20	232
	Post-test	55	67	70	17	209
Stung Treng	Pre-test	74	72	44	20	210
	Post-test	69	72	41	19	201
Total	Pre-test	548 (315)	292 (163)	352 (194)	120 (70)	1312 (742)
	Post-test	495 (282)	275 (153)	314 (177)	100 (56)	1184 (668)

Note. The number in brackets indicates the number of girls.

### Rationale for Sampling Plan and Sampling Methods

As mentioned in Chapter 1, in 2005-2006 27.27 per cent of 5- to 6-year-olds in Cambodia receive some sort of preschool services (State Preschool: 21.23 per cent; Private Preschool: 1.43 per cent; Community Preschools: 2.96 per cent; and Home-based Programmes 0.84 per cent). State Preschool provision for all children is desirable but is not financially viable in the Cambodian context. Hence the brief of this study was to consider the issues related to the functioning of Community

Preschools and Home-based Programmes and to make recommendations about the scaling up of these programmes. As state preschool services were not a major focus of this study, we selected only 20 children from a state preschool in each province to form a comparison group. We assumed that the inputs to state preschools would be similar, regardless of location. State preschools are typically attached to primary schools, have proper classrooms facilities, adequate teaching and learning materials and professionally qualified teachers.

We expected more variability in the functioning of Community Preschools and Home-based programmes. Hence we used a process of stratified random sampling to select CPS and HBP. Randomisation was done at the district, commune, village and programme levels, respectively.

### ***Selection of Districts***

The number of districts in the provinces studied varied from 5 to 12 and UNICEF supports a varying number of districts in the 6 provinces we studied. Table 2.2 provides information about the districts, communes and villages sampled.

Table 2.2

Number of Districts, Communes and Villages Sampled for the Study

Province	Total No. of Districts	No. of UNICEF Supported Districts	No. of Districts Sampled	No. of Communes in Districts sampled	Number of villages sampled
Kampong Speu	8	3	5	17	38
Kampong Thom	8	4	6	19	33
Oddar Meanchey	5	5	3	10	35
Prey Veng	12	3	4	11	35
Svay Rieng	7	5	5	16	33
Stung Treng	5	5	4	13	31

UNICEF supports 3 of 8 districts in Kampong Speu (KS); 4 of 8 districts in Kampong Thom (KT); 5 of 5 districts in Oddar Meanchey (OMC); 3 of 12 districts in Prey Veng (PV); 5 of 5 districts in Stung Treng (ST) and 5 of 7 districts in Svay Reing (SR). For each province, a list of all the communes and villages in each of these UNICEF-supported districts was obtained from the PoE-ECE Department for the province. In SR, participants were from all five UNICEF-supported districts. In OMC, participants were from 3 out of 5 randomly selected UNICEF-supported districts while in ST participants were from 4 out of 5 randomly selected UNICEF-supported districts. In KS, KT, PV participants were from all UNICEF-supported districts and either 1 or 2 other districts. We sampled from non-UNICEF supported districts to ensure that we had enough children for the control and home-based programmes. For example, in the case of PV, 3 children in the control group were from a non-UNICEF supported district and in KT 10 children in the HBP and 20 children in the control group were from non-UNICEF supported districts.

#### **Selection of Communes**

Once districts had been selected, the next step was to randomly select communes in the district. Depending on the number of communes in the district, every second or third commune on the list was chosen.

#### **Selection of Villages**

After selecting the communes, depending on the number of villages in the commune, every second, third or fifth village in the commune with a CPS was selected.

#### **Selection of Programmes**

We selected all villages in the commune with CPS and HBP. To the largest extent possible, we also selected control group children from these same villages. However, many children in the control group were from villages where there was no

early childhood programme. It should be pointed out that only 2.4 per cent of children who did the pre-test were from villages that had more than one form of ECCE programme (SPS, CPS and HBP). Most villages had only one form of programme. If there was an early childhood programme in the village parents tended to enrol their child in the programmes. State Preschool Programmes were also in villages in selected communes.

### ***Selection of Children***

All 5-year-old children in the selected programmes were administered a test of developmental functioning.

### ***Developmental Assessment***

A contextually relevant measure was developed and used to assess children's school readiness developmental outcomes. As part of UNICEF's "Going Global" project (Kagan & Britto, 2005) Ministries of Education in the region have been supported by UNICEF to develop culturally and contextually appropriate Early Learning and Developmental Standards (ELDS). As mentioned in Chapter 1, Cambodia is one of the first countries in the East Asia and Pacific Region to develop their ELDS and the first country in the region to have conducted studies to validate these. The Cambodian Developmental Assessment Test (CDAT) was developed for this study based on the Cambodian ELDS. A few items, adapted from the McCarthy Test of Children's Abilities (McCarthy, 1972), were added to get more information about children's School Readiness Competencies. The CDAT is administered in individual sessions and takes about 30 minutes to complete. It contains 30 items which tap General Knowledge (6), Gross-motor Skills (3), Fine-motor Skills (3), Pre-academic concepts (6), Memory (2), Reasoning (3), Life Skills (2), and Language (5). The administration and scoring guides are in Appendix A.

### ***Examiners***

The developmental assessment was conducted by senior and experienced specialists in Early Childhood Education from the MoEYS. The research team included 6 PoE-ECE Directors from the 6 provinces and 6 senior ECE specialists from the MoEYS in Phnom Penh. All the examiners had been involved in the development of the ELDS and received extensive training on the administration of the test prior to the pre-test assessment. Inter-rater reliability was established prior to the pre-test and was over .95 prior to the post-test. The examiners worked as a cohesive team under the leadership of the MoEYS and UNICEF in Phnom Penh. The team engaged in collaborative problem-solving and worked with the first author throughout the study.

### ***Procedure***

In teams of 3 to 4 persons, examiners went to the selected villages and conducted the pre-test and post-test assessments. They did not necessarily work in the same province during the two phases and were blind to the child's initial pre-test scores. During the post-test, the examiners interviewed mothers or another family member to obtain standard demographic details, information about the child's preschool history, maternal and paternal education levels, maternal and paternal occupation and information about the child's siblings. The relevant questions are in Appendix A.

## **Objective 2**

*Observe early care and education practices in Community Preschools and in Home-based Programmes and assess the extent to which various practices influence children's school readiness.*

### **Community Preschools**

This objective was met in 2 stages. First, the investigators randomly selected a village that had a CPS using a table of random numbers. The CPS teachers were either not informed of this visit or only informed about the visit the evening before it took place. One of the consultants, NR or EP went to the CPS a little before 7.00 am and watched the entire preschool class for 2 hours taking notes about all aspects of the programmes but focused on the physical setting, curriculum, teaching and learning approaches. The teacher was interviewed to obtain information about her academic and professional background and to discern her beliefs about early childhood education. She was also asked about the technical support she received and about the monitoring of the programme.

In Stage 2, the PoE-ECE Directors completed the Cambodian Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (CECERS), which was developed for the study, for a total of 18 CPS. The CECERS is based on the Tamil Nadu Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (TECERS) (Isley, 2000) and has been found to have adequate psychometric properties in studies in Bangladesh and India (Aboud, 2004; M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, 2000). A copy of the CECERS is in Appendix B.

The research team received intensive training in the administration and scoring of the CECERS during workshops. The test is scored based on observation over a 2-day period.

Three children from three CPS in each province were chosen based on their scores on the pre-test (highest, middle and lowest scores on the CDAT). The PoE-ECE directors were requested to assess the programmes in their provinces in which these 18 children were enrolled. They were blind to the children's pre-test scores and did not know why the three children were selected.

### **Home-based programmes**

One of the consultants met mothers from the HBP that was closest to the CPS selected in Stage 1 above. The nature of the HBP is such that mothers implement the activities at home and we could not observe the programme, per se. However, we met with the core and group mothers who were at the regular meeting place with their children and asked them to explain how they implemented suggested activities at home. This was done in order to gain an understanding of their perceptions and reported implementation of the programme.

### **State Preschool**

Once again, we chose the SPS closest to the CPS selected in Stage 1. Children from this study were not necessarily enrolled in this SPS as we assumed, as mentioned earlier, that inputs to SPS would be similar across the provinces as the programme is centrally funded and managed. For the 6 SPS visited in Stage 1, we observed at least one full lesson paying particular attention to the physical environment, curriculum, teaching and learning approaches and assessment.

## **Objective 3**

*Discern the perceptions of key stakeholders (teachers, parents, commune officials, policy makers) on how the CPS and HBP are currently being implemented.*

As mentioned above (Objective 2, Stage 1) we randomly selected a village that had a CPS in each province using a table of random numbers. In this village, we interviewed the Village Chief (VC). We then interviewed the relevant Commune Chief (CC) and Commune Council Focal Point for Women and Children (CCFPWC). These stakeholders were interviewed using a standard protocol to ascertain their perceptions of the Early Childhood Programmes in their village or commune. The questions are shown in Appendix C.

We interviewed teachers/core-mothers of the SPS, CPS and HBP in the selected village in communes. The questions are also shown in Appendix C. Mothers whose children participated in HBP participated in focus groups that addressed their perceptions of the early childhood services their children were receiving and other forms of service. We focused on their views of how the curriculum was being implemented and their perceptions of the value of the different components of the HBP curriculum in supporting school readiness skills

At the Provincial Level, we interviewed the PoE-ECE Director, in an individual session, and the Director of the Provincial Department of Women's Affairs (POWA) and Provincial Local Administrative Unit (PLAU) or their representatives together.

At the national level, the investigators had many opportunities to discuss ECE programmes with the Director of the Department of ECE at the MoEYS and senior ECE specialists in the department. These conversations, which took place in both formal and informal sessions, allowed us to discern policymakers' perception of ECCE, their priorities and the challenges and opportunities related to the scaling up of early childhood programmes.

We also conducted informal interviews with UNICEF staff at the Country and Provincial offices who had been involved in supporting the government to develop and implement early childhood policy and programmes. These interviews, which were conducted throughout the course of the study, helped in the interpretation of the findings

#### **Objective 4**

*Make recommendations for the future improvement of the CPS and HBP and suggest strategies that will contribute to improved effectiveness and sustainability of these programmes.*

Our impressions of the programmes are based on data collected using a rigorous research design and systematically collected empirical data. We also worked very closely with experts who had local knowledge. That said, it must be acknowledged that we are outsiders and there may be instances where our impressions are incorrect. Our conclusions and recommendations based on tests and interviews are presented in the following chapters.

Another objective stated in the Terms of Reference for this study is to "Assess the transfer of children from preschool to primary school in Grade 1 at age 6". This information is not available at the time of writing this report and will only be available in late 2007. Data on how many children from the different programmes started Grade 1 on time is necessary and if these children are being up to June 2008 to see if any children have to repeat Grade 1.

### **Data Analyses Procedures**

Quantitative data were used to assess programme impact and were analysed using a pre-post design. Both quantitative and qualitative data were used to compare and describe settings for early childhood care and education. Interview data were transcribed and common themes were extracted.

#### ***Quantitative Data on Programme Impact***

Quantitative data were gathered by administering the CDAT at the beginning and end of the academic year. Findings from the CDAT provided the comparative effects of the programmes. Statistical tests applied to quantitative data yielded four analytic outcomes:

- Assessment of *initial* group differences for the entire study and for sub-groups
- Assessment of *final* group differences for the entire study and for sub-groups
- Assessment of the net effect of pre-school intervention on school readiness
- Assessment of the comparative effect the two preschool programmes had on school readiness

Table 2.3 provides a summary of how CDAT data that were collected at different points in time, within different programmatic contexts, were used to produce these four analytic outcomes.

Table 2.3  
Framework for Analysis of Quantitative Data

Measurement Point	Programme Type		Analytic Outcomes
	Home-based	Community	
<b>Pre</b> Start of school year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group mean</li> <li>• Sub-group mean</li> <li>• Standard deviations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group mean</li> <li>• Sub-group mean</li> <li>• Standard deviations</li> </ul>	Assessment of initial group differences for the entire study and for sub-groups
<b>Post</b> End of school year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group mean</li> <li>• Sub-group mean</li> <li>• Standard deviations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group mean</li> <li>• Sub-group mean</li> <li>• Standard deviations</li> </ul>	Assessment of final group differences for the entire study and for sub-groups
<b>Programme Impact</b> (Pre) – (Post) = Impact Test for effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall effect of home based programme</li> <li>• Effect of home based programme on subgroups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall effect of community programme</li> <li>• Effect of community programme on subgroups</li> </ul>	Assessment of the net effect* of pre-school programmes on school readiness  *net effect = pre–post scores for DFI

### **Prediction of Child Outcomes**

We used Multiple Regression Analysis to examine the best predictors of developmental functioning.

### **Observational Data**

Systematic observations of the CPS yielded both quantitative and qualitative data. Frequencies, means and standard deviations were calculated for the Cambodian Early Childhood Environmental Scale (CECERS). Qualitative data were transcribed and analysed to identify commonalities and distinctions across the preschools.

### **Interview Data**

Interview data were transcribed and recurrent themes were identified. Comparisons were made of issues raised and responses made by policy makers, government officials, community figures, teachers and parents.

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### Chapter Three

#### Impact of Programmes on Child Development

The Cambodian Developmental Test (CDAT) was administered to all participating children at the beginning and the end of the 2006 – 07 academic year. This test, developed specifically for this study, was designed to provide a developmentally and culturally appropriate index of children's developmental functioning.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, 1312 children took the pre-test but only 1184 completed the post-test. There were no significant differences between children who dropped out of the study and those for whom we also had post-test data and the attrition rate of 10 per cent (n =128) is acceptable. This report focuses on children for whom we have both pre-test and post-test data. Among these 1183 children, only 1019 children stayed in the same programme and did not attend any other programme at the time of the post-test. Against the background of the objectives of this study, i.e., to examine the influence of participation in ECCE programmes on children's school readiness developmental outcomes, we only present statistical analyses of the data from these 1019 children. The other 164 children started an additional programme (n = 156, including 69 in primary school), dropped out of the programme (n = 6) or started 2 additional programmes. The data from one child are incomplete.

Details about programme status at pre-test and post-test are shown in Table 3.1. Among the 1019 children, 99, 452, 199 and 269 children attended the SPS, CPS, HBP or no programmes, respectively and did not change their group status during the study. Among children who were in the control group at the pre-test, 3 started attending SPS, 7 started attending CPS, 9 started receiving the HBP and 24 were enrolled in primary school by the time of the post-test. The fact that 43 children from the control group started receiving educational services is important and in line with efforts to increase access to early childhood services. Given the age of the children, it is not surprising that some of them started primary school. Children from the HBP and the control group were more likely to have a change in the type of early childhood service they received than children from the other two groups.

Table 3.1

Programme(s) attended by children at pre-test and post-test

		Post-test Programme				
		SPS	CPS	HBP	Control	Primary School
Pre-test Programme	SPS	99	1		5	27
	CPS	1	452	9	0	0
	HBP	25	32	199	1	18
	Control	3	7	9	269	24

Note. Two children were attending 2 additional programmes by the time of the post-test.

Table 3.2 shows the number of children from the different provinces and the number of girls attending each programme across province.

