EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY PRESCHOOL MODALITY IN CAMBODIA
April–December 2015
Final Report
(Volume I)
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Fabrice Hénard, Learning Avenue (Team Leader)

With contribution from:
Leslie Diamond, Estelle Roesch, Sok Sovannarith, Mario Fernández Hernández, Carole Marks, Sabine Becker-Thierry
UNICEF Cambodia produces and publishes evaluation reports to fulfil a corporate commitment to transparency. The reports are designed to stimulate the free exchange of ideas among those interested in the study topic and to assure those supporting UNICEF work that it rigorously examines its strategies, results and overall effectiveness.

The ‘Evaluation of Community Preschool Modality in Cambodia’ was prepared by an independent consultant, Fabrice Hénard (Learning Avenue), with contribution from Leslie Diamond, Estelle Roesch, Sok Sovannarith, Mario Fernández Hernández, Carole Marks and Sabine Becker-Thierry. The evaluation was managed by a team comprised of UNICEF staff (Monitoring & Evaluation, Local Governance for Child Rights and Education sections) and was supported by a reference group, which included representatives from the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and UNICEF Regional Office for East Asia and the Pacific.

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While the insights of those interviewed were essential to shaping this report, the contents are entirely the responsibility of the evaluation team.

Fabrice Hénard, Learning Avenue
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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>commune council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCWC</td>
<td>commune committee for women and children</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDPF</td>
<td>Capacity Development Partnership Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPAP</td>
<td>Country Programme Action Plan (UNICEF)</td>
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<td>CPS</td>
<td>community preschool</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAC</td>
<td>Development Assistance Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>D&amp;D</td>
<td>decentralization and de-concentration</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOE</td>
<td>district office of education</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECCD</td>
<td>early childhood care and development</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECD</td>
<td>early childhood development</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>early childhood education</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education For All</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELDS</td>
<td>Early Learning Development Standards</td>
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<tr>
<td>EMIS</td>
<td>Education Management Information System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>GIZ</td>
<td>German Society for International Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGCR</td>
<td>Local Governance for Child Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEF</td>
<td>Ministry of Economy and Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOEYS</td>
<td>Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOI</td>
<td>Ministry of Interior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOWA</td>
<td>Ministry of Women’s Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCDD-S</td>
<td>National Committee for Sub-national Democratic Development Secretariat</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>non-governmental organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POE</td>
<td>provincial office of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOC</td>
<td>theory of change</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOR</td>
<td>terms of reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNEG</td>
<td>United Nations Evaluation Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>WASH</td>
<td>water, sanitation and hygiene</td>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

International research indicates that access to preschool and early learning improves a child’s developmental readiness and capacity for learning throughout life. Nations that provide quality early childhood learning see high long-term returns on this important investment. Prior to the election of Cambodia’s first commune councils in 2002, UNICEF Cambodia supported the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MOWA) to establish community-based childcare classes, with technical input from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MOEYS). Thereafter, community-based childcare classes were transformed into community preschools (CPSs) that are sustained and managed by commune councils and commune committees for women and children (CCWCs). In 2012, there were 28,339 children aged 3 to 5 enrolled in 1,282 CPSs in 320 communes in 12 provinces in Cambodia; of those, girls accounted for 52 per cent, or 14,932 students. UNICEF supported the management of the schools and provided technical expertise to the Ministry of Interior (MOI) to strengthen local commune council and CCWC ability to oversee day-to-day operations. Following a 2014 midterm review of its 2011–2015 Country Programme, UNICEF decided to refocus the geographical coverage of its support to 101 communes and 1,073 CPSs of a total 2,309 CPSs across the country.

Purpose of the evaluation
This report presents the results of an independent evaluation that UNICEF Cambodia, in conjunction with MOI and MOEYS, commissioned in April 2015 to assess the contribution of CPS to early childhood development in Cambodia. The CPS model is at a critical juncture and the purpose of this evaluation – undertaken by an external evaluator, Fabrice Hénard – was to provide evidence that will help both the Government of Cambodia and UNICEF refocus, redevelop and improve the CPS experience and inform UNICEF’s 2016–2018 Country Programme’s support strategies for early childhood development (ECD).

Evaluation objectives and expected users
The evaluation had five specific objectives:

- Provide a documented overview of results achieved by UNICEF-supported CPSs over the 2005–2014 period, along with the strategy and modus operandi prompted by UNICEF;
- Assess the effectiveness of UNICEF-supported CPSs, especially the role of commune councils in the context of the decentralization and de-concentration (D&D) process;
- Highlight the impact on the children and families targeted by the CPS modality and, to the extent possible, provide evidence on these impacts (or formulate assumptions about the effect of UNICEF support, depending on the degree of causality);
- Explore the sustainability of the CPS modality; and

The primary users of the findings and conclusions of this evaluation will be MOI, MOEYS and UNICEF, as well as the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) and to some extent local-level implementing partners, such as commune councils, provincial offices of education (POEs) and district offices of education (DOEs).

Evaluation methodology
Given the specific objectives and proposed uses of the evaluation, as well as its broad scope, a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect data (mixed-methods approach). The evaluation matrix included 18 evaluation questions covering the five evaluation criteria of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development
Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) – relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability – set forth in the Terms of Reference (TOR) and UNICEF’s guiding principles on equity, gender equality and human rights. During data collection, the evaluation team visited 101 CPSs over three geographical areas (Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Kampong Cham) to observe classes, conducted 30 semi-structured key informant interviews with various stakeholders (representing some 150 community members as many were interviewed in groups), carried out focus group discussions with more than 200 people (i.e., teachers, parents) and used a life story approach to ask 30 parents or caregivers about their opinions on CPS. Moreover, in-depth research was carried out to gain an understanding of Cambodia’s political system, administrative divisions and major institutions involved in education, as well as which donors and NGOs have a stake in this policy area. Triangulation involved comparing findings between several sources (at least three) as well as cross-checking evidence from interviews and documentation review. Ethical considerations were taken into account in terms of the design and implementation of the evaluation.

The major methodological limitations of this evaluation included the lack of a theory of change (TOC) for the CPS modality and the unavailability of relevant baseline, midline or end-line data. Thus, the impact of the CPS modality could not be accurately measured in terms of developmental outcomes and children’s school readiness. Instead, the effects of CPS are examined with causal reasons for achievements and shortfalls. The fast-changing context of the D&D process made it difficult for the evaluators to understand in which legal context the commune councils were operating. The devolution of power to the local level is an ongoing process in Cambodia and the breakdown of responsibilities between the central and decentralized level remains unclear. Likewise, the devolution of responsibilities to de-concentrated levels (i.e., POEs, DOE) is not complete and remains unclear for ministerial as well as provincial and district staff. The combination of these factors made analysis of the CPS modality efficiency challenging. Complementary interviews with technical professionals from MOI, MOEYS and UNICEF staff clarified the institutional situation and the funding process, which remain, however, highly complex and constantly in motion.

**Findings, conclusions and lessons learned**

**Relevance:** Considerable evidence has shown that most CPSs address the needs of children aged 3 to 5 in terms of access and enrolment to quality early childhood education (ECE). CPSs are also relevant to the needs of the most disadvantaged, worst off children through the establishment of schools in areas in which state schools are not providing preschool education. In 60 per cent of the CPSs visited, commune council and CCWC representatives, as well as teachers, try to encourage parents to enrol and send their children to preschool under all circumstances (e.g., children with disabilities or those in poor conditions). However, significant gaps still exist in providing access to ECE. Although centrally located CPSs enable easy access, which allow children to go to school on foot, access is severely hampered for children living one to three kilometres from the school. Similarly, commune councils have difficulty detecting children with disability that drop out or have never gone to preschool. When children with disability do access education, those with greater physical disabilities, such as inability to walk, do not receive an education adapted to their needs. Teachers are not trained to deal with children with disability, but in most cases try innovative ways to include these children so that they may benefit from an education.

UNICEF has developed long-standing support to communes to help deliver social services. It has also strongly supported a holistic approach to ECE, according to most CPS teachers and commune councils. However, CPSs are not yet an entry point for inter-sectoral early childhood care and development (ECCD) services (including education, health, hygiene and nutrition) as teachers are not sufficiently trained in these areas.

**Effectiveness:** Evidence from focus group discussions and class observations suggests a clear correlation between the quality of the premises, the teaching material, the teachers’
motivation and parental recognition of the value of CPS. Many CPS settings are of poor quality and teaching material is underutilized. Evidence suggests that most teachers have a basic understanding of child-centred and active learning pedagogies despite vast disparities among communes. However, most teachers operate in isolation and their motivation to make the school welcoming to children depends much on the involvement of the commune council and CCWC members and parents, which is often minimal.

When teachers are motivated and when they received in- and pre-service training, the results on school achievements are better: children attending CPS show a good level of school readiness and transition to primary school.