Table 3.2

## Children's Participation in Programmes across Provinces

	SPS	CPS	HBP	Control	Total
Province					
Kampong Speu	18	97	39	72	226
Girls	7	61	21	40	129
Kampong Thom	17	102	19	21	159
Girls	11	53	12	14	90
Prey Veng	14	73	16	42	145
Girls	7	41	9	23	80
Oddar Meanchey	14	77	14	39	144
Girls	7	41	8	21	77
Stung Treng	19	67	59	40	185
Girls	9	38	32	20	99
Svay Rieng	17	36	52	55	160
Girls	14	19	34	35	102
Total	99	452	199	269	1019
No. of Girls (%)	55 (55)	253 (56)	116 (58)	153 (57)	577 (57)

### Statistical Analyses

#### Pre-test Scores

The first set of statistical analyses considered the initial equivalence of pre-test CDAT total scores across age, gender, province, and programme type.

An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with gender and age as between subject factors and pre-test CDAT scores as the dependent variable indicated that the main effects of age and gender and the Gender X Age interaction were not significant. Hence the data for boys and girls were pooled together for subsequent analyses.

An ANOVA with programme (4) and province (6) as between subject factors and pre-test CDAT scores as the dependent variable indicated that the main effects of programme,  $(3, 1011) = 51.9, p < .000$ , Province  $F(5, 1011) = 13.05, p < .000$  and the Programme X Province interaction  $F(15, 1011) = 3.28, p < .000$  were significant. From a technical perspective a significant Programme X Province interaction signals that we should not focus on the main effects of either programme or province alone but that we should look at the differences in programme effects across provinces.

Figure 3.1

## Pre-test CDAT Scores across Programmes and Provinces

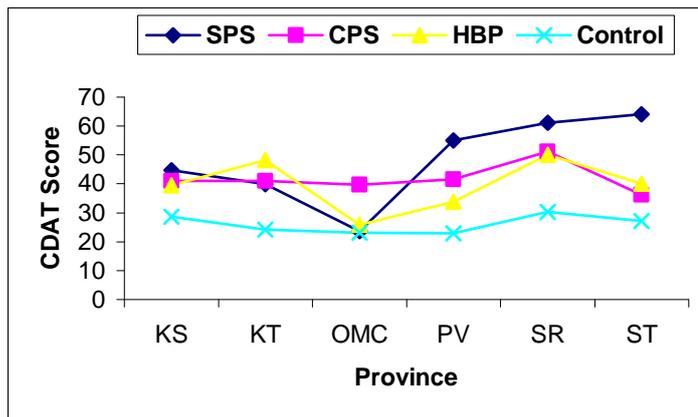
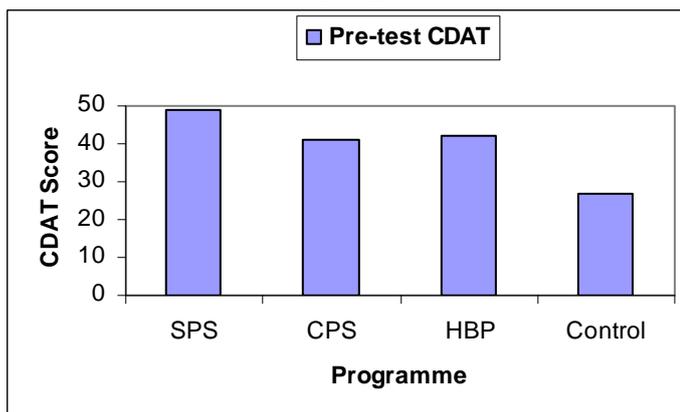


Figure 3.1 shows that the three programmes groups did better than the control group in all provinces except for Oddar Meanchey. Further children in Svay Rieng had significantly higher scores than children in three other provinces. The findings from these provinces have most probably led to significant Programme X Province interaction effects. When the statistical tests were re-done without the data from these provinces, there were no significant differences across provinces in pre-test CDAT scores and the Province X Programme interaction was no longer significant. This suggests that characteristics of Oddar Meanchey (for example, its remoteness) and the particular characteristics of the SPS there may have caused these findings. It has been reported that interventions in Svay Rieng have been successful in the past and the high scores in this province may be due to community mobilization efforts.

### Programmes

Figure 3.2

Pre-test CDAT scores across programmes



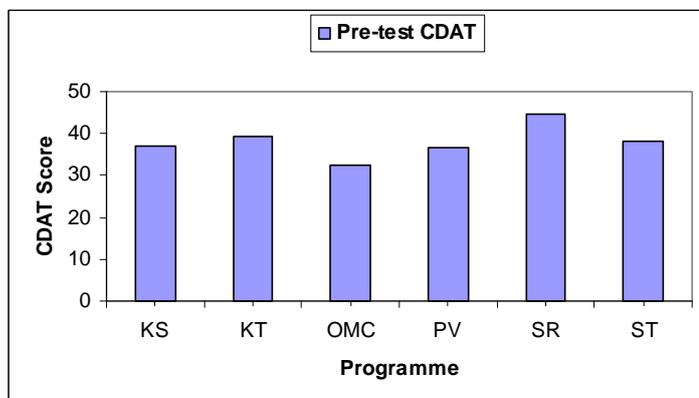
Follow-up multiple comparisons using Scheffe's Test indicated that the SPS ( $\bar{M} = 48.9$ ), CPS ( $\bar{M} = 40.94$ ), and HBP ( $\bar{M} = 41.96$ ) groups had significantly higher pre-test CDAT total scores than the Control group ( $\bar{M} = 26.69$ ) and that children in

the SPS had significantly higher pre-test scores than children in CPS and HBP groups.

### **Provinces**

Figure 3.3

Pre-test CDAT scores across provinces



Follow-up multiple comparisons using Scheffe's Test indicated that the mean pre-test score for Svay Rieng ( $M = 48.17$ ) was significantly higher than Prey Veng ( $M = 38.3$ ) Kampong Speu ( $M = 38.5$ ) and Oddar Meanchey ( $M = 28.11$ ). Further the mean pre-test scores for Kampong Thom ( $M = 38.29$ ) were significantly higher than Oddar Meanchey. No other differences were statistically significant.

### **Summary and Impressions**

There were significant differences among children in the different programmes at the time of the pre-test. Children in all three programme groups (SPS, CPS, and HBP) had higher scores than children in the control group and children in the SPS had significantly higher pre-test scores than children in CPS and HBP. Children in Svay Rieng did significantly better than those from three other provinces while children in Kampong Thom did better than children from Oddar Meanchey.

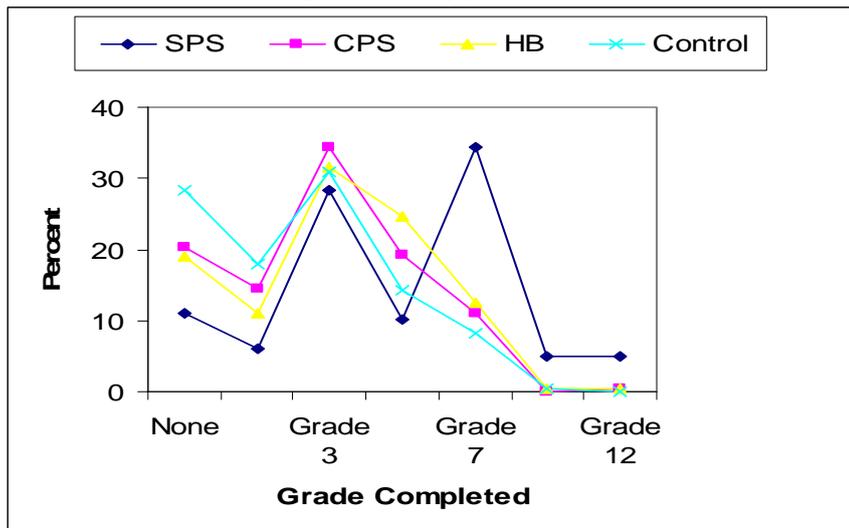
There are several possible reasons for significant programme and province differences in pre-test scores. These include the interdependent factors of where the child lives, maternal education and preschool history. Each of these reasons will be discussed in turned.

**Where the child lives.** From our interviews and observations, it appeared that parents would use preschool services (SPS, CPS, HBP) if they existed near their homes. As noted earlier, all the children in the SPS and CPS groups lived in villages that had these programmes and 180 of the 196 children in the HBP lived in villages that had these programmes. On the other hand, all the control children lived in villages where there were no services. These villages tended to be remote (perhaps more economically disadvantaged) and therefore children may have had less exposure and developmental stimulation than children in less remote areas. Parents use preschool services when they exist. However, efforts should be made to encourage parents to participate in these services and develop knowledge about child development and children's developmental needs. This will enable children to attain their full potential and empower parents to be advocates for children's needs and rights.

**Maternal Education.** There was a significant relationship between maternal education level and the type of programme attended by the child. Among mothers of children who went to SPS, only 11 per cent had no education. About 20 per cent of mothers of children from the CPS and HBP had no education but 28 per cent of mothers of children from the control group had no education. As seen in the figure below, mothers of children in the control group had lower education levels than children in the other groups.

Figure 3.4

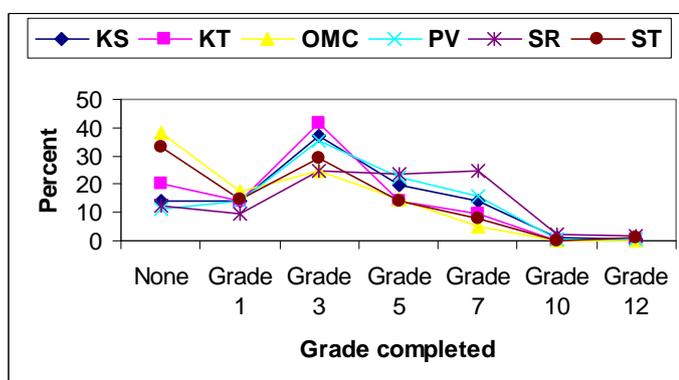
Maternal Education and Programme Type



Mothers who live in remote areas tend to be less well educated than other mothers and their children were more likely to be in the control group. This may reflect the educational opportunities available in remote areas for both mothers and their children. These children, as discussed later, had the lowest pre-test CDAT scores and this finding has implications for providing services for excluded and vulnerable children.

Figure 3.5

Maternal Education Levels across Provinces



As shown in Figure 3.4 above, mothers who lived in Oddar Meanchey and Stung Treng had the lowest education levels compared to the other groups. In Oddar Meanchey, 56 per cent of mothers had no formal education or had only completed Grade 1. The comparable figure for Stung Treng was 48 per cent.

**Preschool History.** The majority of children in the SPS, CPS, and HBP had early childhood education the year before they were assessed at pre-test. Among children in the SPS, 44 per cent had attended the SPS and 11 per cent attended the CPS in the previous academic year (05-06). Among children in the CPS, 67 per cent had attended the CPS in the previous year and 72 per cent of children in the HBP had received services the previous year. None of the children in the control group had received early childhood services in the previous year. The percent of children in the different provinces with preschool experience in 05-06 are as follows: Kampong Speu 57 per cent; Kampong Thom 57 per cent; Oddar Meanchey 41 per cent, Prey Veng 37 per cent; Svay Rieng 46 per cent; and Stung Treng 58 per cent.

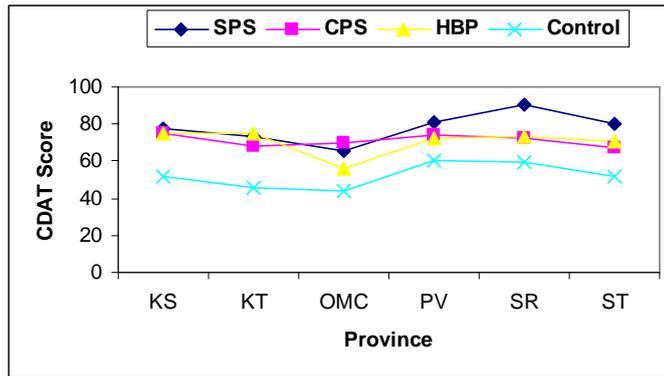
A one-way ANOVA with prior preschool experience (4) as the between-subject factor and pre-test scores as the dependent variable indicated that preschool experience in the prior year was significant,  $F(3, 1007) = 29.62, p < .000$ . Children who attended SPS in the previous year ( $M = 56.96$ ) had significantly higher pre-test scores than those who attended either the CPS ( $M = 41.3$ ) or the HBP ( $M = 41.91$ ) in the previous year. Given the higher quality of the SPS and the fact that 55 per cent percent of children had preschool education, it is perhaps not surprising that children in the SPS group had significantly higher pre-test scores. Children who had no preschool experience in the previous year had the lowest pre-test CDAT scores ( $M = 33.41$ ). Children who attended the CPS and HBP also had significantly higher scores than children in the control group. However, even when the effects of preschool history are statistically controlled, the effects of programme and province are still significant. This may be because the programme type and preschool history are significantly related and suggests that preschool history does not have to be treated as a covariate.

### **Post-test Scores**

An ANOVA with programme (4) and province (6) as between subject factors and CDAT post-test scores as the dependent variable indicated that the main effects of programme  $F(3, 1007) = 107.96, p < .000$ , province  $F(5, 1007) = 13.05, p < .000$  and the Programme X Province interaction  $F(15, 1007) = 2.76, p < .000$  were significant.

Figure 3.6

Post-test Developmental Test Scores across Programmes and Provinces



### Post-test Developmental Test Scores across Programmes and Provinces *Programmes*

Follow-up multiple comparisons using Scheffe's Test indicated that the SPS ( $\bar{M} = 78.12$ ), CPS ( $\bar{M} = 71$ ), and HBP groups (70) had significantly higher post-test CDAT total scores than the control group ( $\bar{M} = 52.07$ ) and that children in the SPS had significantly higher pre-test scores than children in CPS and HBP. A similar pattern of results emerged for both pre-test and post-test CDAT scores.

Figure 3.7

Post-test CDAT scores across Programmes

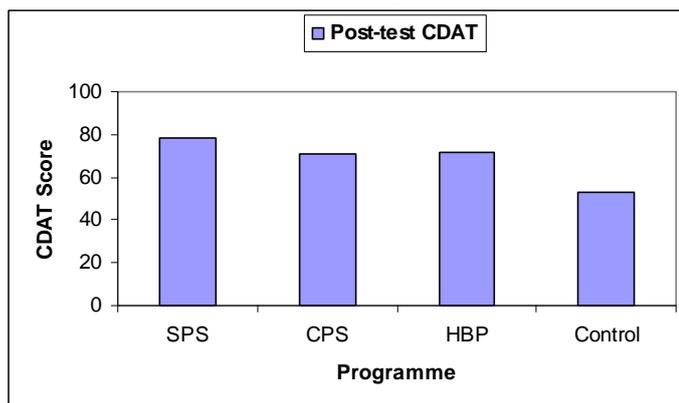
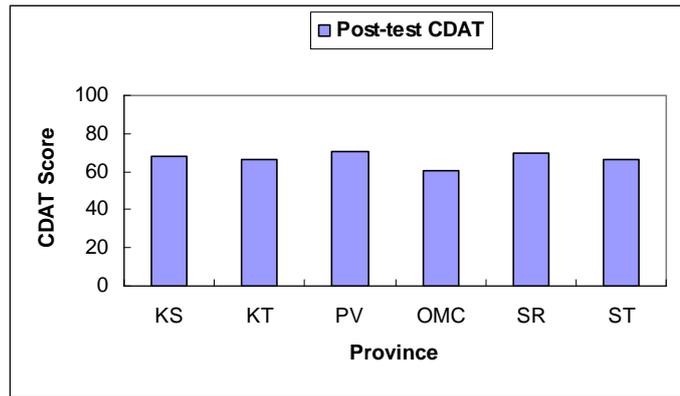


Figure 3.8

Post-test Developmental Test Scores across Provinces



### Provinces

Follow-up multiple comparisons using Scheffe's Test indicated that the mean post-test score for Oddar Meanchey ( $M = 60.83$ ) was significantly lower than Prey Veng ( $M = 70.6$ ) and Svay Rieng ( $M = 70.03$ ). No other differences were statistically significant. Compared to the pre-test, the differences across provinces were less marked at post-test. This suggests that if early childhood services are provided during the year before primary school, they may decrease the variability in children's developmental functioning when they start primary school.

### Assessment of Programme Impact

The final set of statistical tests was conducted to assess the influence of programme impact. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with programme (4) and province (6) as between-subject factors, time (2) as the within-subject factor and pre-test CDAT and post-test CDAT scores as dependent variables indicated that the main effects of time  $F(3, 975) = 1959.41, p < .000$ , the Time X Programme Interaction  $F(3, 975) = 2.62, p < .05$ , the Time X Province interaction  $F(5, 975) = 3.17, p < .001$  and the Time X Programme X Province interaction  $F(15, 975) = 3.15, p < .000$  were all significant. Since there was a Time X Programme X Province interaction, it is necessary to discuss the effects of programmes in each province separately. The figures below show the pre-test and post-test scores across programmes and provinces.

Figure 3.9

Pre-test and Post-test Developmental Test Scores across Programmes and Provinces

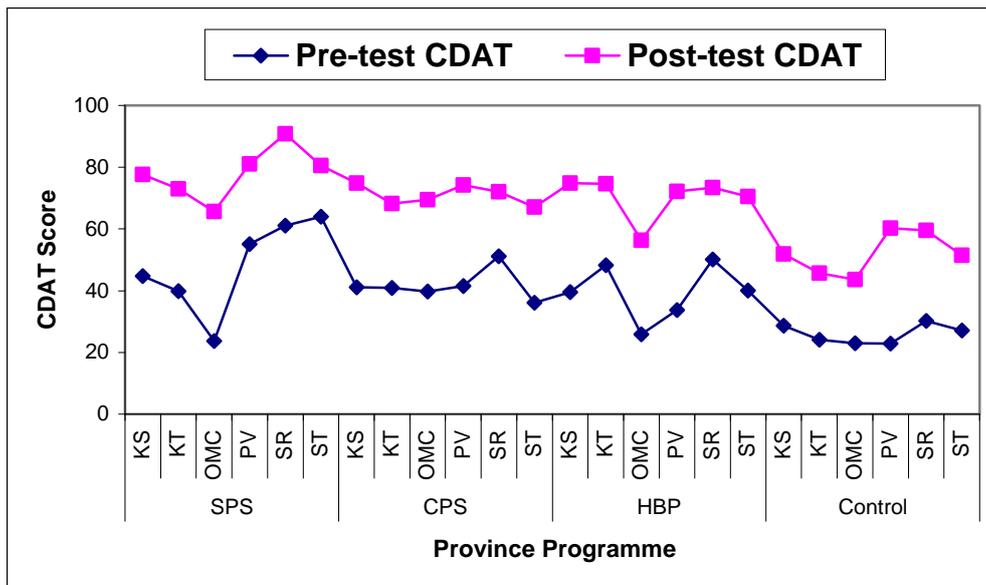


Figure 3.10  
Pre-test and Post-test Developmental Test Scores across Programmes

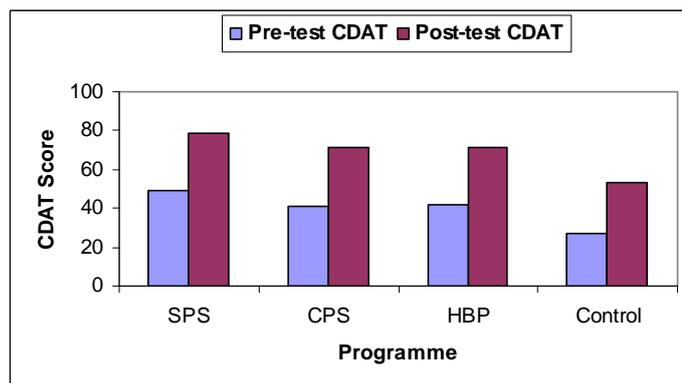
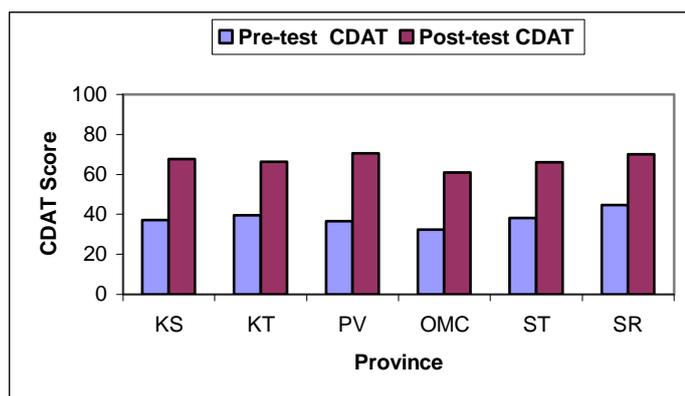


Figure 3.11  
Pre-test and Post-test Developmental Test Scores across Provinces



The figures show that all children increased their CDAT scores from pre-test to post-test. The fact that children in the control group also significantly improved confirms that the CDAT is a developmental test, as children's scores increase as they mature. During the pre-test, children from the control group in all provinces did less well than those who attended any type of programme. Apart from children in Oddar Meanchey and Kampong Thom, children from SPS did better than children from all other groups and children from CPS and HBP did better than children in the control group in all provinces. As noted earlier, the low scores of SPS children in Oddar Meanchey may be a function of the particular state preschool the children were attending at the beginning of the study, even though the inputs for SPS are similar across the country. However, this group of children made significant improvements at post-test.

### CDAT Subscales

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the CDAT takes a holistic view of child development and was developed based on the Cambodian Early Learning and Development Standards and skills felt to be important for school readiness. The test has 7 subscales that contain a varying number of items. Given the objectives of the study, we were particularly interested in whether participation in preschool programmes would have more impact on some competencies than others. Hence we selected three subscales, i.e., Gross Motor (maximum score = 4) Pre-Academic Skills (maximum score = 17) and Language (maximum score = 40) and compared the performance of children from different groups on these subscales. Given the nature of the preschool curriculum and the experiences of out-of-preschool children we expected smaller differences across groups on the Gross Motor Subscale compared to the other two scales. CDAT items are shown in Appendix A. The varying number of items and maximum scores across subscales reflects the nature of school readiness skills expected in Cambodia and other parts of the world. However, these variations suggest that we should also interpret subscale differences with caution.

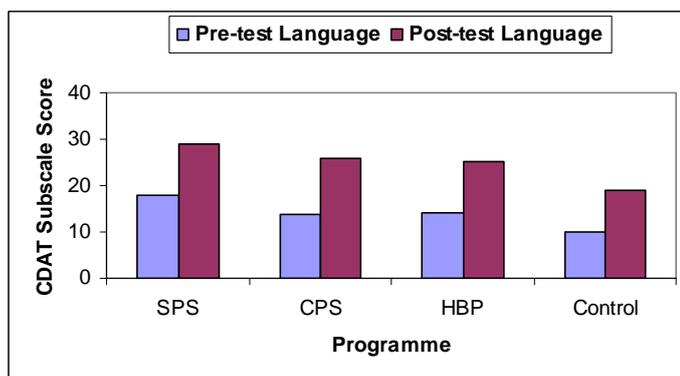
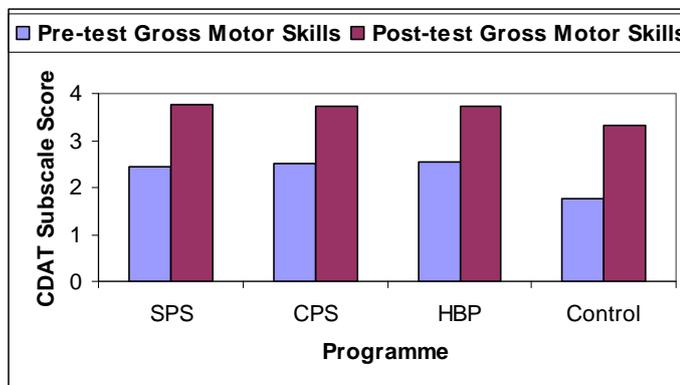
The figures below show an interesting pattern. As we would expect, the difference between the control group and 3 programme groups was less at post-test for gross motor skills but was greater at post-test than for pre-academic skills and language. The curriculum for the three programmes addresses concept formation, number and language skills. On the other hand, children in the control group catch

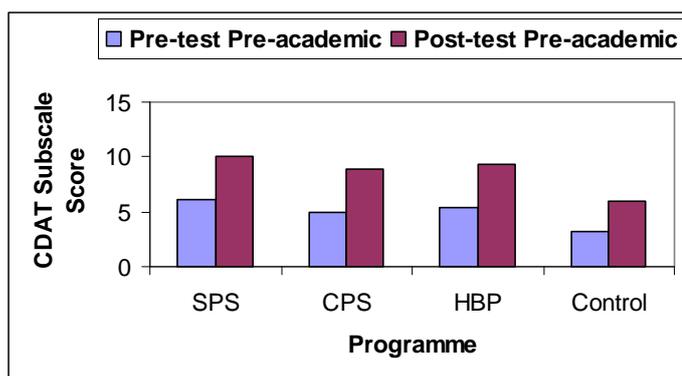
up in the gross-motor domain simply by their participation in daily activities, e.g., running and climbing trees.

Statistical tests used for the analyses indicated that all three programme groups performed significantly better than the control group on the CDAT subscales at both pre-test and post-test. There were no significant differences between the CPS and HBP groups on any of the sub-scales at either pre-test or post-test. The SPS group had significantly better scores at post-test than both the CPS and HBP groups on the following subscales: Language, General Knowledge, Fine Motor Skills. However, there were no significant differences between the SPS and the two programme groups on Gross Motor Skills and Memory at post-test. Further there were no significant differences between the SPS and HBP group on Pre-Academic Skills at the time of the post-test.

Figure 3.12

Gross Motor, Pre-Academic and Language Skills across Groups and Time





### Prediction of Post-test Scores

The final set of analyses examined the predictors of post-test CDAT scores. We first conducted correlational analyses. Maternal education, maternal literacy, paternal education and paternal literacy were all significantly intercorrelated. Maternal education, programme, pre-test CDAT and post-test CDAT scores were also significantly correlated as shown in the following table.

Table 3.3

Intercorrelations among Parental Education, Programme Type and CDAT scores

	Maternal Education	Paternal Education	Programme Type	Pre-test CDAT	Post-test CDAT
Maternal Education	--	.53*	.19**	.23**	.25**
Paternal Education		--	.15**	.19**	.22**
Programme Type			--	.33**	.44**
Pre-test CDAT				--	.59**

Note. N = 1019, \*\*  $p < .01$

Multiple regression analyses indicated that three variables significantly contributed to prediction of post-test CDAT scores and accounted for 42 per cent of the variance in the score. They were pre-test CDAT score, pre-test programme status and maternal education. The best predictor of post-test CDAT scores was pre-test CDAT score and it accounted for 35 per cent of the unique variance in the CDAT post-test score. We know that pre-test CDAT significantly differed by programme type with children in the SPS getting the highest scores, followed by those in the CPS, HBP and control group, respectively.

### Summary and Suggestions

#### 1. Programme Impact

Participation in preschool programmes had a significant influence on children's developmental functioning. Children who attended any type of programme did better than children who did not. There was also a correlation between maternal education and children's participation in programmes. Perhaps mothers who are more educated are more likely to seek services for their children.

### Suggestion

Increase access to early childhood services. Children who participate in early childhood programmes (SPS, CPS, and HBP) have significantly better developmental functioning than those who do not.

### 2. History of Preschool Attendance

The majority of children who attended programmes when they were 5 had also attended programmes when they were 4. Pre-test scores were the best predictor of post-test scores.

### Suggestion

Enrol children in early childhood programmes before they are 4. The fact that pre-test developmental functioning was the best predictor of developmental functioning at post-test suggests that the effects of experiences prior to age 5 continue to have an influence on children at 6. This has very important implications for service provision for young children. Efforts should be made to get children preschool services as soon as possible.

### 3. Community Preschools versus Home-based Programmes.

There were no significant differences between children attending Home-based programmes and Community Preschools on either the pre-test or post-test. This finding is inconsistent with the impressions of the various stakeholders we interviewed (including government officials, teachers, commune council members and parents themselves) who all believed that the CPS services were of a higher quality than the HBP. However, there was wide variation in the quality of teaching and the learning environment of the CPS and many children did not attend the programme regularly. On the other hand, mothers in the home-based programme reported taking advantage of many opportunities to teach their children during everyday routine activities. Mothers, the children's first teachers, regarded preschool education as a way to make their child "clever" and were committed to promoting their child's development. The HBP involves community participation and mothers support each other. On the other hand, the CPS teacher seems to work in isolation with limited support from the families in the community. Many CPS teachers spent the limited time at the CPS attending to children's personal needs (hygiene and grooming) in lieu of facilitating children's early development and learning.

### Suggestion

Enrol children in either Community Preschools or Home-Based Programmes. There were no significant differences between children who went to Community Preschools and those who participated in Home-based programmes. Our empirical findings suggest that if children cannot go to the state preschool class they get similar benefits whether they enrol in Community Preschools or receive Home-based services. Children who receive Home-based services have opportunities to meet with their same-age peers during the weekly mothers' group meetings.

### Maternal Education

There were differences across provinces in children's developmental functioning which may be related to their mother's education level or the remoteness of the

place in which they live. Clearly it is important to provide services to the most disadvantaged children.

Suggestion

Focus on maternal education/literacy education. Maternal education was a significant predictor of children's developmental functioning but not as important as preschool education. Mothers who are educated are more likely to seek services for their children and stimulate them.

4. Quality of the Learning Environment

The State Preschools provided the highest quality of early childhood services among the three programmes and this is because of the quality of inputs to the programme.

Suggestion

Focus on the quality of the teachers and the learning environment. Children from the SPS, which clearly had the most qualified teachers and provided the highest quality of early childhood education of all the programmes had better school preparedness than children in the CPS and HBP.

## List of Recommendations

### **Recommendation 3.1**

#### ***Increase access rates to early childhood services.***

Children who participate in early childhood programmes (SPS, CPS, and HBP) have significantly better developmental functioning than those who do not.

### **Recommendation 3.2:**

#### ***Enrol children in early childhood programmes before they are 4.***

The fact that pre-test developmental functioning was the best predictor of developmental functioning at post-test suggests that the effects of experience prior to age 5 continue to have an influence on children at 6. This has very important implications for service provision for young children. Efforts should be made to get children preschool services as soon as possible.