**Efficiency:** As far as efficiency is concerned, the evaluation indicates that UNICEF has provided support to teachers who highly value the quality of training and teaching materials. However, most teachers lack the appropriate knowledge and skills to enforce the ECCD concept, which is relatively new to them. POEs and DOEs provide minimal help as they lack of time and do not regularly supervise the CPS teachers. Despite wide dissemination of guides for teachers and teaching material, most teachers operate in isolation and rarely share practices or ask for help.

Commune councils are challenged in running CPSs efficiently due to a shortage of managerial skills, despite the training they received. They find it difficult to arbitrate funding among the many priorities of the commune. Most council members and households prioritize economic development, namely infrastructure, and education often comes second. Funding social service delivery is progressing, but remains low. There is no earmarked funding for CPS.

Nevertheless, the engagement of commune council and CCWC representatives and parents, where effective, is a strong driver to quality improvement of ECE services, including in cases where communes have limited funding.

**Sustainability:** The recognition of CPS as a regular model for ECCD is a major factor in ensuring sustainability. Despite UNICEF support, the issue of funding ECCD and CPS, the unstable context of D&D, the sharing of responsibilities between MOI and MOEYS, as well as the low level of parental engagement in CPS, threaten the sustainability of the CPS modality. In case of UNICEF’s withdrawal, many commune councils would be unable to operate the CPS as they still need extra funding and technical assistance to deliver this social service.

**Impacts:** The evaluation found little evidence on impacts of CPS on children. The most robust evidence collected shows that overall children progressed on educational and social skills. The absence of children’s performance tests prevents Cambodian authorities and UNICEF from having a more precise and reliable picture of the impact of UNICEF support and country engagement in ECCD and CPS in particular. Likewise, UNICEF’s additional social support to communes is quite recent and although it has yielded more funding for social services in UNICEF-supported communes, the commune council capacity to deliver social services such as education provisions, maternity services and health protection information more efficiently remains low.

In conclusion, the structure of the CPS modality is adequate and complete in its design as it responds to children’s needs. It is also in line with the national framework in place. The communes are now strongly aware and supportive of ECCD, which was not the case in earlier years. Although results in terms of policy structure and specific tangible outcomes, such as training guides and curricula, have been achieved, implementation on the ground remains hampered. There is no particular incentive nor regular monitoring provided that would make the CPS more operational. This leads to questioning the sustainability of a model that is essentially relying on the communes to function. While ‘upstream work’ may be functional in many instances (i.e., at ministerial level), it lacks the necessary support and much-needed motivation from the ‘midstream’ level (i.e., POEs/DOEs and communes that manage the CPS).
The evaluation team identified the following main lessons:

- **Assigning responsibilities:** The chain of roles and responsibilities from the national level, via the mid-level, through to the local (commune) level needs to be clearly defined and operational for the CPS modality to be functional. Otherwise, regardless of how well the CPS is designed, implementation is too dependent on the community level and lacks sufficient technical support and feedback or monitoring loops allowing for adjustments and improvements. Placing the onus on communes for CPS functioning presupposes that they have the necessary knowledge, skills and financial capacity to implement (which may not be the case). Therefore, capacity building for members of local decision-making or advisory bodies within the communes should be a priority.

- **Roles of parents and communities:** Parent and community involvement is essential for lobbying and for pressuring local authorities to place early childhood at the centre of social policies. Therefore, supporting the engagement of parents and community members is likely to help commune councils better consider CPS in their policies.

- **Teacher support system:** In order to avoid isolation of CPS teachers, mentoring, in-service training and network support should be encouraged beyond occasional trainings. This would foster a sense of community and improve the cross-sharing and cross-fertilization of good practices.

- **Children’s results assessment:** The assessment of preschool children’s results offers precious feedback for POEs and DOEs as well as UNICEF. A robust tool, easily manageable by teachers and under the supervision of the POE and DOE, is necessary to measure results. The holistic approach of early childhood (i.e., education, health, hygiene and nutrition) requires the measurement of these multiple, interconnected aspects.

- **Holistic approach to ECD:** Viewing education, health, hygiene and nutrition as key levers for successful development of children aged 3 to 5 is the ideal model for ECD.

- **Monitoring systems:** It is worthwhile to consider the introduction of a monitoring assistance system managed by POEs and DOEs that are more operational on the ground, along with commune councils and NGOs operating in early childhood. Providing guidelines to commune councils is not sufficient as commune members are new in the decision-making process and early childhood is not yet a priority in all communes.

**Recommendations**

Based on this analysis, a number of recommendations emerged from the evaluation for different stakeholders. These relate to the integration of the CPS modality into a wider reflection on the effectiveness of UNICEF support to make change happen on the ground and improve the quality of ECE for all children in Cambodia, irrespective of their socio-economic conditions and location. A tentative timeline has been added, suggesting the optimal period of time for the recommendation to be implemented.

Recommendations are listed in order of priority and organized around three overarching tracks of improvement. These are:

1. **Involve high-level authorities** to strengthen implementation of the ECCD National Action Plan, embedding cross-sectoral programming and developing a sustainable services and funding model for ECD.

2. **Monitor and support commune councils** in the process of implementing the D&D reforms and assist UNICEF in better targeting its interventions.
3. **Explore field intervention and pilot-effective CPSs in the most disadvantaged areas** by refocusing on a limited number of CPS, thus better reaching the most vulnerable children, including children with disability, along with UNICEF’s mandate.

### 1. Involve high-level authorities – Recommendations:

**UNICEF:**
- Education section within the Country Office should support MOEYS to provide technical assistance to the POEs and DOEs to improve professional qualifications of teachers, embedding cross-sectoral programming, as well as financial and human resources for CPS to ensure the provision of sustainable early education services to children (2016–2020).

**MOI, MOEYS and MEF:**
- Should allocate earmarked funding or identify options for sub-national expenditure related to CPS and ensure that a legal framework is in place between MOI and MOEYS to clarify roles and responsibilities with regards to CPS in the context of D&D at national and sub-national levels (2016–2018).

### 2. Monitor and support the commune councils – Recommendations:

**UNICEF:**
- Education section, alongside the Local Governance for Child Rights (LGCR)/Community Development section of the Country Office, should support MOI and MOEYS to adapt existing guidelines in a way that they are clearer, thorough and easily comprehensible for local decision-makers (commune councils and CCWCs) on how to set up a CPS and promote a holistic approach to child development (2016–2018).
- Education section should support the MOEYS in the design and use of a child performance evaluation tool to measure and document the impacts of ECCD on children (2016–2018).
- Should conduct a stand-alone evaluation of UNICEF’s upstream and midstream work in Cambodia, especially in terms of relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of support at all government levels (ministerial, provincial, district and commune) (2016–2018).

**MOEYS:**
- Should design a comprehensive CPS teacher training framework encompassing career advancement and development, quality standards and teacher training plans and integrating earlier achievements (2016–2020).
- Should strengthen capacities of POEs and DOEs to supervise CPSs and assist commune councils (i.e., funding, programming) in the context of the D&D process (2016–2020).
- Should integrate CPS into the national Education Management Information System (EMIS) to track progress on a regular basis (2016–2018).

### 3. Explore field-level intervention and pilot-effective CPSs in the most disadvantaged areas – Recommendations:

**UNICEF:**
- Education and LGCR/Community Development sections should assist MOI, MOEYS and MEF in designing a local, multi-partnership CPS model, drawing upon the success factors of the CPS modality (i.e., parental support, commune council...
engagement, quality teaching material and trained CPS teachers) and cross-fertilizing with other stakeholders’ experience in inclusive education (2016–2018).

MOI, MOEYS and MEF:
- Should clearly budget expansion of the pilot model experience to multiple deprived areas (2016–2020).
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context of the evaluation

Research shows that exposure to early learning has positive effects on a child’s education, particularly in terms of right age entry to primary schooling. But according to 2014 estimates, only one in three Cambodian children (33 per cent) aged 3 to 5 access and benefit from some form of early learning or preschool opportunity. While this is an increase compared to 2005–2006 data (14 per cent)³, this rate remains below the target set by the Government of Cambodia’s Education for All (EFA) initiative as well as Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3 relating to education, which aimed to see 50 per cent of children in this age group accessing preschool by 2015.

ECE demand in Cambodia is growing and the provision of private preschooling for middle class families, especially in urban areas, is expanding. However, children from the poorest families, ethnic minority groups and with disabilities remain largely excluded from the preschool experience.⁴

Within this context, UNICEF Cambodia has been supporting a holistic approach to young children’s development (including education, health, hygiene and nutrition). Supporting various government authorities, in particular MOEYS, the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) and MOWA, in the rollout of CPSs throughout the country has been an important part of this approach.

Against this background, UNICEF, in conjunction with MOI and MOEYS, commissioned an independent evaluation, undertaken by an external evaluator, Fabrice Hénard, to assess how the CPS programme contributed to early childhood development in Cambodia. The evaluation was conducted between April and December 2015, with the final report submitted in May 2016. The TOR is attached to this report (Annex 1).