### **Recommendation 3.3:**

#### ***Enrol children in either Community Preschools or Home-Based Programmes.***

There were no significant differences between children who went to Community Preschools and those who participated in Home-based programmes. Our empirical findings suggest that if children cannot go to the state preschool class they get similar benefits from Community Preschools and Home-based programmes.

### **Recommendation 3.4:**

#### ***Focus on Maternal Education/Literacy Education.***

Maternal education was a significant predictor of children's developmental functioning but not as important as preschool education. Mothers who are educated are more likely to seek services for their children and stimulate them.

### **Recommendation 3.5:**

#### ***Focus on the quality of the teachers and the learning environment.***

Children from the SPS, which clearly had the most qualified teachers and provided the highest quality of early childhood education of all the programmes had better school preparedness than children in the CPS and HBP.

## Chapter Four

### Observations of Community Preschools

The objective of this aspect of the evaluation was to observe and assess early care and education practices in CPS to identify factors that might contribute to, or pose challenges for, providing high quality learning environments.

The data collection process for information provided here involved:

- Informal observations of at least one randomly selected CPS in each of the UNICEF-supported provinces conducted by the consultants. This provided an objective assessment of teacher-child interactions, resource availability and usage and physical environment. Evaluators arrived at each of the 6 CPS, usually unannounced, just before the commencement of a session scheduled. After each session they interviewed the CPS teacher in order to gain a better understanding of CPS teachers' major motivations and challenges.
- In Stage 2, three children from three CPS programmes in each province were chosen based on their scores on the pre-test (highest, middle and lowest scores on the CDAT). The rationale behind this was to sample individuals as cases across the achievement spectrum, thereby gaining insights about programme effects for children who had different levels of developmental functioning. The PoE- ECE directors were requested to assess the programmes in their provinces in which these 18 children were enrolled, by completing the Cambodian Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (CECERS). The Directors were blind to the children's pre-test scores and did not know why the three children were selected. The Scale is scored based on observation over a 2-day period and the research team received intensive training in the administration and scoring of the CECERS during workshops prior to data collection.

We begin by providing background information on CPS, including both administration and daily routines. Results from administration of the CECERS tool, which provides a quantitative overview of CPS quality, are presented followed by findings based on informal observational data, which provide further insights into individual CPS and stakeholders involved in their operation.

#### **Brief Overview of Community Preschools**

CPS offer a curriculum that will provide children with social and cognitive skills that will prepare them for school. Sessions incorporate a focus on literacy, pre-numeracy, personal hygiene and exercise, and moral behaviour. Methods used to teach relevant skills include story-telling, teacher-directed learning via the use of flash cards, and learning activities such as drawing in the sand, singing songs and exploring the properties of different objects.

CPS teachers are selected by the Commune Council. Although formal criteria have been set (e.g., highest level of education in the area, Aged 18-45 years), many teachers are selected largely on the basis of their popularity and experience with young children. In one village, the CPS teacher had been a "child-minder" under an earlier programme. Another explained that she had been chosen because her mother had been a child-minder.

Several of the teachers involved in this research explained that, since they took up their role as CPS teacher, they had also become involved in village and commune administration, as deputies to Commune and Village chiefs.

CPS teachers receive initial training lasting 10 days at the provincial headquarters and refresher training for 3 to 6 days per year. This training is provided by the Provincial and District Offices of Education under the auspices of the MoEYS.

### **Monitoring and Curriculum**

In most villages where there is a CPS programme in place, the CCFPWC representative is expected to work most closely with the CPS teacher, visiting regularly and providing support by taking issues to the Commune Council, for example. “Technical” monitoring and supervision is conducted by a Technical Supervisor appointed by the PoE on a regular, monthly basis.

CPS teachers follow a curriculum guide designed by MOEYS and distributed by UNICEF. The curriculum provides a framework for teachers to teach pre-math and pre-literacy skills, as well as good hygiene and social skills.

### **Analysis of CECERS data**

The following section analyses the data collected via the CECERS which was administered by PoE-ECE Directors in each of the UNICEF supported provinces. The analysis is based on 18 CPS (3 in each of the 6 provinces). The CPS were located in 18 different villages in 14 different communes across 10 different districts. Of the 18 CPS observed, the majority were started in 2005 and 2006 with a few started in 2000 and 2001 as part of the child minding service. As indicated above, data collection sites were chosen based on children’s performance on the CDAT, in order to ensure balanced representation.

### ***Instrument***

The CECERS is a 58-item scale that was developed for this study and was constructed based on the Tamil Nadu Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (TECERS) (Isley, 2000). The TECERS is an Indian adaptation of the Early Childhood Environment Scale (Harms & Clifford, 1980) and contains 56 items which are subsumed under the following areas: Infrastructure – Furnishing Physical Setting, Personal Care and Routines, Physical Learning Aids, Language and Reasoning Experiences, Fine and Gross Motor Activities, Creative Activities and Social Development Activities. Certain items from the TECERS were added, modified or deleted based on pilot observations and discussions by the research team

The following items were added (see Appendix A): Item 1: Location of the CPS; and Individual Attention (Item 49). Covered Space (Item 9) was modified. Items from the TECERS related to nap and rest time were deleted as these do not occur in the 2-hour CPS programme. Although children were only given snacks in the minority of the CPS, we chose to retain items related to snacks but the two items were not counted in determining the subscale score for Personal Care and Routines and the Total CECERS score. The CECERS contained items in the following areas Infrastructure – Furnishing Physical Setting (12 items), Personal Care and Routines (7 items), Physical Learning Aids (7 items), Language and Reasoning Experiences

(9 items), Fine and Gross Motor Activities (6 items), Creative Activities (6 items) and Social Development Activities (11 items).

### **Procedure**

The PoE-ECCE Director went to the programme and watched the whole programme from 7am to 9am.

### **Children Served by the CPS**

The average number of children registered in each of the 18 CPS was 23 (12 females) and the number of registered children ranged from 12 in Stung Treng to 34 in Kampong Speu. An average of five 3-year-olds, nine 4-year-olds, and nine 5-year-olds were registered in each centre. This shows that the CPS is indeed catering to the 3-5 year olds. However, on the day of the observation, there were an average of only 16 children in the CPS; three 3-year-olds, six 4-year-olds, and seven 5-year-olds. The discrepancy between the number of registered children and children present was the highest in OMC in the CPS observed in Anlong Veng and Chongkal districts. In one CPS there were 28 registered children but only 11 were present on the day of the observation. There were 20 children registered in the two other CPS but only 8 and 5 were there on the observation day.

### **Summary and Impressions**

The CPS were serving children from 3 to 5 years as envisioned. However, there was a discrepancy between the number of children registered (average 23 in 6 provinces) and actually present (average of 16 in the 6 provinces). Attendance was particularly an issue in OMC. Further, in interviews with mothers in Kampong Thom, they indicated that their children would only go to the CPS if they were able to give them Riel to buy a snack (sold in a house opposite the CPS during the recess). The ability or inability to purchase food should not be allowed to have an impact on children's attendance at CPS.

### **Suggestions**

It is clear that children must attend the CPS to receive the benefits it offers. It is recommended that the PoE and POWA develop a better understanding of the reasons for non-attendance and take steps to address them. One suggestion is to request the Village Chief to enlist a volunteer from the village to bring children who do not attend the CPS regularly to the CPS every morning and drop them home at the end of class. Another is to provide during sessions a meal/snacks as it will enhance demand for CPS services.

### **Teacher Characteristics and Background**

The average age of the CPS teachers was 31 years (SD = 8.9; range 20 to 51 years). They had an average of 6.6 years of education (SD = 2.2; range 3 to 12 years) and an average of 24.5 days of training on Early Childhood Education (SD = 8.9; range 0 to 50 days).

## Summary and Impressions

The research literature affirms that teacher education is one of the best predictors of the quality of early childhood education. The CPS teachers may not be the most highly educated women in the village and efforts should be made to indeed find the most educated women. We noted that some of the teachers struggled to read the story books to children. Further efforts should be made to enhance the quality of in-service training for CPS teachers.

## Suggestions

Provide more continuing professional development courses for teachers so as to enhance the quality of services they provide. Continue with the programme to encourage CPS teachers to work with SPS teachers once a month on Thursdays to provide training and feedback to CPS teachers on their instructional methods. Given the CPS teachers' levels of academic and professional qualifications, efforts should be made to provide them more detailed curriculum guides/lessons plans and very specific guidelines on implementation.

## *Physical settings for Learning*

Five of the CPS were **located** under the teacher's house, 10 were located in shelters and 3 were located in a big room under a house or in the primary school. There was no **toilet** available in 12 CPS, one had a toilet but no water while 5 had a clean toilet and water.

There was **adequate space for indoor activities** in 10 of the CPS but it was crowded in 6 CPS and space was not enough for small group activities in 2 CPS. In terms of **space for gross motor play**, 9 of CPS had adequate space, 7 had adequate space for gross-motor activities either indoors or outdoors while 2 had inadequate space.

**Drinking and washing water** was available in only 7 CPS and were inadequate in 5 CPS. The rest had either drinking or washing water, not both. There was no **protective barrier** between children and hazards in 8 CPS, at least one hazard (e.g. an open well) in 3 CPS while children were safe from hazards in 7 CPS.

Children in 13 CPS were in **unclean surroundings** while in only 5 CPS was there a protective barrier between children and unhygienic conditions. Children were able to hear the teacher in 17 of the CPS and only 1 CPS was in a **noisy location**.

The **indoor space** was in a good condition in 9 of the 18 CPS and the rest were in bad condition.

The **storage available for the teacher** was adequate in only 1 CPS, minimal in 6 CPS and absent in 11 CPS. There was no chair or table in 17 of the CPS. Storage for play materials was not available in 10 of the CPS, a space on the floor was available for the purpose in 6 CPS and adequate storage for play materials was available in only 2 of the CPS.

## Summary and Impressions

Young children are very sensitive to their physical and psychological environments and efforts should be made to create a child-friendly and teacher-friendly CPS environment. When CPS were located under houses, teachers stored materials in plastic bags tied to the roof. When making recommendations to improve the physical settings for learning we are sensitive to the need for low cost/no-cost solutions. The shelters that are being constructed formalise learning and provide children with a safer environment for learning.

### **Suggestions**

In communities where a lack of adequate facilities is impeding children's learning, local authorities should be encouraged to construct shelters for the CPS that have storage facilities and places to display children's work and allow the preparation of learning corners. The community should be encouraged to erect barriers to prevent children from encountering hazards and providing a safe and hygienic environment for children to learn. Teachers' training should incorporate basic guidance on setting up appropriate early learning environments, such as ensuring that children have access to water for drinking and washing.

### ***Personal Care and Routines***

Snacks were eaten in only 4 of the CPS. In two of the CPS children were independent in their eating and there was a pleasant social atmosphere at snack time.

There was no toilet in 10 of the CPS and the majority of children were independent in toileting in only 2 of the CPS.

In one of the CPS, no attention was given to children's personal grooming. Thirteen teachers did not give routine attention to children's grooming while 4 teachers checked all children's personal hygiene and grooming.

Hand washing was observed in 16 out of 18 CPS. In 8 CPS children washed their hands after either toileting or eating. Those in the other 8 washed their hands at both times.

A schedule/routine existed in 15 of the CPS while no schedule or teaching plan was apparent in 3 of the CPS.

### **Summary and Impressions**

Teachers talked a lot about hygiene to us and taught children songs about hygiene. However, there appeared to be a discrepancy between what teachers said and what they encouraged children to do. In 2 of the preschools we visited in Stage 1, the two CPS teachers spent much time on grooming the children – washing hands and face, combing hair.

### **Suggestions**

Given that teachers only have 2 hours of instructional time their time would be better spent in learning and teaching activities. Parents should be encouraged to ensure their children are groomed before coming to school. A volunteer from the village can assist the teacher in grooming, assisting children in toileting and other general care.

### ***Physical Learning Aids***

No learning aids for gross-motor learning were available in 4 of the CPS; they were inadequate and adequate in 10 and 4 of them, respectively. Supplies for fine-motor activities were adequate in 6 of the CPS and inadequate or absent in 12 of them. The majority of CPS (10) had only three different types of activities.

Among the CPS, 1 had no materials for teaching basic concepts, 13 had inadequate materials, while 4 had adequate materials,

Only one of the 18 CPS had learning corner that was used by the children, 16 had none. The majority of CPS (n = 10) had no visual displays (e.g., wall charts) or child-produced displays (n=16).

### **Summary and Impressions**

The majority of CPS do not appear to have adequate supplies. The nature of the CPS (no walls) also precludes visual displays.

### **Suggestions**

Given the possibility of securing no-cost or low cost materials for both gross- fine-motor activities, CPS teachers should be afforded the opportunity to attend workshops in which they learn to make suitable instructional resources from materials available in the environment and shown how to use them effectively. We were told that CPS teachers are provided with a box of instructional resources and they should be encouraged and shown how to use them. Further there is a need to provide adequate open space that can be cleared so that children can engage in outdoor activities and games.

Teachers should be encouraged to use the natural environment to teach concepts as knowledge of basic concepts is an important pre-academic skill. For example, in order to help children name colours, children can be asked to find something green (grass) from around the shelter. In order to teach size, seriation and number, children can be asked to collect stones of different sizes and count them. The point is that commercially produced expensive products are not required to help children acquire these important school readiness skills.

In designing future CPS shelters, the authorities can consider providing permanent or movable facilities for visual displays.

### ***Language and Reasoning Experiences***

The majority of children in 17 of the CPS seemed to understand the language used by the teacher but they had fewer opportunities for spontaneous talk. In 2 of the CPS, children had no or few opportunities to speak individually. Although they had many opportunities to speak in 9 of the CPS, these were formal or routine, i.e., responding to teachers' question. In 7 of the CPS, children had many opportunities for spontaneous and natural speech.

Children had many opportunities to talk with their peers outside formal activities in the classroom in 12 of the CPS but they were discouraged from doing so in 6 of them.

No games or materials were used to teach concepts in 1 of the CPS and there were inadequate supplies to do so in 12 of the CPS. In 11 of the CPS teachers used the materials to teach concepts in an appropriate way while in the rest materials were used in a rigid, routine way (n = 4) or not used at all (n = 3). Teachers taught number appropriately in 15 of the CPS.

### **Summary and Impressions**

Opportunities for speaking and listening are very important for early childhood programmes and in general, CPS teachers provided children many opportunities for speaking and for verbal interactions with peers.

In all preschools teachers engaged in teaching of numbers and counting and did so appropriately. This is clearly a skill that they have been taught in their pre-service and in-service training and it was apparent they were confident in doing so. Further, given the age of these children, they should understand one-to-one correspondence and know how to count small quantities. There was much more variability in the use of materials and styles of teaching other concepts.

### **Suggestions**

Teachers should be encouraged to use “Who”, “What” and “Why” questions rather than questions which require a yes/no response from children. Instead of asking the same question to all children, teachers should use responses to pose other questions which will scaffold and promote children’s high-order thinking skills.

In-service programmes should focus on the teaching of basic concepts other than number and to construct and use available and appropriate materials in their instruction.

### ***Gross and Fine Motor Activities***

Fine motor activities took place daily in 14 of the CPS while in 4 CPS they were used less often. When they were used, teachers provided developmentally appropriate guidance in 7 CPS whereas no guidance was provided in the other CPS (n = 7)

Children had opportunities for a variety of gross motor activities daily in 10 of the CPS; in 6 of the CPS the gross-motor activities were repetitive and routine while children had no opportunity for gross-motor play in 2 of the CPS. When gross motor play occurred, the majority of children in the CPS (n = 14) participated. Encouraging and friendly supervision of gross-motor activities and play occurred in 13 of the CPS whereas in 4 of the CPS adult supervision focused only on safety.

### **Summary and Impressions**

Gross- and fine- motor activities took place daily in the majority of CPS. But the nature of the varieties of activities varied. Teachers tended to provide more developmentally appropriate guidance in gross-motor play than in fine-motor play.

### **Suggestions**

Many teachers can use a variety of activities for fine- and gross- motor activities and provide appropriate guidance in these activities. Steps should be taken to ensure that teachers who are not using these activities do so.

### ***Creative Activities***

Materials for arts and crafts were available in all but 3 of the CPS. However, appropriate guidance was only provided in 4 CPS. In 5 of the CPS, guidance in the activities was absent while there were no/routine activities in others (n = 9). Children did no arts and crafts activities in 7 of the preschools, had no choice of activities in 4 CPS but had free expression in 7 CPS.

Singing occurred at least twice in all CPS, 3 times in 8 CPS and 4 times in the rest. Singing with actions occurred in 15 of the CPS while in one CPS singing was only accompanied by clapping. In general, the majority of children participated in singing or movement activities in 14 of the CPS.

### **Summary and Impressions**

While arts and crafts activities are important for children, children have only 2 hours in the CPS. After planning for motor activities, teaching of numbers, movement and song and language activities, it may be unrealistic to expect teachers to have art and craft activities on a daily basis. It may also be that teachers do not have adequate resources to engage children in arts and crafts activities.

The occurrence of singing suggests that this form of activity is valued and easy to implement in the Cambodian context. We heard children chanting many songs related to greeting, good behaviour and hygiene. Teachers appeared particularly skilled in getting all children to participate in these song and movement activities.

### **Suggestions**

Teachers should be encouraged to provide children opportunities for arts and crafts activities at least a few times a week.

### ***Social Development***

Teachers greeted the majority of the children in 13 of the CPS and just some of the children in 5 of the CPS. They actively encouraged social interactions in 12 of the CPS and promoted cooperation in 11 of the CPS. In the rest of the CPS peer social interactions and co-operation were permitted but not specifically facilitated.

In 13 of the CPS, teachers gave individual attention to the majority of children. Teachers in 5 of the CPS actively promoted children's leadership and initiative while in 12 of the CPS they were indifferent to children's initiatives. One teacher did not provide children any leadership opportunities.

In 11 of the CPS, children had 30 to 60 minutes of free play and in 6 of them children had more than an hour of free play. In one CPS, less than 30 minutes was

allocated for free play. In 9 of the CPS, teachers provided supervision during free play while there was no supervision in 8 of the CPS.

Children were allowed to be inactive for less than 30 minutes a day in 12 of the CPS and between 30 and 60 minutes of inactivity in 6 of the CPS.

When conflicts among children arose, teachers in 15 of the CPS intervened and helped to resolve relevant issues. While teachers in the other 3 CPS stopped children from quarrelling, they did not help children resolve the issues behind the conflict.

The tone of the interaction was pleasant in all 18 CPS.

### Summary and Impressions

In the majority of the CPS, teachers allowed children more than 30 minutes for free-play. This is noteworthy since children are only in the CPS for 2 hours a day. However, as noted earlier, in some of the CPS, teachers had limited involvement in children's play. The teachers managed to create a pleasant atmosphere in the preschools and they were not too strict.

### Suggestions

Teachers should be encouraged to be involved in children's free play and use these social interactions as teaching opportunities (e.g., dealing with conflicts with peers) and scaffolding children's learning. Another adult from the community should be present to supervise the children during outdoor free play. Teachers should also be helped to gain skills in dealing with children. More attention should be directed at teachers who need more skills.

## Quality in Early Childhood Programmes

Table 4.1  
Information about Teachers' background

	Mean (SD)	Range
Teacher Age	31.33 (8.86)	20 - 51
Teacher Education (years)	6.56 (2.23)	3 - 12
Teacher Training (days)	24.5	0 - 50

Table 4.2  
Means and variation on the CECERS

Subscales of CECERS	Means (SD)	Range
Infrastructure	11.44 (4.31)	4- 19
Personal Care and Routines	4.31 (1.14)	2 - 6
Physical Learning Aids	7.28 (4.68)	2 - 18
Language and Reasoning Exp	14.61 (4.33)	3 -18
Fine & Gross Motor Acts.	10 (4.55)	2 - 16
Creative Acts.	10.17 (4.57)	3 -18
Social Development	17.17 (2.81)	11 -21
Total CECERS	67.56 (14.56)	31 - 98

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 4.2 provide a clear indication of the variability that exists across CPS in terms of physical, teacher background and teaching and learning factors. The four scales within which there appears to be least and most variability (Personal Care / Routines and Social Development and Physical Learning Aids / Creative Activities, respectively) are worthy of note. Table 4.3 shows correlations between each of the 6 scales. A single asterisk beside the number in the column indicates a positive link and double asterisks indicate a strong positive link. According to these data:

Despite teachers having voiced concern about infrastructure and physical settings, this factor appears to be linked only with Physical Learning Aids and Creative Activities, both of which depend upon availability of resources. Infrastructure concerns appear to be unrelated to the quality of Personal Care and Routines, Language and Reasoning, Fine and Gross Motor and Social Development.

This suggests that, regardless of physical environment, teachers are equipped by their curriculum packages to cover Language and Reasoning and that they have access to resources that enable them to incorporate Personal Care and Routines and Fine and Gross Motor activities in their lessons. Access to and use of resources for creative teaching and learning purposes, however, appears to be in short supply, particularly for CPS lacking in quality. Lack of access to resources that support creative learning experiences, such as painting, block construction and puzzles may lead to boredom and lack of motivation among children. Both mothers and teachers expressed concern about older children's lack of motivation to attend their CPS. They suggested that a more attractive environment / physical setting might encourage children to attend. These data suggest, then, that issues related to the physical setting of CPS, and the need to build adequate shelter, are related as much (if not more) to the need to entice children to attend CPS as they are to pedagogical issues.

Table 4.3

Intercorrelations among CECERS subscales

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Infrastructure	----	.36	.48*	.28	.43	.49*	.00
2. Personal Care and Routines		----	.45	.62*	.62*	.61*	.49
3. Physical Learning Aids			----	.61**	.77**	.83**	.78**
4. Language and Reasoning				----	.85**	.74**	.93**
5. Fine & Gross Motor Activities					----	.83**	.96**
6. Creative Activities						----	.55*
7. Social Development							----
8. Total CECERS	.67**	.69**	.78**	.93**	.96**	.91**	

### **Informal Observations**

The following section presents results from informal observations of CPS sessions, teacher interviews and parent focus groups conducted in each of the UNICEF-supported provinces. The observations / interview data support much of what is indicated in analyses of the CECERS data, particularly with regard to the need for further training for CPS teachers and variability in quality across CPS. All teachers interviewed for the purposes of this research indicated that they were very keen to receive further training.

The summary of teacher and parent feedback presented in this section provides affirmation of the value attached to CPS by parents and teachers, both in terms of preparation for school, promoting a focus on young children and their welfare, and in terms of children's general development. The feedback also highlights some of the micro-level challenges faced by parents and teachers in supporting and attending CPS.

#### **Issues identified in Teacher interviews and Parent Focus Groups**

In addition to conducting observations of CPS teaching sessions in each of the 6 provinces, the consultants interviewed CPS teachers following each session and held focus groups with mothers present.

The interviews were designed to provide further information regarding value attached to CPS by both teachers and parents, as well challenges faced in terms of teaching and children's attendance. In the following section, we summarise the positive aspects of CPS identified by teachers and mothers. We also discuss some of the major challenges referred to widely across the interviews and focus groups.

#### **Positive aspects of CPS**

##### ***Satisfaction gained***

Several of the teachers interviewed referred to their desire to provide support for young children in their villages / communes. Even teachers who had felt unsure about their role when they were appointed highlighted the satisfaction that they gain from helping young children.

##### ***Teachers as advocates***

Several of the teachers interviewed explained that, as a result of their role as CPS teacher, they had also taken on other roles, such as assistant to the village chief. While teachers' primary motivations for taking on these additional roles may be to supplement their income, children in the village might benefit as teachers become active advocates for children and their needs. For instance, one teacher spoke at length about her efforts to persuade the village chief to invest in play space for young children in her village.

##### ***Teachers upgrading their knowledge***

All teachers interviewed indicated that they were grateful for the training that they had received, that the training had been useful and that they would be very appreciative of further opportunities to attend training. Again, while there may be financial incentives involved, the benefits for children and communities of having women who feel empowered and are eager to learn more should not be understated. One teacher proudly pointed out that 14 of the children enrolled in her CPS in 2006 were now attending the local primary school.

##### ***Children learning social skills***

The vast majority of mothers interviewed talked about the significant changes that they had noticed in their children in terms of politeness, manners and ability to communicate effectively with adults since attending a CPS. Many mothers believed that their children were more responsive to them and more likely to follow instructions. Some mothers also pointed out the improved hygiene among their children.

### ***Children learning academic skills***

Among the academic skills that were attributed to attendance at a CPS were knowledge of shapes, identification of plants and animals, emergent reading and writing skills (the ability to recognize and, in some cases, read signs), counting skills and memorization of songs.

### ***Mothers involved in children's learning***

Many mothers were eager to share the changes that they had observed in their children since attending a CPS. The attention paid by mothers to their children's development as a result of the family's involvement in CPS was evident throughout interviews.

## **Major challenges**

### ***Inadequate shelter***

Teachers operating out of shelters with no walls talked about difficulties with regard to displaying resources and in attracting children to their school. In one case, the CPS shelter was shared with the village (the roof had been built using UNICEF funds and the walls had been built by the village) and so the shelter could not be used by the CPS during religious festivals. One teacher explained that her CPS was so popular that she did not have enough space to cater for all the children whose parents wanted them to attend.

### ***Transportation and storage***

Teachers who were operating out of shelters with no storage space faced significant challenges with regard to storing equipment. One teacher explained that living 1 km away from the CPS made it difficult for her to transport resources between her home and the CPS. She felt she could not leave her instructional aids under the shelter because the children came and played with them.

### ***Challenges with teaching mixed age-groups***

Several of the teachers spoke about their difficulties catering for a wide age-range. This difficulty was also highlighted in the observations, where the consultants found that younger children were easily distracted and therefore distract older children. The resources that teachers had were not appropriate for younger children.

### ***Irregular attendance***

For a number of reasons, attendance at CPS is irregular. However, we did note that some children manage to attend regularly while others do not. Some teachers referred to the seasons and the need for families to take their children away with them at certain times of the year to carry out agricultural tasks. Many mothers and grandparents discussed the difficulty of having to offer children incentives for them to attend CPS. Some mothers described offering their children money, others talked about offering food as an incentive. Many mothers felt that it was necessary to accompany their children to the CPS.

## **Summary and Impressions**

The strength of the CPS model lies in its potential for community capacity building. Based on the findings presented here, the CPS programme is active and becoming an increasingly vital aspect of the communities that we visited. Our impression was that CPS teachers had gained status within their villages / communes, with some having acquired the role of Deputy to the Village Chief. In terms of advocacy for and raising awareness of young children's rights, this is a significant achievement.

According to our data, an additional benefit of CPS programmes is mothers' heightened awareness of their young children's development. Several of the mothers interviewed expressed pleasure at observing new skills their children learned at the CPS. Mothers interviewed also demonstrated a strong commitment to the CPS programme, despite various challenges for some in ensuring that their children attend regularly.

In terms of quality of CPS provision, the most positive findings reflected in the data here is that the tone of interactions between teachers and children in all 18 CPS observed and assessed was pleasant, with teachers attaching significant importance to social development. Teachers appear to use their resources effectively and children are reportedly learning new skills.

As expected, teachers also face major challenges in providing a quality learning experience for young children. In developing our recommendations, we are mindful of the need to be practical and sensitive to situational concerns:

### **List of Recommendations**

#### **Recommendation 4.1:**

#### ***Enhance and extend teacher training.***

On the basis of the observations presented here, one of the most significant concerns for teachers is lack of training. Given the financial constraints that many CPS teachers face, and their enthusiasm for training, an on-going training programme could be offered as a long-term incentive.

Some of the areas in which immediate training / workshops may be needed are:

- Catering for a varied age-range (in some CPS, teachers had accepted children below the age of 3 and also had 6-year-olds in their group).
- Creating resources from raw materials and the natural environment. Teachers should be encouraged **not** to become too dependent upon formal learning resources, which do not engage children for long periods of time. Creative, everyday experiences for children can be used to enhance formal learning skills such as numeracy and literacy.
- Interacting with young children and planning appropriate learning experiences. As our data show, CPS teachers are generally skilful in creating warm, friendly learning environments. However, in order to engage and motivate children, teachers need support in developing child-centred interaction (e.g., story-telling, listening to children appropriately and guiding their behaviour).
- Teachers attending future training sessions should complete evaluation forms that provide some indication of the most useful aspects of their training.

**Recommendation 4.2:**  
***Provide improved infrastructure***

Feedback from teachers and parents suggest that there is an urgent need for improved and / or purpose-built shelters for many CPS programmes. We are aware the UNICEF staff are currently engaged in negotiation with a number of Commune Councils to build new shelters in partnership. The benefits of purpose-built shelters are that they (i) enhance and establish the status of CPS programmes in the community, (ii) ensure stability of provision since CPS lessons are less likely to be disrupted by community and religious events, (iii) provide a more attractive environment conducive to enjoyable learning for children.

Based on the data provided here, we would recommend that investment in purpose-built shelters be made only on the basis of careful consideration of the specific needs of individual CPS programmes and consultation with CPS teachers. In some cases, investment may be more effectively made in teacher training and / or provision of learning resources for children.

**Recommendation 4.3**  
***Work with parents and teachers to enhance children's attendance at CPS***

As the primary stakeholder in CPS programmes, children must feel motivated to attend CPS programmes on a regular basis. Incentives for participation such as a breakfast programme<sup>2</sup> have created and enhanced demand for early education in other parts of world. We would assume that improved teacher training and resources (as per recommendations above) would contribute to enhancing children's motivation to attend CPS programmes. However, parents, teachers and other stakeholders need to be made aware that if the CPS programme is to achieve wide-ranging success in preparing children for school, the programme needs to focus more on engaging children in learning, as well as teaching fundamental academic skills.

### References

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<sup>2</sup> A school feeding programme existed in primary schools in Cambodia in the past.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Views of Stakeholders on Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes**

In this chapter, we analyse the perspectives of key stakeholders regarding the implementation of the three types of ECCE programmes across the 6 UNICEF-supported provinces. Our objectives were: (i) to better understand the range of motives for provision of these programmes; (ii) to study stakeholders' various ideas about effective implementation of programmes; and (iii) to report on challenges faced at all levels of management and administration of ECCE programmes.