1.2 Context of early childhood development

1.2.1 Development data for Cambodia

According to the World Bank, economic growth in Cambodia is strong, with real growth in 2014 estimated at 7 per cent. The poverty rate more than halved from 2004 to 2011, declining from 53 per cent to 20.5 per cent, though the rate has not significantly improved since then. The poverty rate was 17.7 per cent in 2012, with almost 3 million poor and over 8.1 million near-poor people. World Bank estimates further suggest that Cambodia achieved Millennium Development Goal 1 of halving poverty in 2009.

At the same time, human development, particularly in the areas of health and education, remains an important development priority for Cambodia (Cambodia’s Human Development Index ranking was 143 in 2014)⁵. Although the number of deaths per 100,000 live births decreased from 472 in 2005 to 170 in 2014 and the under-five child mortality rate decreased from 124 per 1,000 live births in 1998 to 35 per 1,000 in 2014, about 42 per cent of children under 5 are malnourished and stunted. Looking at education (Millennium Development Goal

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2), the net primary school admission rate in Cambodia increased from 81 per cent in 2001 to 94.3 per cent in 2012.6

1.2.2 Early childhood education in Cambodia

International legal framework
The Government of Cambodia has ratified several international human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols (1992).7 In that vein, the Cambodian authorities, supported by international donors, are convinced of the importance of ECCD and are committed to addressing the developmental needs of children through national policies and plans. The Government has also subscribed to the goals of the 2000 EFA Dakar Framework for Action, of which the first goal is “Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education”.

National legal framework
In order to provide access to skills for all, the Cambodian Government prepared the National Action Plan for Early Childhood Care and Development and an education expansion programme, along with guidelines on the management and operation of preschool resources and principles to expand the framework of preschool teacher training in 2014. The functions of the Department of Early Childhood Education have also been revised, in response to the 2014 D&D policy.

The Government’s Education Strategy Plan 2014–2018 is closely linked to Cambodia’s ambitious plan to transition into a middle-income country by 2030.8 Recognizing education as playing an important role in the development of the country, the plan aims primarily to increase enrolment of children and promote teacher training.

Service provision and situation
Early childhood development opportunities are being provided through four different programmes: state preschools, community preschools, home-based programmes and private providers. ECE was allotted about 4 per cent of the national education budget in 2014, while the national budget devoted to education was 10 per cent.9

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7 The other international treaties ratified by Cambodia are: the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol, and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Optional Protocol (http://cambodia.ohchr.org/EN/PagesFiles/TreatyReportingIndex.htm).
Box 1: Types of early childhood programmes in Cambodia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State preschools</th>
<th>Community preschools</th>
<th>Private preschools</th>
<th>Home-based programmes</th>
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<td>are administered by MOEYS in all aspects, including construction and maintenance of school buildings and infrastructure; teacher training, deployment and payment of teachers; and provision of curriculum, teaching and learning materials, and monitoring. The classes are typically taught for three hours per day following different curricula depending on age. In the 2013/14 school year, there were 3,184 state preschools nationwide with 157,288 children, accounting for 45 per cent of total ECE enrolment.</td>
<td>are organized under the ownership of commune councils to provide a community-based early learning programme to children in areas where state preschools are not available. Teachers are volunteers selected from local communities, but do not have formal teaching qualifications. Classes are organized for two hours per day with a simplified curriculum. There were 2,200 CPS with 5,832 children in the 2013/14 school year. UNICEF and NGOs currently support many CPS for operation.</td>
<td>are administered by individuals, the private sector or NGOs to provide early education programmes according to their own curriculum and standards. Most are clustered in urban areas. Teachers may not have qualifications. Administrative data is also collected through EMIS. There were 403 private preschools with 36,379 children enrolled in the 2013/14 school year.</td>
<td>are run by trained parents, often mothers, to practice improved early childhood care and education in their homes for children aged 0 to 5. The programmes are typically organized in rural and disadvantaged communities where either state or community preschools are unavailable. MOEYS provides cascade training on care and developmentally appropriate early learning activities for ‘core mothers’, who subsequently train ‘mother groups’ to enable parents in the village to practice improved parenting skills. In the 2013/14 school year, there were 2,378 home-based programmes, benefitting 79,224 children aged 0 to 5 (41,618 children aged 3 to 5).</td>
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</table>

Source: UNICEF, Education Section, 2014

Preschool education in Cambodia is not compulsory and yet almost all communes and districts have one to two preschools. According to UNICEF and Cambodian ministerial authorities, this might explain why early childhood education is not yet a full priority for parents and commune council representatives. Raising awareness on its added value remains necessary in many provinces of Cambodia.

There were approximately 90,000 children aged 3 to 5 enrolled in preschool in the 2003/04 school year, which increased to 310,000 in the 2014/15 school year. The Cambodian Government’s EFA target is to have 50 per cent of all 3 to 5 year olds enrolled in preschool by 2015.

In terms of CPS specifically, enrolment has increased slightly over the last 10 to 11 years, especially compared to state preschools. There were approximately 20,000 children aged 3 to 5 enrolled in CPS in Cambodia in the 2003/04 school year compared to about 52,000 in the 2014/15 school year. Enrolment of children aged 3 to 5 in CPS increased from 2.77 per cent of all preschoolers in 2006/07 to 6.6 per cent in 2012/13. The percentage of enrolled five year olds increased from 4.04 per cent to 8.9 per cent during the same period.

Although there has been a steady increase in the number of children attending CPS, the percentage is still low. The EFA 2015 National Review underlines the need for more CPS services, particularly for children in remote areas, poor families and ethnic minority groups. This concern has been reflected in the National Education Strategic Plan 2014–2018. 

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10 In 2008, there were 1,634 public preschools of which only about 100 were independent and the remaining schools shared facilities with primary schools or pagodas. See: UNESCO, ‘UNESCO National Education Support Strategy Cambodia’, 2010.

11 Education For All 2015 National Review.
Management at national and local level

MOEYS manages and monitors formal preschool education. Its Department of Early Childhood Education was established in 2003 to manage not only existing preschools, but also to provide technical inputs to community schools and home-based programmes.

CPSs are under the administration of three different ministries – MOI, MOEYS and partially MOWA. Commune council members, under the general guidance of MOI, are responsible for providing the venue, identifying teachers and paying incentives. The recurrent financing for teacher incentives and maintenance of the facilities is the responsibility of commune councils. MOEYS supports pre-service and in-service training for teachers, curriculum and teaching materials, as well as regular monitoring for technical support. MOWA provides monitoring and support to promote the enrolment of children. Commune council members (at the time of the field visit for this evaluation in July 2015) had no legal status in Cambodia.

1.2.3 Overview of UNICEF’s role

UNICEF has been playing a critical and effective role in advocating for MOEYS leadership and coordination of ECCD with key actors and influencing Cambodia’s national ECE agenda. UNICEF’s promotion of a holistic approach to young children’s development has been reflected in the Government’s National ECCD Policy and Action Plan.

Initially village based

UNICEF first promoted the importance of ECCD as a priority in the 2001–2005 Country Programme and introduced the concept of meeting academic needs to also include the role of play for enjoyment, psychosocial development and school readiness. Its support was initially based on decentralized village action plans – 693 childcare classes were set up, benefitting 13,946 (7,459 girls) children (aged 3 to 5) in 117 communes. These classes sought to enable young mothers and adolescent girls to attend 604 literacy classes and at the same time get involved in income-generating activities.

Two specific UNICEF milestones during that first phase were:

- In 2003, UNICEF’s midterm review of its Country Programme recommended a shift from volunteer child care to ECE provision at commune level and that UNICEF should start providing financial incentives to teachers.
- In 2004, UNICEF’s situational review of commune council activities recognized the need for structured, community-based ECE. In practical support terms for UNICEF, this meant that its intervention shifted focus from village to commune level. Six provinces (Kampong Speu, Kampong Thom, Prey Veng, Svay Rieng, Oddar Meanchey, Stung Treng) were targeted of Cambodia’s 24 provinces to better integrate child rights in Cambodia’s ambitious decentralization reform through support to a number of community-based services. At this point, UNICEF’s programme changed its name from Seth Koma to Local Governance for Child Rights (LGCR).

CPS pilots at the commune level

Following that, agreement was reached to converge 700 childcare classes into CPSs, under the responsibility of the three ministries (MOEYS, MOI, MOWA). Between 2004 and 2006, UNICEF piloted the CPS modality with commune councils, conducted training for relevant staff and supported MOEYS to develop a curriculum for the CPS modality and teacher guides. As

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14 See TOR.
a result of these efforts, in 2006 the Government endorsed the CPS as a model for delivering ECE services in Cambodia.

UNICEF has a long-standing cooperation with the Cambodian Government on child rights and communal development (via Seth Koma, then LGCR). LGCR (known as Community Development since January 2016) was meant to foster a commitment to the fulfilment of child rights into the mandates of local authorities, which in turn would be demonstrated through real investment in services for children. The approach helped ensure that the decentralization reform process met the needs of the communities they aimed to serve.