Interviews were conducted following observations of a randomly selected CPS programme from each province. We went to each of the villages where the programme was operating and interviewed the Village Chief. We also conducted interviews with the local Commune Chief and Commune Council Focal Point for Women and Children. Teachers, mothers and core mothers of the SPS, CPS and HBP in the selected village were also interviewed in individual or focus group sessions. At the provincial level, we interviewed the PoE-ECE Director, the Directors of the POWA and the PLAU and /or their representatives. In some cases, the relevant DOE officer was also interviewed.

We present the results here according to a range of **themes** that were identified as pertinent on the basis of their being referred to across stakeholder groups, and indicate whether or not there was concordance between perspectives on the different themes across those groups.

The empirical results presented in Chapter 3 indicate that, while SPS clearly provide children with the “best” preparation for school in terms of CDAT measures, the two community-based programmes (CPS and HBP) are equal in their effectiveness. However, there was a strong belief among stakeholders at all levels that CPS programmes are better than HBP.

PoE-ECE Directors expressed universal support for ECCE programmes in their regions. However, there were varied preferences for SPS, CPS and HBP. Based on the interview data, we would suggest that variations in preference are based on a range of factors including:

- (i) background and history of programmes in the region;
- (ii) perceived benefits of respective programmes;
- (iii) administration, cost and sustainability; and
- (iv) the influence of UNICEF staff working in ECCE.

In the next sections, we present and analyse information collected according to these factors.

#### **Background and History of ECCE programmes**

In developing an analysis of approaches to and management of ECCE programmes, it is important to understand the background against which these programmes have developed. According to feedback from the PoE and POWA Directors whom we interviewed, the histories behind ECCE programmes across the 6 UNICEF-supported provinces are quite varied and likely to influence both current perceptions and administration. There is a widespread belief that the SPS programmes offer the highest quality educational experiences for young children because they are associated with enhanced teacher training, infrastructure and

resources. There also appears to be a perception among a number of the PoE-ECE Directors that, given the choice, parents rank order of preferences would be the SPS, CPS and HBP, respectively.

However, there are a number of challenges within the SPS system. For example, one PoE-ECE Director referred to difficulties with obtaining supplies for them, particularly if the SPS is housed within a primary school:

*“The danger is that budget may go to the primary school”.*

PoE-ECE Director

In a few of the provinces, UNICEF had reportedly provided support for resources in SPS programmes.

The more complex and varied histories of CPS and HBP provision may have influenced current beliefs about their sustainability and role in the community. For example, in one province, the PoE-ECE Director referred to past challenges with CPS programmes (prior to UNICEF’s involvement) due to lack of support and sustainability:

*“During that period, we expanded the CPS to most villages, but **due to lack of support these programmes disappeared**..... these programmes were only implemented in 5 villages. When (an NGO group) phased out support, again the programmes disappeared”.*

PoE-ECE Director

This Director appeared to express a preference for HBP, due to their positive impact on the community as a whole and fewer challenges associated with human and physical resources:

*“HBP offer opportunities to work with mothers....fewer resources are needed, since mothers can produce own materials....HBP need less time to support mothers.....seeing other families do well motivates other families – we see that really happening in villages.....we can ask SPS and primary school teachers to support the HBP programme and don’t have to pay them.”*

PoE-ECE Director

In another province, the POWA Director described a previous CPS programme operated under the auspices of another NGO that POWA had taken over in 2001, in partnership with Seth Koma. She explained that the previous CPS programme (which still provides support in some villages) had focused largely on providing child minding facilities and that many of the teachers originally involved in that programme were now teaching in current CPS programmes. There are implications here with regard to both parents’ and teachers’ understanding of the purpose of CPS programmes:

*“The purpose of the original programme was to provide child-care for children during parent literacy classes and to provide child-minding for 2 hours per day to help parents.... (the teachers of these programmes were) selected volunteer teachers with no incentive [remuneration].”*

Director of POWA

Several issues are raised by these responses. Sustainability of a programme depends upon stakeholders' commitment and autonomy. Where the PoE-ECE Director lacks confidence in one programme and expresses a preference for another, there needs to be clear consultation between partners so that shared priorities are achieved.

With regard to the possibility of continued observance of teaching-related perceptions formed on the basis of previous programmes, all stakeholders involved in the process of administering and supporting ECCE programmes, particularly CPS, need to be mindful of risks associated with undermining the role of teachers in early childhood education and care. There needs to be clear acknowledgement that CPS teachers are trained educators who play a critical role in children's development, and that they should not be expected or encouraged to work on an informal, non-salaried basis.

### **Perceived benefits of ECCE programmes**

We observed widespread support for ECCE programmes at all levels of management and administration, across all 6 provinces. In this section, we present feedback from a range of stakeholders that reflects the perceived importance of ECCE programmes, as well as the respective benefits of the SPS, CPS and HBP.

When asked about the overall purpose of ECCE, most interviewees referred to children's preparation for formal schooling, reflecting the broad understanding upon which implementation of these programmes is based. Not surprisingly, however, there were differences in responses to our questions regarding the role and benefits of different ECCE programmes, ranging from changes in parent behaviour to skills development in young children.

#### ***Benefits of State Preschool***

State preschools are widely perceived as the "best" providers of education for young children. Other benefits associated with SPS programmes are:

- (by parents) the longer hours of operation, which better justify time spent getting to and from SPS and giving parents more time
- (by teachers and provincial officers) the formalised training that CPS teachers receive
- (by a PoE-ECE Director) clear line of management, overseen by MoEYS.

#### ***Benefits of Community Preschool***

The PoE, POWA and PLAU Directors all referred to academic benefits for children associated with CPS programmes, as did village and commune chiefs. Other developmental benefits of CPS programmes were articulated most clearly by CPS teachers and mothers:

*"(The) children are more active, confident and brave"*  
(CPS teacher)

*"My son keeps changing (and developing)...he respects his parents now".*  
(CPS mother)

Interviewees across the 6 UNICEF-supported provinces also referred to community-based benefits of, and support for, CPS programmes. For example, one additional benefit (discussed in Chapter 4) was reflected in teachers' enhanced confidence and capacity for representing children and their needs:

*"Before, I didn't think I could be a teacher – the villagers and the VC appointed me. Now, I feel happy to see the children are healthy and smart – that's why I'm still happy to be a CPS teacher".*

(CPS Teacher)

One PoE-ECE Director also referred to positive outcomes with regard to the behaviour and attitudes of CPS teachers:

*"They learn how to look after themselves..... they influence their husbands"*

(PoE-ECE Director)

A commune chief explained how parents' growing support for their village CPS was reflected in their contributions:

*"...in the past, parents did not understand the advantages of preschool, but now they do...parents give rice to the teacher to make porridge".*

(Commune Chief)

### **Benefits of Home-Based Programmes**

Based on feedback presented here, benefits associated more specifically with HBP reflect a much stronger focus on community capacity. Interviewees at all levels referred to changes in behaviour of parents as well as children:

*"This (HBP) programme is very important because it reduces my workload. I am responsible for the behaviour of everyone in the village and if mothers can take care of their children and influence them, that makes my job easier"*

(Village Chief)

*"Providing HBP to villages is very helpful because they change the behaviour of both mothers and fathers. Before HBP piloting in the villages, parents drank a lot (of alcohol) after work. Since the HBP was introduced, villagers are more conscious of what other people think about their behaviour and so they communicate more with their children. If parents use bad words with their children, this reflects badly on them and other people will judge them. We see this happening in all 8 pilot villages."*

(CFPWC)

*"Instead of blaming children for our mistakes, we have learned to control our anger and not take things out on children – for example, when we are angry with our husbands"*

(HBP Mother)

One PoE-ECE Director spoke at length about sustainability-related benefits of HBP (which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter). When asked about her focus on HBP, she replied:

*“HBP offers opportunities to work with mothers...Fewer resources are needed, since mothers can produce their own materials. HBP needs less time to support mothers: SPS requires 2 years’ training, CPS requires 10 days’ training, HBP requires just a few days’ training and has a very immediate impact. Seeing families do well motivates other families – we see that really happening in villages.”*

(PoE-ECE Director).

As well as motivating mothers to provide educational experiences for their children, HBP have lead to a greater awareness of family functioning and its impact on young children. HBP also offer a community-based strategy that requires less investment in human and physical resources for commune councils and the various government departments involved. Despite the high levels of support evident among community members for HBP, however, we did not observe the same degree of commitment to advocating for children’s needs at a community level that we saw in several of the stronger CPS teachers.

### **Administration, Cost and Sustainability**

Administration of ECCE programmes is interwoven with issues related to both their cost and perceived sustainability. In this section, we present feedback from stakeholders on issues related to provision of human and physical resources to support ECCE programmes. We also refer to issues regarding monitoring and evaluation of ECCE programmes, as these were raised widely in our consultations.

Despite the various challenges associated with implementation of ECCE programmes, several PoE-ECE Directors interviewed expressed pride at their province’s achievements, reflecting positive outcomes associated with administration of these initiatives:

*“We are very happy to respond to your questions because we appreciate the good collaboration that we have with UNICEF and the support that we get from MoEYS”* (PoE-ECE Director)

*“We have limited staff with limited training but are very proud of the results we can see. We believe the programme has been successful and would like to expand it.”* (PoE-ECE Director)

At a local level also, implementation of ECCE programmes appeared in some cases to have resulted in positive outcomes for local management “teams” that have the potential to impact on communities and their beliefs / practices regarding children. The importance and value of cooperation among stakeholders was referred to widely:

*“(We have a).. strong network – which includes a preschool teacher who regularly visits, advises and attends monthly DoE meetings; a core mother and group mothers (see Figure 1.3) who meet weekly to discuss progress,*

*issues...; a village elder is also involved and supports the programme. Our network also includes a male primary teacher who is trained in home visiting and is the trainer for the district; the core mother is also a member of the Women's and Children's Development Committee. She is a very good communicator and is a relative of the village elder.....A major contributor to success has been the TEAM."*

(PoE-ECE Director)

*"Things have changed since we implemented the programme....the whole community is more aware...I'm not a commune member but I can raise issues with the CC ...and have good communication with mothers throughout the commune".*

(CFPWC)

### **State Preschool**

Once again, our data reflected a widely-held assumption that administration and sustainability of SPS are well-established and highly functional, because they are under the control of state government departments. Funding of SPS was not an issue for most of our interviewees, as they are funded by MoEYS and form part of the formal education system.

### **Community Preschool**

Not surprisingly, interviewees across levels of implementation and across all provinces described various challenges associated with administration of CPS programmes. At a micro-level, challenges centred largely around obtaining funding for resources with strong emphasis on external sources:

*"The programme needs more toys, games and teaching materials"*

(Village Chief)

*"This should be like a school as it needs a room. The children want to go to school where there is a real building."*

(Village Chief)

For CPS teachers, issues centred around low salaries and inadequate resources:

*"...very small incentive..small salary...."*

(CPS teacher)

*"...increase salary and FAST!"*

(CPS teacher)

*"...we need shelter, some renovations and a well. I have raised these issues with the commune"*

(CPS teacher)

Another issue shared with us that is worth noting is a primary school principal's concern that, although Commune Chiefs are invited to attend Programme Management Committee meetings, they are not part of the formal working group. Since Commune Chiefs are responsible for allocating funding to ECCE projects, it would seem prudent to ensure that they are appointed as members of ECCE working groups.

At provincial level, a wide range of challenges regarding consistent administration of CPS were referred to, including other time demands placed on families and teachers, and difficulties in recruiting "quality" teachers:

*"...families move away to clear land during the dry season.... If it takes more than one day, their children go with them.....even though people recognise the importance of ECCE, their lives come first"*

(PoE-ECE Director)

*"CPS programmes don't work fully as planned. For example, we planned a month's holiday for CPS programme in mid- December, but the teacher went in early December to pick rice".*

(ECE Officer)

*"... (recruiting) CPS teachers is difficult....(they) are not well educated and have little training so it is difficult for them to be effective, especially in remote areas"*

(PoE-ECE Director)

An underlying message contained in most feedback we obtained was that communes are not in a position, and do not plan, to achieve sustainability of CPS programmes without external aid:

*"...amount of USD 7.5 is provided. When UNICEF removes the support the Village will hold a discussion about funding, but this is not certain."*

(Village Chief)

*"If outsiders continue to support CPS programmes, the commune council will think about ways to share the cost"*

(Commune Chief)

At District and Provincial level, concerns were raised about the capacity of commune councils to budget for ECCE programmes, because they do not form part of the budget for infrastructure projects. As two PLAU officials pointed out:

*"Social services projects are harder to implement than infrastructure projects"*

(PLAU Director)

*"At present, commune does not have a budget to support social service projects"* (PLAU Officer)

Providing financial support for purpose-built shelters could increase tangibility of CPS programmes and reduce the apparent reluctance to financially support them. In addition, relevant training for Commune and Village chiefs could enhance their understanding of the importance of social service projects. One of the PLAU representatives interviewed described how effective training for communes in managing budgets had been in terms of promoting support for the local CPS programmes.

Acknowledging the important role of the CPS teacher in the community is a way of raising the profile of CPS programmes. The latter must be seen to be an integral part of community functioning. In a number of villages that we visited, for example, CPS teachers had been appointed assistants to the village chief.

### ***Home-based Programmes***

Due to the less complex administration requirements and relatively low cost of resources for HBP, stakeholders at all levels expressed a preference for these programmes when asked about sustainability and ease of management. For example, with regard to monitoring and technical support:

*“(with the CPS programmes)...1 in each village, so when problems arise, they have no support (with HBP)..... because they’re groups, they can support each other”.* (PoE Director)

*“(There is a) strong network, including the preschool teacher, and the Village Chief visits Mothers’ meeting weekly”*  
(CFPWC)

We are mindful that, while both CPS and HBP provide important functions in terms of young children’s development, they serve somewhat different purposes. HBP appear to be highly effective in terms of informing mothers (and therefore families and communities) about critical issues in children’s development, while CPS programmes provide a more education-centred experience for young children.

However, consideration of the extent to which these 2 programmes could be merged to serve a combination of functions may be advisable. Given the widely perceived difficulties associated with cost and sustainability of CPS programmes, recruitment of core mothers to train and take on the role of community “teachers” might pose fewer funding concerns and provide a more secure foundation from which to develop a more Community Preschool-based approach.

It is important to note that issues related to the roles of the different Ministries were raised in discussions on administration of programmes. These issues are likely to influence functionality of ECCE programmes and will be considered in the following chapter.

### **Influence of UNICEF Staff**

Based on our observations, the reported successes of ECCE programmes across the 6 UNICEF-supported provinces are due in large part to the commitment, integrity and enthusiasm of UNICEF staff.

The involvement of multiple departments in administering CPS programmes appears to have resulted in widespread mobilisation and commitment to ECCE programmes and it benefits communities to see various staff involved in promoting early childhood education and care.

Once again, given the wide range of personnel involved, it is important for UNICEF staff to be clear about and respond to the priorities and specific needs of communities, and to maintain impartiality in their interactions with district and provincial departments.