UNICEF put stronger emphasis on ‘upstream work’ with a view to leveraging the capacity of the authorities through improved service delivery for children, through “leverage of policy, partnerships focused achievements on agreed results”.\(^{15}\) This approach, led by the LGCR programme, meant to increase the capacity of national and local-level authorities. One expected result was “ECE professionals at national and sub-national levels are able to plan, coordinate and guide the provision of high-quality ECE programmes”. LGCR was fully aligned with these expected results.

An evaluation of the LGCR programme (2008) underlined, among other achievements, the increased awareness among commune communities\(^{16}\) and local officials of child rights and practical actions to address them, as well as greater capacity on the part of local government officials to take concrete action and monitor progress towards the realization of child rights. This matched the focus of UNICEF’s capacity development work at provincial and district levels, reflecting its responsiveness to government priorities, namely the D&D reform process.

From 2009, UNICEF was viewed as an important development partner in the policy forums. UNICEF gained its legitimacy because of a recognized capacity to identify the national educational needs as well as government gaps to meet them.\(^{17}\) With the United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF supported the establishment of CCWCs at provincial and district levels. Local legislation defining roles and responsibilities and a capacity development strategy was drafted and is awaiting approval. UNICEF experience with CCWCs in the past was critical in ensuring that the function of these new committees was based on field experience. UNICEF paid close attention to strengthening cooperation between local governments, line departments and service providers, and thereby ensuring smooth implementation of D&D reform. To this end, UNICEF solidified local networks via a multi-year capacity development framework for CCWC and created a social mapping tool meant to help communes identify vulnerable children in a more systematic way.\(^{18}\)

In 2010, UNICEF reported commune councils and CCWCs were significantly better equipped to monitor indicators for children and organize service delivery related to health, education, protection and water and sanitation. CCWC guidelines for social development were developed and disseminated nationwide.

UNICEF has been advocating for years to the ministerial authorities on the value of early childhood and the holistic approach specific to this type of education.

The LGCR programme developed a number of useful resources for sub-national levels to analyze data, set priorities, plan, budget and organize low-cost, high-impact interventions to improve the lives of the most vulnerable children. In addition, to address some of the


\(^{16}\) There were no commune councils at the time of the LGCR evaluation in 2008, but only commune communities. Since then commune councils have been established, but with no legal status.


challenges faced by communes, UNICEF and the National Committee for Sub-national Democratic Development Secretariat (NCDD-S) provided instructions to communes to help them plan and budget for social services, while the National Treasury guided clerks on the liquidation process. Sub-national administrations are now reporting on indicators related to social services, encouraging greater attention to service delivery for children.\(^{19}\)

MOI, NCDD-S and line ministries, in partnership with UNICEF, gained experience piloting and documenting modelling functions for commune councils to address the needs of children and women. UNICEF support was meant to link delivery of quality services at the commune level to the D&D reform, with a view to creating a basis for sustainability and opportunity for expansion. In this regard, a common results framework was designed in May 2011 and agreed on by NCDD-S. Provincial and district administrations were expected to report against these results beginning in 2013,\(^{20}\) which would create new impetus for actions leading to the progressive realization of children’s rights at the local level.\(^{21}\)

**ECE included in the Country Programme Action Plan**

In March 2011, the Cambodian Government and UNICEF signed the Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) for 2011–2015. In that context, both parties took steps to further improve ECD and achieve related goals outlined in national policies and strategic development plans. The CPAP, with the horizontal cooperation of 11 ministries, aimed at building capacity for multi-year budgeting and planning at ministerial level. This was a major first step in giving priority to ECD services in social spending.

As the below figure summarizes, the CPAP included three main strands:

1. Support for ECD-related policy development;
2. Enhancement and expansion of pre-primary and parenting education services, particularly CPSs, home-based programmes and the Parenting Support initiative; and
3. Enhancement of health and social protection services that promote ECD.

\(^{19}\) UNICEF Midterm Review, 2013.

\(^{20}\) There is no information whether the provincial and district administrations actually reported.

Activities and associated outputs were expected to lead to policies supporting ECD and improving inter-sectoral collaboration; increased knowledge and skills among parents and service providers and increased reach and quality of pre-primary education services; improved health and nutritional status for pregnant mothers and young children; and enhanced opportunities for disadvantaged children. The box below summarizes the engagement of the Government with ECCD.
Box 2: Cambodia’s Commitment to ECCD – An overview of actions

The importance of ECCD is highlighted in a number of key documents, including the Education for All National Action Plan 2003–2015, the Education Strategic Plan and the National Early Childhood Education Development policy. Other key documents and institutionalized activities underlying the importance of early childhood education development to the education sector include:

**Governance**
1. National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development
2. Prakas on the rules and regulations for public preschool
3. Instructions on the operation of public preschools
4. Drafted result-based monitoring and evaluation system for the early childhood education sub-sector
5. Drafted principles and instructions on preschool resource centres, community preschools, home-based programmes, parental education manual on care, nutrition education, child protection, using health services, pregnancy and caring for children younger than 2

**Coordination**
6. Royal Decree on the Organization and Functioning of the National Committee for Early Childhood Care and Development (an inter-ministerial coordination mechanism for ECCD)
7. Instruction on the implementation of the functions of the commune or sangkat committee in charge of women’s and children’s affairs in developing maternal health, community preschools, hygiene, gender equality and child protection in communes (in cooperation with National Commission for D&D)

**Quality assurance**
8. ELDS for children aged 3, 4 and 5 and curriculum for five-year-old children
9. ECD resource book
10. Eight-week education programme for children who did not attend preschool

**Financing**
11. Expanded early childhood education services in all forms and in all places, particularly in areas where school attendance and the achievement rate is low, the dropout rate is high and where nutrition levels, child protection and use of health services are low
12. Strengthened and expanded community bilingual preschools for indigenous areas
13. Expanded integrated study programme for children with disabilities in formal and community preschools
14. Improved information on nutrition and health in the preschool sub-sector
15. Improved quality inputs and technical support to public and community preschools and standard home-based education programmes (skills improvement for teachers, study programmes, physical and health education programmes, teaching and learning materials)
16. Developed preschool teacher training standards to be used as the basis of the preschool teacher training system


**Management and technical assistance**
By 2012, there were 28,339 children aged 3 to 5 (of which 14,932 were girls, or 52 per cent) enrolled in 1,282 CPSs in 320 communes in 12 (of 24) provinces in Cambodia. UNICEF supported the management of these schools and also provided technical support to MOI to strengthen capacity of local commune councils and CCWCs to ensure the day-to-day operation of CPS. In 2014, UNICEF decided to refocus the geographical coverage of support provided to 101 communes and 1,073 CPSs out of a total of 2,309.

**Funding**
With regard to UNICEF funding, a guiding figure for education spending for 2011–2015 is US$15 million. The amounts planned or spent on CPS from 2011 to 2016 are estimated at

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At the time of the study, many CPS teachers were volunteers; those working in UNICEF-supported provinces received approximately US$12 monthly. UNICEF also provided materials for the programme. An annual technical review, coordinated by the ECE Department at MOEYS, encourages POEs to discuss and share experiences.

23 The analysis stems from interactions with UNICEF LGCR section, December 2015.
To reduce repetition and dropout rates and increase the number of children remaining in preschool, UNICEF provided technical support to POEs and DOEs to strengthen teacher training (in-service and pre-service) activities that develop child-centred and participatory teaching methods in line with the Child-Friendly School policy. CPS teachers are trained to manage a class or group of children, ensuring the inclusion and support of children with disabilities within this group. For CPSSs with a multilingual education component, teachers are trained to introduce oral Khmer language in the second semester.

In the context of the D&D efforts, there are two lines of support to assist commune councils in developing CPSSs: technical support provided by MOEYS and management support provided by MOI. The CPS modality supported by UNICEF underpins both lines of support. The following figure shows the functioning of the CPS model.

**Figure 2: Community preschool system**

CPS modality combined with other initiatives
Other ECE-focused programmes exist in Cambodia. The most known is the Home-Based Programme, which was initially developed by Save the Children Norway and is now being expanded nationwide. A relatively low cost and flexible, culturally tailored programme, UNICEF, World Bank EFA-Fast Track Initiative and Save the Children Norway funded it in select provinces. Unlike CPS, the initiative provides services for children from birth to age 5. Mothers and village volunteers from mothers’ groups voluntarily lead the programme in the absence of formal paid teachers. These groups are facilitated by a ‘main’ mother, who has received two days of training on how to use home-based schooling materials to support nutrition, child well-being and developmental stages. These groups typically meet monthly. Social networks, friendships and mutual support are developed. The home-based model is thus strong in promoting social inclusion.
2. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

2.1 Purpose and scope of the evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation was to provide evidence that will help both the Cambodian Government and UNICEF to refocus, redevelop and improve the CPS modality and strategically inform UNICEF’s Country Programme (2016–2018) and its action plan on CPS support strategies. More specifically, the strategic intent of the evaluation was to:

- Provide a documented overview on the results achieved by the CPS modality over the past years, on the strategy and the *modus operandi* prompted by UNICEF;
- Assess the effectiveness of the CPS modality, especially the role of the commune councils in the context of the D&D process;
- Highlight the impact on children and families targeted by the CPS modality; to the extent possible, provide evidence on the impact of UNICEF-supported modality (or formulate assumptions about the impact of UNICEF support on children – depending on the degree of causality);
- Explore the sustainability of the CPS modality; and

**Evaluation users**

The primary users of the findings and conclusions of this evaluation will be MOI, MOEYS and UNICEF, as well as MEF to some extent. Local implementing partners, such as commune councils, POEs and DOEs, are also expected to use the evaluation findings. NGOs and donors, who play an increasing role in childcare and early childhood, are other expected users.

**Evaluation scope**

The evaluation was meant to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the CPS modality in the context of the D&D process. The objectives were reformulated in July 2015 with a view to reaching a consensus among the various potential users of the evaluation report. The evaluation is structured around 18 questions outlined in the TOR that fall under three major categories:

1. Evaluation questions that deal with the overall governance of the CPS modality as well as its management by UNICEF Cambodia and decentralized offices. They deal with the overall effectiveness of the modality.
2. Evaluation questions that explore how the CPSs are managed at field level and benefit from UNICEF support, when implemented locally.
3. Evaluation questions that are meant to explore the tangible impacts on children, who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the CPS modality.

Geographically, the evaluation scope covered 101 CPSs over three areas (Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Kampong Cham). To cover a wide span of CPSs, the evaluators set up a typology of 101 CPSs, reflecting the variety of situations, as follows:

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25 The inception mission highlighted differing expectations in terms of evaluation objectives between the UNICEF LGCR and Education sections, UNICEF zone officers, MOI, MOEYS and POEs and DOEs. An agreement on the objectives of the evaluation was reached in July 2015 and has been reflected in the Inception Report.
• One group of CPSs that directly benefited from recent UNICEF support (i.e., after 2011) and notably from additional support for social service delivery;
• One group of CPSs that received UNICEF support in the past (where activities might be put on hold); and
• One group of CPSs that has not benefited from UNICEF support (but which might receive support from other donors or NGOs).

Figure 3: Community preschool sampling

During data collection, the evaluation team visited 101 CPSs based on this criteria, including 67 that directly benefited from UNICEF support (50 from recent support and 17 supported in the past) and 34 CPSs that had not benefited from UNICEF support. Of the 101 CPSs, 11 receive inclusive education interventions and nine are multilingual. The sampling included CPSs that benefited from additional social support provided by UNICEF. Trade-offs had to be made between representativeness and feasibility of the CPS visits given budget and time constraints, as Kampong Cham is a vast territory in which CPSs are scattered. Data was collected on 93 CPSs as a number of schools were closed or no longer operating.
Table 2: Community preschools visited by the evaluation team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>CPS beneficiary from UNICEF</th>
<th>CPS non-beneficiary from UNICEF</th>
<th>Total no. of CPSs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Siem Reap</td>
<td>Battambang</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kampong Thom</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phnom Penh</td>
<td>Kampong Speu</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prey Veng</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kampong Cham</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stung Treng</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>67</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Learning Avenue

The evaluation covered a period of 11 years, from 2004 to 2015, when it was commissioned, with a focus on recent years (2011–2015). Due to turnover of UNICEF staff as well as changes in terms of responsibilities on early childhood since 2004, there is limited information on the running and impact of CPS modality before 2011. Information is not consolidated and could not be utilized in a consistent manner by the evaluators, nor by commune councils, POEs, DOEs or UNICEF. This evaluation has therefore used previous evaluation reports and UNICEF reports to identify pieces of information that could inform the analysis. Findings on effectiveness and efficiency mostly focus on the 2011–2015 period, where data could be collected and judged in a reliable way.

2.2 Mixed methods approach and evaluation criteria

Mixed methods approach

Given the specific objectives and projected uses of the evaluation and its broad scope, a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, which is considered a good approach in development evaluation, was used to collect data. While the qualitative methods allowed for an in-depth understanding of the key issues from the perspective of different stakeholders, the quantitative method helped identify trends across larger pieces of information. This approach also allowed for triangulation of data collected from different sources, including both primary and secondary data, which strengthened the quality and credibility of the findings and conclusions.

Further, given the broad geographical coverage and comprehensive involvement of different stakeholders in this evaluation, the evaluation team took the following measures to ensure quality of data collected:

- An ‘Evaluator’s Guide’ consisting of a set of comprehensive guidelines and protocols for data collection was developed. It also included a standard form for data reporting to ensure a consistent and coherent approach across different team members focusing on different regions and therefore robust data to inform the evaluation findings.
- A pilot stage at the beginning of the data collection phase – in June 2015 in Kampong Speu Province, Kong Pisei district – allowed the usefulness of data collection tools developed in the ‘Evaluator’s Guide’ to be tested. This helped fine-tune the different data collection tools and train team members in charge of translation during data collection. The pilot facilitated a common understanding of how to use the tools among the evaluation team members.
- All respondents were asked to indicate their name and title and sign a form of consent that allowed the evaluation team to use the information, including pictures taken of them or their environment, for this study.
- Lastly, all respondents were assured confidentiality of the information they disclosed in order to enable them to speak freely.
The table below presents the main informants and their role as described by them and in the documentary analysis undertaken.26

Table 3: List of informants and their role with regards to ECE/ECCD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informants</th>
<th>Role in ECE/ECCD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOI</td>
<td>Co-policy architect for CPS alongside the Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOEYS</td>
<td>Within MOEYS, the three departments with chief governance and financial responsibility for ECE are ECE, Finance and Planning. At the provincial and district levels, these offices represent the intermediate level of governance in Cambodia between the ministries and local governance: POEs, DOEs, provincial health departments and provincial offices of women’s affairs. Both the ministry and provincial offices of education act as technical advisors for CPS through teacher training. They provide materials and funds to the commune councils. This is monitored by CCWCs and provincial departments of women’s affairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Women’s Affairs</td>
<td>Designs programmes related to gender issues and maternity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commune councils and commune committees for women and children</td>
<td>Act as an advisory body to commune councils on issues related to women and children and help the commune council prioritize the delivery of essential social services for women and children, such as health centre outreach and school services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial/khaet councils District/srok councils</td>
<td>Decision-making bodies at the province or district levels; provinces/khaets are second-level administrative divisions in Cambodia. Districts/sroks are third-level administrative divisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commune/sangkat councils</td>
<td>Third-level administrative divisions in Cambodia (subdivisions of the districts), consisting of about 330 villages depending on the population. On education issues, the commune council ensures the sustainability of schools and answers to the objectives of MOEYS. Local council members conceptualize development plans for the community and propose budgets to the central government based on an overall budget provided by MOI directly to the commune.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Committee for Early Childhood Care and Development (NC-ECCD)</td>
<td>Co-policy architect for CPS alongside MOI. Main body responsible for Cambodia’s decentralization efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National ECCD Task Force</td>
<td>Interministerial committee of NGOs and 11 ministries led by MOEYS. MOWA and MOI also key players.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multilateral agencies and donors (i.e., UNICEF, UNESCO, EU, Swedish Agency for International Development, World Bank EFA-Fast Track Initiative)</td>
<td>Engage(d) in technical assistance to build national and local capacity and coordination for ECD and, in the case of Fast Track Initiative, provided resources for expanding pre-primary education coverage substantially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International NGOs (i.e., Save the Children Norway, Plan International, Handicap International, CARE International)</td>
<td>Support ECD services in communities and develop models of ECD service delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local NGOs</td>
<td>Advocate and provide services for ECD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commune council women and children focal point</td>
<td>Monitor the CPS regularly using a checklist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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26 See Inception Report.
The selection of informants was based on the CPS sampling, then on the availability of the informants. Much flexibility was used in order to conduct meetings with the targeted informants (e.g., POEs, DOEs or commune council members were not always available when the evaluation team was collecting data). A three-week data collection mission was carried out by four evaluation assistants and the assistance of UNICEF zone officers, who identified the geographical location of the schools. This allowed the team to meet the right informants based on the criteria in the Inception Report. Additional interviews were conducted by a national evaluation assistant, who spent two additional weeks in the visited areas, which enabled complementary interviews to take place. Likewise, the evaluation team leader conducted additional exchanges from October to December 2015 with MOI, MOEYS and UNICEF (e.g., on the D&D reform process).

**Evaluation criteria**

In line with international evaluation practice and United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) standards, the methodology was based on OECD/DAC evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.

The OECD/DAC criteria were chosen because they helped most appropriately capture the evaluation questions listed in the TOR and they were emphasized by UNICEF during preparatory consultations; they also allowed the evaluation team to proceed in a very logical, structured way with this study. Additionally, the evaluation team developed an evaluation matrix during the inception phase. It consisted of 18 evaluation questions grouped around the five OECD/DAC evaluation criteria. Further, the evaluation matrix included indicators associated with the OECD/DAC criteria, sources of information, and sources and tools for data collection. Evaluation questions 4 and 14 were merged for greater clarity. Annex 2 shows the full evaluation matrix.