We observed concerted efforts in some communes, for example, to encourage councils to contribute to investment in purpose-built shelters for CPS programmes. The need for shelters was widely expressed throughout interviews by various stakeholders and moves towards providing adequate facilities for CPS teachers are important. However, it may be that in some circumstances, investment would be better placed in teaching resources or in ensuring that teachers' salary is paid in order to avoid the CPS teacher resigning.

Clear understanding of the purpose of ECCE programmes, and priorities with regard to provision of appropriate resources (on the part of both UNICEF staff and therefore communities), will lead to informed decisions that are more likely to result in increased sustainability and enhanced educational opportunities for children.

### **Impressions and Recommendations**

Our overall impression, based on the consultations reported here, is that there is widespread support for ECCE programmes, in general, among all stakeholders, and that significant achievements have been made. We are aware of current moves toward decentralisation of services in Cambodia. However, the extent to which ECCE programmes will be integrated with these moves is not clear. Further, how does this impact on their administration in the long-term, given that a major impetus for ECCE (particularly CPS) programmes is from the MoEYS?

The following recommendations are based on acknowledgement that a wide range of factors (not directly related to ECCE promotion) impact on stakeholders' commitment to ECCE programmes.

#### **List of Recommendations**

##### **Recommendation 5.1:**

##### ***Clarify Priorities of ECCE programmes***

It is useful to have a wide range of stakeholders involved in implementation and administration of CPS programmes, but given this range it is also VERY important to be clear about priorities and obligations, to maintain momentum and to make sure that ECCE programmes are at the top of everyone's agenda, particularly commune and village councils, by promoting key personnel, such as CPS teachers.

##### **Recommendation 5.2:**

***Encourage co-ordination among SPS teachers, CPS teachers and core-mothers***

There should be more coordination between SPS, HBP and CPS programmes as they can support each other. CPS teachers operate in a relatively isolated environment in which they do not have opportunities to discuss teaching-related issues on a regular basis. Given the limited training that these teachers receive, it is a significant challenge for them to cater for a wide range of children with minimal resources.

## Chapter Six

### Operation and Sustainability of Community Preschools and Home-based programmes

This chapter considers the operation and sustainability of Community Preschools and Home-based programmes. We first describe the guidelines for establishment, monitoring and support of the two programmes. In doing so, when appropriate, we identify discrepancies between guidelines for programmes and what we observed. Next, we consider issues related to the sustainability of these programmes. Finally, we discuss some of the challenges associated with scaling up these programmes.

#### Operation

As mentioned in Chapter 1, CPS are designed to operate 5 days a week<sup>3</sup> from 7 – 9 am. The programme in its present form was initiated in 2004 and is an outgrowth of the child-minding service that was started in the 1990s so that parents could attend literacy education classes. The CPS is designed to provide early learning opportunities for children ranging in age from three to five years and to enhance their preparedness for school. The latter is very important in the Cambodian context where there are high rates of repetition in the early grades and over-age enrolment in the Primary grades.

The HBP focuses on mothers as the child's first and most important teacher and aims to support them as early educators. This is done by showing mothers how to engage their children in early learning activities in the home setting, thereby promoting child development and school readiness. This programme, which was established in 2004, caters for children from birth to 6 years. Figure 1.3 illustrates the organisational structure of the programmes and Table 1.1 describes the role of three ministries in the CPS and HBP.

The **establishment** of a CPS and a HBP is the responsibility of the Commune Council, an elected local body. The POWA and the PoE departments are engaged in the support and monitoring of these programmes.

The CPS is **located** within the community but as pointed out in Chapter 4, the schools were sometimes in inappropriate locations. The programme is **staffed** by a single teacher who has to manage up to 34 mixed-age children single-handedly. There is no support from members of the community as teacher's aides. We found that the **quality** of instruction varied considerably and was dependent on teacher background, characteristics and individual circumstances. The CPS combines care and education and it is important that the community and the CPS teacher considers herself<sup>4</sup> a teacher and not a child-minder. Some CPS teachers were child-minders and they may need support to change their conceptions of their role in the programme.

Respect for CPS teachers in the community is evident but they would benefit from having more recognition for their role as an early childhood educator. Male members should be encouraged to become CPS teachers and effort is needed to build community acceptance of male early childhood educators.

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<sup>3</sup> Community Preschools are closed on Thursdays and Sundays

<sup>4</sup> There is only one male CPS teacher in Cambodia

Mothers are the formal targets for the HBP. Each project is led by a core mother who is selected by villagers as someone who is more educated and experienced than other mothers. The core mothers attended monthly meetings where they were given hand-outs and hands-on practice with children in homes, peer support and co-operative problem solving.

The **curricula** for both programmes were developed by the MoEYS, with NGO support and focuses on the holistic development of the child. They have been informed by the Cambodian Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) which have been mentioned in Chapters 1 and 3. One Ministry is responsible for documents and curriculum for all ECCE programmes and it is currently revising the curriculum for all ECCE programmes so that it will be aligned with the ELDS that were finalised in August 2007. Hence, as mentioned in Chapter 1, all 5-year-old children in Cambodia, regardless of whether they attend the SPS, CPS and HBP will shortly have access to the same basic curriculum.

CPS teachers are given a handbook and the focus is on activities that can be done with large and small groups. The HBP instructs mothers in activities that can be implemented by her as part of the daily routine at home and a Calendar of Activities was developed in 2006 for mothers participating in the Home-based programmes. Core mothers consider this calendar a pivotal part of the programme as it provides mothers with a coherently organised series of activities to use with their children at home. The intention was that every participating mother should have a Calendar. However, we observed that this was not always the case. In one commune we visited, there were two home-based projects in adjacent villages and one core mother for both villages. All the mothers in one village had Calendars but only the Group mothers had calendars in the other. When questioned about this by government officials, the core mother reported that she did not have enough calendars for all beneficiaries of the programme.

We observed the link between the curriculum and its implementation in CPS. We found that there was limited time for some instructional activities, limited attention was given to addressing individual differences among children and that children's learning was not assessed. If the programme length was increased from two to three hours, the teacher would have more time to achieve instructional objectives.

In the HBP, mothers are trained how to use everyday activities to stimulate their children's development and how to introduce basic concepts to them.

The MoEYS is responsible for providing **technical support/monitoring** for all programmes. The POWA is responsible for community mobilization and ensuring that Community Preschools and Home-based programmes are actually functioning. The PLAU is responsible for the commune council budget for Community Preschools. There was a lack of clear understanding by some stakeholders about their roles. For example, some commune council members said they provided technical support to programmes in addition to seeing whether the programmes were operating. The CPS teachers and core mothers from the HBP were also not able to distinguish the roles of officials from different departments and the reasons they were visited by them.

There clearly needs to be a shared understanding between all stakeholders about their roles in monitoring and support. If this does not occur, efforts may be unnecessarily duplicated and there could be a diffusion of responsibility. Explicit guidelines are needed for dealing with sub-standard programmes and for children with developmental delays. We provide information on monitoring and support of CPS and HBP garnered from our interviews of stakeholders below.

### ***Monitoring of HBP***

Monitoring of HBP appears to be largely community-based. One particularly successful HBP programme that we visited involved a wide range of people in “monitoring” and support:

*“...the commune chief “mobilises” parents and liaises with the local primary school principal for support; I visit mothers’ groups in 2 villages; the core mother “monitors” groups by visiting (on the pretext of) conducting cooking activities / delivering resources on a regular basis, and Programme Monitoring Committees meet weekly. The DOE staff and the local primary teacher are on this Committee....”*  
(Village Chief)

Based on our observations, the relaxed but well-organised role of community members in administration of HBP provides a significant benefit. Support for mothers’ groups and core mothers is on-going and consistent, with less dependence on external bodies for physical and human resources required for successful operation.

### ***Monitoring of CPS programmes***

Responses to questions regarding **perceived roles** in administration of CPS were relatively straightforward (typically: POWA provides support within the community / PoE provides “technical” support). However, responses describing actual activities carried out by the different provincial Departments (PoE, POWA and PLAU) provided some indication of the lack of clarity that exists in some cases.

Lack of clarity seemed more apparent with regard to administration of CPS than HBP, perhaps due to the involvement of more stakeholders. In provinces, communes and villages where CPS programmes are operating effectively, there is evidence that the three departments work in close cooperation with each other and have reached agreement on their respective roles:

*“POWA collaborates with PoE from district, commune and village level”*  
(POWA Director)

Of particular concern is the importance of shared understandings not only about roles and obligations of PoE and POWA with regard to “monitoring” teachers but also the purpose (and outcomes) of monitoring. As one POWA Director explained:

*“Teachers are monitored by the CFPWC. She observes classes, makes sure the teacher is there. She prepares a report and feeds back to Commune Chief. Teachers are also monitored by staff member of DEO on ‘technical ability’”. (POWA Director)*

According to another POWA Director:

*“POWA is responsible for coordination, facilitation of CP through CWCFP. The CWCFP supervises and monitors functioning”.*

(POWA Director)

We encountered some degree of variation in consistency of monitoring and support, even across villages in the same commune. One teacher told us:

*“The CFPWC comes often.....last year, DOWA and DOE came often, but in the last three months, no-one came.”*

(CPS Teacher)

In another village in the same commune, another teacher told us:

*“The DOE comes often....once a month....also, someone from the commune comes once per month”*

(CPS Teacher)

Whether the inconsistency reported here is related to accuracy of feedback or to regularity of monitoring there needs to be clear understanding, among all stakeholders, that CPS teachers need regular support, particularly given the relatively isolated circumstances in which they operate.

While it is beneficial to have multiple departments and offices involved in overseeing functional aspects of ECCE programmes, the need for clarity of roles and responsibilities is crucial in order to ensure consistency in provision of support and services for CPS teachers.

POWA Directors and CFPWC referred to supporting CPS teachers by taking their concerns and challenges to the commune council, however the purpose and outcomes of “technical” monitoring and support were less clear. Once again, the active role of teachers in supporting ECCE programmes (particularly CPS programmes) is crucial for their operation and sustainability. The success of CPS teachers is largely dependent upon the level and quality of support that they receive from POWA and PoE officials. However, in some provinces, teachers had not been visited for over a month and described feeling isolated due to a lack of support:

*“There is only me in the village and not many people to ask for support”*

(CPS teacher)

Delayed payments for teachers were also reported at commune level. In many cases teachers were also owed several months' salary. These issues may be due, in part, to a lack of understanding on the part of commune councils regarding the importance of social service projects and, more specifically, teachers' role and employment "conditions". As one POWA Director pointed out:

*"Commune does not have clear guidelines about use of commune budget for CPS"* (POWA Director)

Lack of clarity may also lead to loss in priority:

*"The CPS is under the management of communes (including commune chief, deputy chief, CFPWC. They are all very busy with other responsibilities so their engagement in CPS programmes is not enough yet. The Commune has an important role to encourage and monitor and, so far, they don't do this fully yet."* (ECE Officer)

Once again, given the range of personnel involved in administration of CPS programmes, shared priorities and roles need to be established, with an emphasis on acknowledging the CPS teacher as central to successful implementation.

## **Sustainability**

### **Commitment**

Every one of the over 100 informants in our interviews expressed a strong commitment to ECCE in their province. There is strong motivation for improving access to ECCE from provincial officials and teachers and they could clearly articulate the benefits of programmes for children. Commune council members also alluded to the benefits of ECCE programmes for the community. MoEYS and UNICEF staff tended to stress the importance of ECCE for children's school readiness and, in turn, for meeting objectives stated in National Plans and for meeting EFA targets. UNICEF staff also looked at these ECCE programmes as ways of improving children's well-being, the empowerment of women and community capacity building. Parents who are the educators in HBP particularly liked the calendar of activities and the feeling of competence they felt in their parenting role. The quotation below captures the feeling of the mothers who participate in the HBP.

*"We lack the knowledge to educate our children – only teachers have that knowledge. However, we are motivated to prepare our children for school and we want to have the knowledge to educate our children at home. I want my children (and those in my village) to be confident, outstanding and moral like other children who go to the State Preschool. We did not have good habits at home but now we know it is wrong to scold and hit children. We want our children to be socialised and to become good persons. We want the knowledge to educate them at home."*

Mother in HBP, 32 years, completed 11<sup>th</sup> grade, mother of two boys

aged 2 and 7 years)

It is clear that there is commitment at all levels to the system for ECCE.

### ***Financial Issues***

CPS teachers receive a financial incentive of USD7.50 per month. In 2006 and 2007, UNICEF met 100 per cent of the costs of this incentive. In 2008, UNICEF will meet 2/3 of the cost of the teacher incentive and the commune council has to meet 1/3 of the cost and in 2009 UNICEF will meet 1/3 of the cost of the teacher incentive and the commune council has to meet 2/3 of the cost. By 2010, the commune council will have to meet 100 per cent of the cost of this incentive. Concerns were expressed by all CC about meeting the cost of this incentive from the commune budget. As mentioned earlier, the CPS is not an infrastructure project and the CC will have to allocate part of its budget for the only social service project managed at the commune level.

On the other hand, the HBP requires little money to run and capital costs are zero. It is thus replicable in other poor, isolated and remote communities.

### ***Staffing***

In earlier chapters, the pressing need for extending and enhancing teacher training has been discussed. To offer sustainable programmes of a high quality, a team of qualified and trained CPS has to be developed.

### **Challenges for Scaling up Programmes**

#### ***Low levels of Maternal and Teacher Education.***

CPS teachers and core mothers must have a basic level of literacy to successfully meet their roles. ECCE programmes should be accompanied by adult literacy programmes. As mentioned earlier, some CPS teachers had difficulty reading and the core mothers were not necessarily the most educated women in the village. Commune Councils should be reminded of the importance of literacy skills when selecting CPS teachers and core mothers.

#### ***Maintaining Quality***

The CPS and HBP are relatively new programmes and much has been attained in a short period of time. Improving the quality of these programmes should be a priority and extreme caution must be exercised to ensure that scaling up programmes does not lead to a decrease in programme quality.

### ***Financial Issues***

The financial inputs which will be required from the Commune Council budget for the CPS may compromise its sustainability. Stakeholders may consider scaling up a hybrid version of the CPS and HBP programmes. This will allow the community to gain the advantages of both types of programmes while avoiding the some of the problems associated with operating and supporting the CPS.

## List of Recommendations

### **Recommendation 6.1:**

#### ***Enhance funding of ECCE***

Increase government spending on ECCE. Developments and improvements in early education in Cambodia will not be sustained if there is a lack of funding. At the least, a commitment for funds for training Community Preschool Teachers, “core” mothers and supporting the development of teacher trainers is necessary to enhance the quality of early childhood services. Commune Councils should be encouraged to allocate some of their budget to social services projects like the Community Preschools.

### **Recommendation 6.2:**

#### ***Focus on Teacher Quality***

Select the most suitable members of the community to be Community Preschool Teachers and “core” mothers. Teachers should be educationally qualified as we found that some had difficulty reading stories to children. Our impression is that some Community Preschools teachers were selected just because they had been child-minders or because they were related to influential members of the community and not because they were the most qualified.