Regarding the impact criteria, the evaluation focused on UNICEF support to the CPS modality and the capacity of CPS to support effective ECE and social service delivery. The evaluation unit of analysis was the CPS modality and not the children as individuals. The impact of the CPS modality on child development was taken into consideration, but the evaluation was not meant to assess the children’s performance, which would have required specific methods and rigorous testing of children.

The methodological sequence followed by the analysis was based on the logical chain of reasoning outlined in Figure 4.
Each evaluation question was broken down into a series of judgment criteria, an interface between the evaluation question and the data sources required to answer it. The evaluation criteria narrowed the questions further by specifying what evaluators focused upon and what they checked precisely when attempting to answer the questions. Data collection concentrated on gathering evidence linked to those judgment criteria.

The evidence consisted of specific indicators (quantitative) or descriptors, a set of tangible facts to be observed by the evaluators. The triangulation of such evidence resulted in findings that together provided answers to the evaluation questions and became the basis for the formulation of conclusions, the lessons learned and the resulting recommendations, in compliance with the forward-looking essence of the evaluation.

Cross-cutting themes: Gender equality, equity and human rights
The evaluation matrix was considerably adapted in order to also address themes of high importance to UNICEF, in particular equity and gender equality and to a lesser extent human rights. Equity\(^{27}\) has been increasingly emphasized by UNICEF in recent years as it is seen to have a significant positive impact on reducing poverty and positively influencing economic growth, supporting a fair and democratic society. Gender equality\(^{28}\) also continues to be essential for UNICEF development programming and implementation, hence also evaluation. It refers to the equality between women and men, thus advocates for equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men. Human rights have been included in the evaluation matrix through the equity-focused questions in the evaluation methodology and by following a participatory approach involving a wide spectrum of duty-bearers and rights-holders among the evaluation stakeholders.

Unpacking the abstract notions of equity and gender equality into more specific sub-themes or issues was essential for the evaluation team as stakeholders were more familiar with these specific issues and could provide clearer and more detailed inputs. This then enabled the

\(^{27}\) For UNICEF, equity means that all children have an opportunity to survive, develop and reach their full potential, without discrimination, bias or favouritism and that disparities between population groups not driven by biology are avoidable and unfair. UNICEF, ‘How to design and manage equity-focused evaluations’, 2012.

\(^{28}\) Gender equality does not mean that women and men will become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.
The evaluation team clearly formulated data collection instruments that included direct questions and (more often) probes on possible aspects of vulnerability such as questions about disabilities among children; ethnicity and possible issues around that of children attending or not attending CPSs; other possible reasons for discrimination among (or favouritism) of specific groups, as well as between girls and boys.

It should be noted here, however, that the CPS modality to date has not (yet) been following this approach on gender equality, equity and human rights for two reasons: baselines and monitoring data are very scarce and not regularly and consistently collected; and stakeholders had not been consulted on those issues when the programme was drawn up, as understood and cross-checked in interviews in the field (commune councils, CCWCs, parents, teachers).

Also, the TOR did not specifically call for such an approach. With UNICEF guidance, the evaluation team tried to incorporate these considerations from the Inception Report onwards, which is far from optimal, and to consider equity and gender issues to the extent possible given the short timeframe, limited budget and limited available data.

**Participatory approach**

The evaluation team paid particular attention to the evaluation approach in order to be able to address equity, gender equality and to some extent human rights. Through the use of participatory techniques, the evaluation team obtained considerable evidence from duty-bearers and rights-holders and other stakeholders of the preschool education system throughout this exercise. For instance, when carrying out the context and stakeholder map analysis, the evaluation team sought inputs and validation from UNICEF staff, MOEYS, MOI and others and reserved as much time as possible (within the given timeframe) for in-depth interviews.\(^{29}\)

### 2.3 Data collection methods

The methods used for data collection were driven by the OECD/DAC criteria as well as the cross-cutting themes, as described above. The findings of this evaluation are, therefore, also structured around the same criteria.

Given the specific objectives and proposed uses of the evaluation, as well as its broad scope, the following mix of qualitative and quantitative methods was used to collect data. It should be noted that the methodology was not meant to compare the performance of the CPS modality in various districts. This would require a specific comparative analysis that was not methodologically possible to conduct due to inconsistency and lack of baseline data, no disaggregated data by district or province, etc.

**Document analysis**

In line with UNICEF as well as UNEG guidance, the team was careful to carry out a comprehensive context as well as stakeholder analysis that was further refined and finalized with input by UNICEF and key stakeholders MOEYS and MOI.

First, a documentary analysis (41 documents, see list of documents consulted) took place. It included a cyber search on the political system of Cambodia, its administrative divisions and major institutions involved in education in order to identify the major stakeholders in the CPS modality in Cambodia, as well as which donors and NGOs had a stake in this policy area. Another document search was undertaken to identify additional stakeholders.

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\(^{29}\) The evaluation team is aware that a wider consultation of stakeholders would have been ideal, but was not possible due to the large number of stakeholders and their geographical spread throughout the country and often remote location, as well as time constraints to prepare and implement this evaluation.
The Evaluator’s Guide: Interviews, life stories, focus groups and observation

The ‘Evaluator’s Guide’ (see Annex 3) developed by the evaluation team served as the main qualitative data method. It listed open-ended questions by stakeholder group and allowed adaptation to elicit certain information from the different groups of actors as follows:

- **As an interview guide** for stakeholders at ease with a semi-structured interview approach, e.g., donors and government officials. Interviews focused on administrative information and the concrete functioning and local issues surrounding the CPS modality. Government officials and donors located in the capital were aware of the ‘larger picture’ and institutional issues surrounding CPS, including the decentralization process and theoretical framework of these structures. District and provincial officials were mostly asked about on-the-ground issues relating to the specific functioning, the institutional and communal context, the situation of the children and other issues relating to the CPS in their commune.

- As a more flexible guide to collect **life stories** from parents or caretakers in villages that would have more difficulty answering interview questions. Caretakers were asked to give opinions on the CPS and to present facts to the extent of their knowledge (for example about opening hours, amount of children in the community not attending CPS).

- **As a guide to structure focus group discussions** with a small group of stakeholders (three to six people) of the same category, e.g., parents, caretakers, commune council representatives or teachers where possible (as most teachers operate on an individual basis at the CPS).

- As a list of specific aspects to verify when **observing** CPS premises and teaching.

**Use of the Evaluator’s Guide**

For interviews, life stories and focus group discussions, the teams usually consisted of one interviewer, one note taker and one local staff member that served as translator. This allowed the team to collect data in a more focused and therefore efficient way by adhering to the same guidance document. This also ensured that information was noted in a detailed and structured manner, which facilitated cross-checking of information during the data analysis stage later on. All team members had printed out ‘Evaluator’s Guide’ booklets; this was particularly helpful for the local team member, who also facilitated translation, to ensure a coherent translated version throughout the data collection phase. When interviewing and collecting life stories, the team followed a **flexible approach to adapt questions to the specific interviewee situation** or story, change the order of the questions, or omit questions. Most importantly, this included probing on vulnerability, (e.g., disability, ethnic differences) and gender differences in as many instances as possible. At the same time, the team followed guidance from the Evaluator’s Guide to ensure it covered the same questions across interviewees from the same stakeholder category.

During the data collection, the evaluation team visited 101 CPSs\(^{30}\) to conduct class observation, conducted 30 semi-structured key informant interviews with various stakeholders (representing some 150 informants as many were interviewed in group), carried out focus group discussions

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\(^{30}\) The TOR for the evaluation suggested to cover an optimal 15 per cent of a total 2,300 CPSs across 12 provinces in Cambodia. This became unrealistic in the inception phase of the evaluation as there is no national CPS database. There is, however, a database of UNICEF-supported CPS that the evaluation team used to identify about 101 CPSs in three zones currently targeted by UNICEF (Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Kampong Cham) in six provinces. The 101 CPSs represented three categories: (i) those that directly benefit from recent UNICEF support (after 2011) and notably additional support for the provision of social services; (ii) those that received UNICEF support in the past (whose activities might have been put on hold); and (iii) nearby CPSs that did not benefit from UNICEF support (but which might receive support from other donors).
with more than 200 informants (i.e., teachers, parents) and used a life story approach to ask 30 parents or caregivers about their opinions on CPS.

As many schools as possible were visited between 6:30 a.m. and 9 a.m. as these were the only hours when the schools were open. The short opening hours constituted one of the main challenges facing the evaluators. Appointments were made to return and talk to teachers and parents. If parents were at the school when classes were being observed, the evaluation team would interview them and, if possible, hold an ad hoc focus group discussion. As the evaluation team usually consisted of several team members, on several occasions it was possible to split into two groups to interview parents or other stakeholders simultaneously. Interviews with teachers would begin after schools were closed. Interviews with teachers and parents continued in the afternoons. Meetings with commune authorities, the CCWCs and the DOEs were only held in the afternoon.

**Interviews**

Interviews were conducted with the following stakeholders: MOEYS (specifically, the Secretary of State for Education), commune councils, CCWCs, POEs, DOEs, UNICEF, the World Bank, parents of children attending CPS and teachers. Interviews were carried out in the field and in Phnom Penh (donors and government officials). Some were conducted using Skype. Interviews with NGOs (i.e., Save the Children, PLAN International, Krousar Youeng and Bandos Komas) were also conducted. Although most interviews were face to face with individuals, there were situations where individuals preferred responding to questions as a group. The report thus does not generally use the expression ‘key informant interviews’ as it is too generic.

**Focus group discussions**

Focus group discussions were conducted in the field with commune councils, CCWCs and parents or caretakers of children attending CPS. Discussions included generally three to six stakeholders of the same category and, to the extent possible, at the same hierarchical level. While focus groups with commune representatives had mostly been scheduled in advance and took place following the CPS visit (between 6:30 a.m. and 9 a.m.), discussions with parents or caretakers were mostly ad hoc depending on the presence and willingness of parents present during or after the CPS schedule. The evaluation team used the focus group discussions to gain a better understanding of the context and/or specific issues of a particular CPS or commune.

**Observations**

Observations were made during data collection. This consisted of usually two team members writing down their own observations of the CPS physical premises as well as of the atmosphere and any additional specifics; this also included taking pictures of the CPS environment (e.g., very clean and functional playground, hazardous spots on school premises, broken latrines).

Observation notes were later cross-checked between team members. As not all stakeholder groups could be interviewed, especially the young children that were following a class, evaluation team members also noted information about their own impressions and understanding of the teacher-student interactions, which the team members also cross-checked. The ‘Evaluator’s Guide’ questions guided observations, mainly addressing two issues:

1. The children’s satisfaction of being at a CPS (e.g., what they tell their parents at home regarding school); and
2. What the children have been learning (e.g., education, health, hygiene and nutrition)
Quantitative data
Quantitative data were collected by translating qualitative data into scores and entering them into a scoring matrix to ‘grade’ (on a scale of 0-3) each CPS based on interview data and field observations on the following aspects:

- **Inclusiveness:**
  - (0) UNICEF support did not increase inclusiveness;
  - (3) Children were given adapted activities, materials and curriculum when necessary and children could develop equally regardless of disability

- **Access:**
  - (0) Children could not access CPS
  - (3) Access was no longer an issue in terms of distance, geography or vulnerability

- **Effectiveness of teaching:**
  - (0) Teachers were not motivated and passed this sentiment on to the children
  - (3) Teachers used innovative ways to inspire the children and the children were motivated to learn

- **Health:**
  - (0) Children had no healthy, hygienic or good nutritional practices
  - (3) Children learned and applied personal care and hygiene skills, as well as received supplies and regular health examinations

- **Environment and safety:**
  - (0) Buildings, classrooms and facilities were dirty, unsafe and not always maintained, lacking adequate lighting, ventilation and cooling
  - (3) Children attended schools with buildings, classrooms and facilities that were clean, safe and regularly maintained and teachers were vigilant regarding safety

- **School readiness:**
  - (0) Children were illiterate and had not obtained the required educational and social skills
  - (3) All children had reached these objectives (0 was given when CPS content was not useful for children to transfer to primary school while 3 was given when CPS content was useful for all of them)

- **Parental implication:**
  - (0) No parental involvement
  - (3) Parents were fully integrated into the CPS decision-making process

As noted, of 101 CPS visited, 93 were graded. Scoring was not sufficiently reliable for eight CPSs, which were hence not considered. Percentages cited in the evaluation findings are based on the results of the scoring matrices. Detailed results are featured in Annex 7.

Additional quantitative data were collected as secondary data such as financial information and various monitoring and evaluation reports obtained from UNICEF and MOEYS and further reviewed.

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31 On 11 June 2015, a pilot was conducted by the evaluation team whereby three CPSs were visited in one day, as well as one POE and one DOE. The bulk of the data collection was conducted from 15 June to 3 July 2015.
## Table 4: Data collection tools used for each evaluation question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Question</th>
<th>Desk review</th>
<th>Teacher interviews</th>
<th>Commune council interviews</th>
<th>Parents interviews</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>DOE/POE interviews</th>
<th>Government/Ministries interviews</th>
<th>UNICEF interviews</th>
<th>Interviews with other stakeholders (NGOs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. To what extent has CPS addressed the needs of the most disadvantaged children aged 3-5 in terms of access to quality ECE?</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. How relevant is UNICEF support for CPS through communes in the context of decentralization and de-concentration and other national strategies (NSDP)?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To what degree did the CPS contribute as an entry point for the inter-sectoral ECCD services encompassing health, nutrition and hygiene to promote holistic child development outcomes in light of the National Action Plan for ECCD?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. How efficient is the current CPS administrative system in terms of technical and financial support for teachers and school operation?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. In what ways and to what extent do the costs incurred to implement CPS justify the result on child development achieved through CPS?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. To what extent has the CPS intervention achieved its set goal to increase the learning and development opportunities for preschool age children aged 3-5?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. To what extent has the current CPS contributed to teacher capacity, improved curriculum, activities and teaching materials?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What are the enabling and constraining factors that influence the effectiveness of the CPS?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. To what degree has CPS strengthened commune councils’ capacity to deliver social services at the community level?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. To what extent has the CPS programme contributed to improving the development outcomes and school readiness of children?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Are there unintended results either positive or negative?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. What are the key bottlenecks to obtaining sustainability of CPS?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. What are the possible solutions for CPS to be integrated and implemented under the full ownership of the Government, both financially and administratively?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. To what extent has UNICEF support through communes enhanced the sustainability of CPS?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. To what extent has UNICEF support been internalized and/or replicated by the Government to address the needs in the areas where UNICEF has not provided support?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. What lessons can be learned from past experience to ensure full government ownership and funding in the continuation/discontinuation and/or expansion of the CPS modality?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Is there evidence of the extent to which CPS may have contributed to a better quality of life of children and their families?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Has UNICEF provided support to CPS in the context of strengthening local administration capacity for social service delivery for children, had any impact on the actual social delivery in terms of budgets and implementation of commune-led social service initiatives?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Learning Avenue*
Data analysis methods
Methods used for data analysis included codification of information, qualitative analysis of the information, triangulation and external and internal validation.

- **Codification** consisted in transcription in a logbook of all information stemming from semi-structured interviews of stakeholders in a logical and systematic way. The logbook is a written record of the main aspects of a semi-structured interview – i.e., basic data, objectives and issues to be covered, the actual notes taken during the interview, a summary of the conclusions and the subsequent steps to be taken. The content of the interviews in the logbooks was also codified to identify specific pieces of information linked to answers to specific evaluation questions. The cross-analysis of the findings of the interviews was done via consolidated matrix presenting the content of the interview breakdown per stakeholder, per evaluation question and per evaluation criteria. This facilitated the triangulation of information coming from differing informants.

- **Triangulation** involved comparing findings between several sources (at least three) as well as cross-checking evidence from key information interviews, observations and documentation review. This also included punctual checks through cross-tabbing the stakeholder inputs by gender, although it must be specified that the majority of respondents on the ground were females (DOE, CPS teachers and parents or caretakers interviewed) and statistics about other important variables with regard to equity, e.g., ethnicity and disability, were mostly not available.

- **Internal validation** took place through an internal peer review process among evaluation team members during production of the draft report.

- **External validation** consisted of a debriefing session in Phnom Penh at UNICEF on 3 July 2015, during which preliminary findings were shared and discussed. Additionally, the draft report was discussed during a meeting of the Reference Group in Phnom Penh on 19 October 2015. Additional remarks were formulated afterwards and they were taken into account by the evaluation team in finalizing the report. Requests for updated information were also formulated (e.g., on implementation of the D&D reform that progressed after data collection and updated information were sought in November 2015 and included in the present report).

2.4 Methodological limitations

**Lack of theory of change**
No theory of change (TOC) had been prepared by UNICEF or other stakeholders for the CPS programme. Considering the geographical scope, duration and budget of this wide-ranging programme, the evaluation team had to put considerable time into re-configuring the TOC in the inception phase. The lack of the TOC meant that the design and results chain were not clear or known to most stakeholders, which can be understood as a lost opportunity for UNICEF and its partners. The inferred TOC provided the evaluation team a basis for understanding the intervention logic and identifying causal linkages or absence thereof. Following the evaluation analysis, the team was able to comment on the initial TOC presented in the Inception Report. The analysis of the TOC is presented in the findings section.

**Lack of monitoring data**
Related to the TOC, the evaluation team was not able to retrieve much monitoring data for this programme. While several ad hoc field missions by UNICEF’s Education and LGCR section had been conducted, these did not follow a regular schedule and were only on very rare occasions linked to the results framework, resulting in an additional important lost opportunity.
to track the progress of this wide-ranging programme. Several previous evaluation reports\textsuperscript{32} and UNICEF annual reports furthermore mentioned the lack of monitoring data from MOEYS and MOI, which rendered the impact analysis ever more challenging for the evaluation team. Where necessary and when the evidence was robust enough, the team used the results of the scoring matrix. However, these results cannot compensate for a robust and systematic monitoring of the outputs, results and outcomes of the programme and of the intervention of MOEYS on CPSs in general.\textsuperscript{33}

Some data on funding of the LGCR programme came late and with no possibility to disaggregate data at the level of districts or provinces. For instance, it has not been possible to identify the type of UNICEF support provided to CPSs in terms of volume and financial input. The evaluation team therefore paid much attention to the reliability of the criteria and preferred to identify the conditions likely to produce impacts, rather than asserting with no evidence.