### **Recommendation 6.3**

#### ***Encourage Good Practices in Programmes***

Encourage practices that can help provide disadvantaged children an opportunity to have higher quality ECCE. These include: nurturing a positive sense of self in the child; providing a child-appropriate early childhood setting; regarding the child as an active learner who can do things and make things happen; implementing a curriculum so that each girl and each boy, regardless of their differences, feels they are regarded with dignity and worth; creating an effective learning environment by developing and enacting effective curricula; and providing high quality and age-appropriate instruction.

### **Recommendation 6.4**

#### ***Assess children’s learning***

Currently CPS teachers do not assess children’s early development and learning. Children’s holistic development should be assessed at the beginning, middle and end of the academic year. This type of assessment will alert teachers to individual differences among children and the support they need to provide to different children. Further, in the Cambodian context, we feel that assessment can have a positive influence on teacher’s instruction. When developing such a policy attention should be given to providing teachers with methods to refer and deal with children with suspected developmental delays.

**Recommendation 6.5*****Consider increasing the length of the CPS programme from two to three hours***

The CPS programme is currently 10 hours per week and the programme may need to increase in length to meet all its curriculum objectives. The time available for teachers to give children individual attention and to provide all the activities needed in an holistic programme is currently compromised by the time they have to spend on grooming children and by the large group size. Recruit mother volunteers, possibly on a roster, to work as teachers' aides. Many of them attend CPS classes to be with their children.

**Recommendation 6.6*****Improve co-ordination in the support and monitoring of programmes.***

The three Ministries and MoEYS, MOWA and Mol and their provincial counterparts should work together to develop a plan for support, monitoring and evaluation of ECCE programmes. Each party's clearly defined, non-overlapping roles should be conveyed to teachers. The Provincial Office of Education provides technical support and should provide more concrete and relevant advice on how to improve the programme and not just focus on pedagogy.

**Recommendation 6.7*****Consider scaling up a hybrid version of the Community Preschools and Home-based programmes.***

Given (i) the inputs required for the Community Preschools; (ii) the challenges identified in the sustainability of Community Preschools programmes; (iii) the fact that children from Community Preschools and Home-based programmes did not significantly differ in their school preparedness; (iv) low levels of maternal education; and (v) low levels of family involvement in the Community Preschools, stakeholders may consider scaling up a hybrid version of the Community Preschools and Home-based programmes. The form of this hybrid version can be developed after consultation with various stakeholders. A fusion of the two programmes will allow the community to gain the advantages of both types of programmes while avoiding some of the problems associated with operating and supporting these programmes. That stated, improving the quality of these programmes must be a priority and extreme caution must be exercised to ensure that scaling up programmes does not lead to a decrease in programme quality.

## Chapter Seven Conclusions and the Way Forward

In order to successfully scale up early childhood programmes, it is necessary for Cambodian society to have the necessary will (increase demand for and supply of programmes) and skill (ability to successfully implement and evaluate programmes) to do so. It is clear from our observations and interviews with the various stakeholders that there is a great desire to have early childhood programmes. This demand that already exists is the result of the successful dissemination of information about the positive effects of early childhood programmes on child development. Government officials, international NGOs, the media and Commune/Village Chiefs should be congratulated on their success in promoting ECCE in Cambodian society. They have successfully conveyed the notion that the early childhood years are critical for cognitive, social and emotional development and that ECCE, which meets the distinct needs of children, can positively affect their performance in primary school as well as their self esteem.

There is clearly political will to scale up ECCE but this will must be accompanied by clearly articulated policies and associated implementation plans in addition to the fiscal commitment which will ensure the quality of these programmes. Commune Councils should be encouraged to allocate resources to non-infrastructure projects such as Community Preschools and parents should also pay a token fee for snacks in the CPS. If this is not possible, they should at least devote their time as volunteers or teacher helpers for the CPS 1-2 days per week. They can be recruited as teaching assistants to look after the hygiene and grooming needs of the children which currently consume significant amounts of the teachers' time. They could presumably also be trained to play structured games and activities with younger children to stop them disrupting the older ones. Observing the CPS teacher interact and teach young children could lead mothers to adopt similar practices in their homes and is another benefit of parent volunteers. In short, parents should contribute to community preschools either in cash for snacks or volunteer their time to help the CPS teacher.

Our results show that just having either a CPS or HBP in the village had several benefits to the community. Further, our observations showed that CPS has strengths in several curriculum domains – for example the teaching of pre-numeracy skills and in getting children to sing with actions. We conclude that the teaching of pre-numeracy must have been very well taught in initial and continuing CPS teacher training programmes. Singing and dancing are enjoyable, no-cost activities and should continue to get attention in the curriculum. Indeed, interviewees mentioned that one of the advantages of CPS attendance was that children learned rhymes and songs. These skills are clearly valued by parents. If the same attention is given to other domains in teacher-training programmes (e.g., language and communication; social development, assessment of children's learning), these aspects of the programme are likely to improve.

We found that the physical setting of the CPS could be improved. In many cases, the CPS was held under the teacher's house and not in a purpose-built or permanent structure. Young children are sensitive to both the physical and psychological environment and efforts should be made to enhance both these.

The advantages of HBP have been stated in earlier chapters. The recent introduction of the Calendar of Activities for 5- to 6-year-olds is a significant added strength of the HBP and is clearly appreciated by the core and group mothers. The importance of having systematic, easy to follow, illustrated curriculum guides for poorly educated mothers cannot be overstated.

Stakeholders explained the roles of the different ministries in the monitoring and supervision of Community Preschools and Home-based programmes. The MoEYS is responsible for providing technical support/monitoring and preparing the curriculum for all programmes. The POWA is responsible for community mobilization and ensuring that the Community Preschools and Home-based programmes are actually functioning. The PLAU is responsible for the commune council budget for the Community Preschools. There was a lack of clear understanding by some stakeholders about their roles.

There is a tremendous need for technical support at all levels of the system. The teacher trainers need more training as do the CPS teachers and core-group mothers. Commune Council officials and Village Chiefs also need more training in advocacy. In particular, there is a need for training in evaluation and monitoring of programmes for PoE, MOWA and PLAU staff and Commune Council members. Of some concern is the lack of a shared understanding among stakeholders about their roles in programme support and monitoring. For example, some commune council members said they provided technical support to programmes in addition to seeing whether the programmes were operating. CPS and core mothers of the HBP were also not able to distinguish the roles of officials from different departments and the reasons they were visited by them.

Our results showed that participation in an early childhood programme had significant and positive effects on children's developmental functioning and readiness for school. Participation in an early childhood programme at age 4 was the most important and significant predictor of children's developmental functioning at post-test and maternal education significantly contributed to this prediction. This suggests that children should be provided with ECCE services from at least age 4. It is very important to note that children who attended programmes at age 4 also attended programmes at age 5 and the cumulative influence of participation for 2 years contributed to their developmental functioning at the post-test.

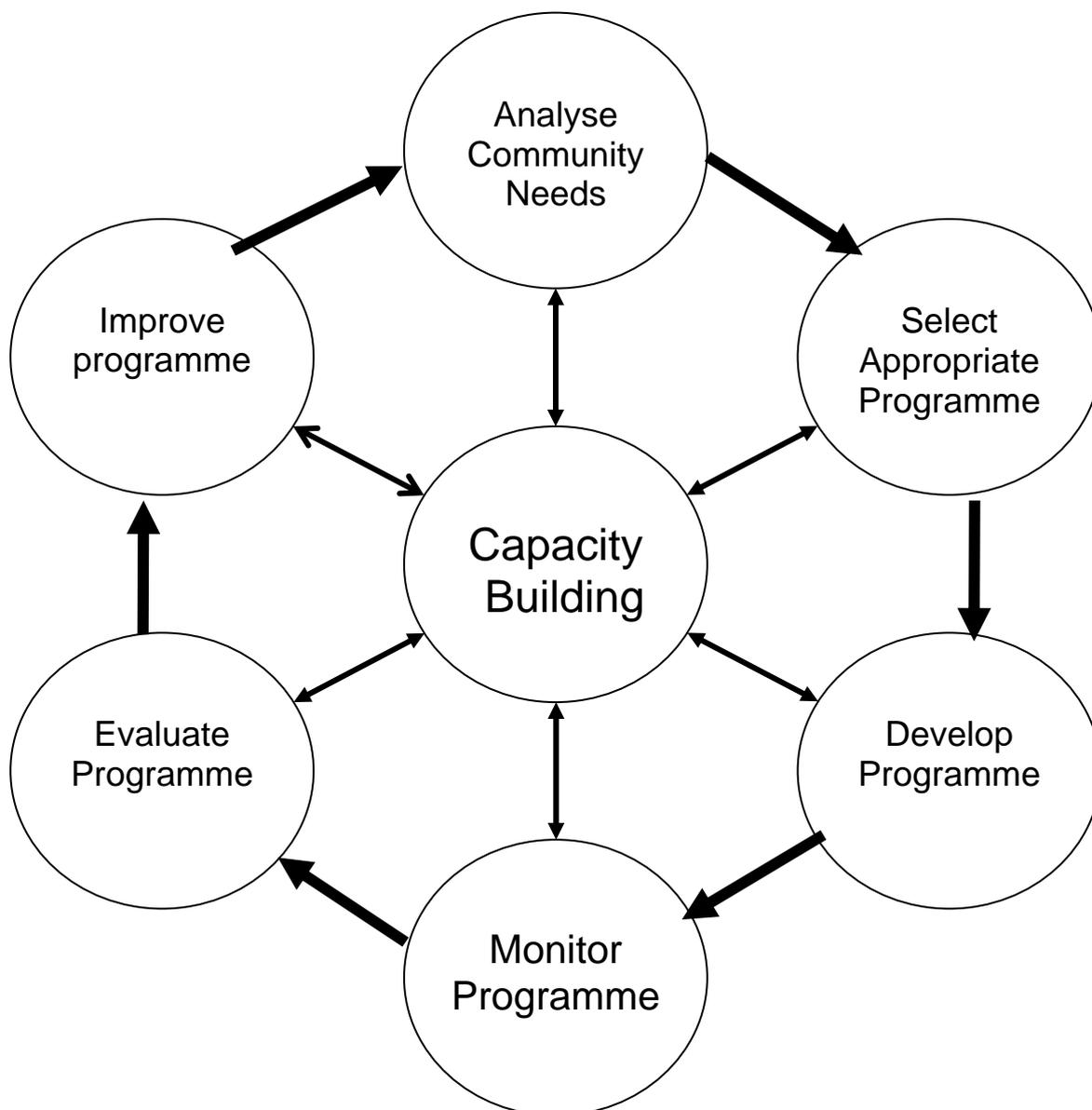
Children from SPS did significantly better than children from CPS and HBP but there were no differences between the groups in children's developmental functioning. While this would appear to suggest that there are no differences in the two programmes, we must interpret these findings in conjunction with the observational data. Less than 70 per cent of enrolled children were present on the day that randomly selected CPS were observed. Parents and teachers told us that not all children attended the CPS regularly and we found that there were wide variations in the quality of the CPS. Teacher competence, community support, programme monitoring and technical support varied greatly across the programmes we observed. To obtain benefits from CPS, children must attend and the programmes must be of adequate quality. On the other hand, mothers are highly motivated to support their child's development and are always there. In the light of

the above, caution must be exercised in interpreting the findings of no significant differences in child outcomes between CPS and HBP.

In deciding whether to establish an ECCE programme in a community, several factors associated with the village and commune must be considered. However, regardless of whether a village decides to adopt a CPS, HBP or hybrid model, the process for decision-making should be the same. The diagram below shows one way of proceeding. Other models may be equally effective.

Figure 7.1

A Model for Establishing and Evaluating the functioning of ECCE programmes



Remote areas require more support in the case of both CPS and HBP. The same evaluation policy (e.g. one visit per month) will be insufficient for some areas. Our findings clearly show that children in remote areas (poor infrastructure/distance from provincial headquarters) are more disadvantaged than other children. Their parents also have lower levels of education. Hence, technical support visits should be more frequent to these areas than other areas.

Many stakeholders mentioned the desirability of providing snacks to children in HBP, CPS and SPS. Children in the SPS received a meal as part of the World Food Programme until early 2007. However, this programme is no longer in operation. In one SPS, there are two L3 bi-sessional classes and children attended morning and afternoon sessions in alternate months. Because of the shortage of food supplies only children in the morning group had a free meal and the teacher commented that the children learned better and were more enthusiastic when they received a meal. The literature attests to the positive sequelae of breakfast and school milk/lunch programmes on young children's learning. This kind of support is particularly important in the Cambodian context given the high rates of malnutrition and stunting (See Chapter 1) and the commitment to holistic early child development. Parents/communities can be encouraged to pay for this snack/meal as it will increase the motivation of children to attend early childhood programmes and make them sustainable. However, once children have been given the meal/snack, the onus is on the teacher to make learning enjoyable and keep children motivated. One CPS teacher complained that children went home after the meal<sup>5</sup> was given.

In the light of our findings, we also feel that stakeholders should consider the desirability of stakeholders scaling up a hybrid version of the CPS and HBP programmes. This will allow the community to gain the advantages of both types of programmes while avoiding some of the problems associated with operating and supporting these programmes.

Empirical research on the influence of early childhood programmes on children and on the larger community has informed policy-making and contributed to theory building. If possible, the 1019 children who were assessed at pre-test and post-test should be tracked beyond 2007 to consider the long term influence of ECCE programmes on children, their families and their communities. Further, the 18 children whose CPS programmes were assessed should be studied to ascertain the influence of the CPS on children with varying levels of developmental functioning. These children can be followed longitudinally as part of a multiple case study. The results of these longer term studies can help find out reasons for dropping out of school, grade repetition and low academic achievement. After determining which children are at-risk for problems in school, efforts can be made to provide intensive preventive interventions to children with these risk factors.

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<sup>5</sup> In this village, the Commune Council Chief asked the primary school to donate supplies from the World Food Programme to the CPS. The CPS teacher collected the rations every day. Hence children in this CPS had, for some months, a free meal during the CPS programme.

This study has generated data relevant to programme evaluation. Its findings can also contribute to further programme development and improve implementation, support and monitoring of ECCE programmes. A list of recommendations from the study is provided below and the points are elaborated upon in the Executive Summary.

During the past decade, there has been a significant increase in access to ECCE in Cambodia. However, the majority still do not have access and quality varies considerably. All education stakeholders have key roles to take to ensure access to and equity in high quality ECE. It is necessary to act at the policy, community, centre and family levels.

## **List of Recommendations**

### **Demand, Access, Enrolment and Attendance**

1. Continue to generate demand for ECCE.
2. Increase access and enrolment by providing services close to where the child lives.
3. Enrol children in early childhood programmes before they are 4.
4. Enrol children in either Community Preschools or Home-based Programmes.
5. Increase enrolment and regular attendance by providing centre-based services that are free, integrated, have incentives for children's participation and which children enjoy.

### **Funding Early Childhood Care and Education**

6. Enhance government and private funding of ECCE

### **Community Involvement**

8. Encourage community involvement and family participation in ECCE through the development and enactment of appropriate policies.

### **Quality of Programmes**

9. Focus on Teacher Quality
10. Emulate Good Practices in Programmes

### **Encourage co-ordination among different stakeholders**

11. Improve co-ordination in the support and monitoring of programmes.

### **Scaling up Community Preschools and Home-based programmes**

12. Consider scaling up a hybrid version of the Community Preschools and Home-based programmes.