In many cases, the triangulation of key informant interviews from various sources, essentially qualitative through interviews and focus group discussions and quantitative with the scoring matrix, allowed most criteria underpinning the evaluation questions to be addressed.

**Interviewing informants separately**

It was difficult to interview informants and stakeholders separately. The DOE usually accompanied the evaluation team to the various schools and during interviews with teachers and parents. To maximize time, commune councils, CCWCs, clerks and village chiefs were usually interviewed at one time. This affected impartiality, especially if one stakeholder, for example the teacher, was being interviewed in the presence of another stakeholder with a superior role in the CPS hierarchy, like the DOE. Parents often presented their life stories in front of the teacher and the DOE. This led to interruptions and corrections that were not necessarily the focus of the interview.

**Language and cultural barriers**

While the language barrier is a recurrent theme in any evaluation, with few solutions other than interpretation or local evaluators, cultural barriers were perceived in how questions were answered. Interviewees were often asked the same questions in different ways in order to ensure the viability of the response.

**CPS accessibility**

The evaluation team was able to gather substantial information. Yet the team often felt overstretched as CPSs are only open for two hours in the morning, making logistical arrangements challenging. In order to conduct a more thorough evaluation, it would be necessary to either reduce the sampling frame of CPSs or expand the evaluation team in order to better meet the evaluative demands that the CPS modality may require.

Further, time constraints limited the team’s ability to follow a strictly participatory approach that would allow all stakeholder groups to be considerably involved in the evaluation from design to the discussion of the evaluation report and recommendations. While the team made efforts to reserve time for stakeholder feedback at as many junctures as possible, the main feedback channel was with the key stakeholders (MOEYS, MOI and UNICEF), while stakeholders in remote locations had fewer opportunities to be involved beyond the field phase. To follow a strictly participatory approach would require a considerably longer timeframe and additional UNICEF support, along with further time and financial commitments.

\textsuperscript{32} For instance, see UNICEF, ‘Evaluation of UNICEF’s ECD Programme with a Focus on the Government of Netherlands Funding (2008-2010)’, 2011.

\textsuperscript{33} For instance, criteria on the capacity of the commune investment plan to fund CPS that had been formally supported by UNICEF could not be used by lack of data.
A consequence of remote stakeholders only being involved during field data collection, coupled with the lack of detailed and accessible statistics about children living in remote locations, hampered the team’s ability to properly assess equity. Cross-tabulations against variables, ethnicity or disability, for instance, were not possible.

**Decentralization and de-concentration context**

The evaluation team conducted the evaluation at a time of major change and legal instability regarding the devolution of powers to communes. Interviews with MOEYS, MOI, decision-makers and staff, including international technical assistance specifically devoted to D&D and analysis of documentation, did not allow the team to obtain a clear and consensual picture of the institutional situation between the responsibilities. As a consequence, evaluation questions dealing with CPS in the context of D&D were particularly complex to address, as informants might have different if not contradictory opinions on the situation, especially as per CPS funding.

The evaluation team therefore decided to complement field data with interviews of technical staff working at MOI, MOEYS and NGOs in late 2015.

### 2.5 Ethical considerations

Prior to all key informant interviews, all stakeholders signed agreement forms to ensure their consent. All interviews were conducted respecting UNICEF and UNEG ethical guidelines:34 impartiality, independence of judgment, integrity, respect, accuracy and transparency were upheld in all possible ways and all participants knew or were advised of the context and purpose of the evaluation, as well as the privacy and confidentiality of discussions. Similarly, prior to taking pictures, consent was asked from the teacher and caretakers (see example in Annex 6).

Furthermore, none of the interview or focus group discussion questions were asked in ways that might harm or discriminate any of the stakeholders, including the children, on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, religion, or economic background.

Most key informant interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with the assistance of an interpreter from English into Khmer and vice-versa or further local dialects. To ensure a coherent and reliable translation, the team had shared its ‘Evaluator’s Guide’ with each team’s translators beforehand for sufficient preparation of the translation and for clarifying questions. The pilot test at the beginning of the field phase also included a thorough review of the guide with the interpreter to clarify evaluation questions and provide further specification.

Regarding class observations, teachers always introduced the evaluation team. Ample time was devoted to discuss with the teacher in the classroom and to stay with children to prevent class disruption and raise confidence.

UNICEF guidance for interviewing children and Principles and Guidelines for Ethical Reporting on Children and Young People under 18 years old are reflected in the ‘Evaluator’s Guide’.

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3. EVALUATION FINDINGS

The chapter of the report analyzes the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impacts of the CPS modality. It will start by analyzing the inferred logical framework that underpins the CPS modality, or the TOC.

3.1 Theory of change (TOC)

As there was no TOC for the CPS modality, the evaluation team developed an inferred TOC on the basis of the initial documentary analysis of UNICEF documents and consultations with key stakeholders (MOI, MOEYS, UNICEF) in the course of the inception mission. This inferred TOC was used to understand and assess UNICEF’s contribution to the realization of the CPS modality and its expected objectives. The TOC takes as its starting point UNICEF’s activities and expectations (both implicit and explicit) of how positive change towards the progressive realization of children’s rights happens and how UNICEF contributes to this change.

The TOC was both seen as a product and a process. As a product, it consisted of articulating how actions, results and their objectives relate to each other. As a process, it allowed for reflective thinking aimed at exploring the changes expected from a set of actions and from the approach taken by UNICEF in the CPS modality.

The elements of the intervention logic used to construct the TOC were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Intermediate outcomes</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Overall objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revamping CPSs; training teachers, parental facilitators, staff, etc.; increasing resources for early childhood care documents, tools, etc.; providing guidelines, documents, tools and training regarding management and operation, meetings; seminars for exchanges among and between stakeholders; organizing and participating in conferences and campaigns; collaborating with government and local authorities and development partners; developing partnerships; organizing and participating in the study; evaluation</td>
<td>Sustained competent human and financial resources; involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, including parents; shared knowledge, experiences and good practices; improved capacity to operate and manage CPS; control of quality and establishment of, adherence to and understanding of quality standards regarding early childhood care in CPS; improved attention to early childhood care in local decision-makers’ (decentralized and local authorities) agenda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier and greater access to early childhood care, irrespective of background and abilities; children’s needs better met and sustained by early childhood care; improved community awareness on the added value of early childhood care; greater technical and operational capacities; greater momentum for improved learning conditions; implementation of better public early childhood care policies</td>
<td>Well-being of all children is improved; quality, inclusive and sustained early childhood care education; social and economic benefits for families sending children to CPS; sustained momentum for overall child development; CPS-provided education is relevant, appropriate and effective</td>
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</table>

Evidence shows that overall, UNICEF contributed to the realization of the actions identified in the TOC (training delivered, guides produced, etc.) and most actions have been implemented, although with varied intensity.
The competences of the commune councils have increased enough to operate CPS in an efficient way. Early childhood is included in social services, but is not top priority on the agenda of local decision-makers. Quality standards have been enacted but are rarely implemented; CPSs are not supervised by sub-national levels. Quality of education delivered is uneven and mostly depends on the individual competence of teachers. Practices are not systematically shared. Parents are not much involved. As a result, there was little chance that the LGCR implementation of CPS would lead to outcomes and global objectives. However, the evaluation reveals that some outcomes have been achieved, like a greater awareness of the added value of early childhood care. Access and enrolment have progressed to an extent although not for the most vulnerable children.

In light of the evaluation findings, there is a great need to revamp the TOC, as it was initially presented in the Inception Report, as follows:

- UNICEF is pursuing many activities that fall under the LGCR and other programmes (like child protection or water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)) that have an indirect impact on the realization of CPS. Other UNICEF actions that might have an indirect influence on ECE should appear in the TOC.
- Actions related to advocacy to the Government on funding earmarked to early childhood and CPS should appear, as the lack of financial engagement hinders the development and sustainability of CPS.
- A key intermediate outcome should focus on the commune capacity and role of the sub-national levels (namely POEs and DOEs), as these actors will be instrumental to implement and sustain CPS in the context of decentralization.

There is a need therefore to conceptualize the intervention logic of the LGCR programme, with a clear focus on the responsibilities and competencies of sub-national actors (POEs and DOEs), commune councils and CCWCs, which will play a pivotal role in the success of the CPS modality. A new TOC should also include other types of actors like NGOs and civil society (parents), which have remained peripheral to the LGCR programme thus far, as they could be instrumental in the success of the programme in terms of buy-in and facilitation of the implementation.

Causal links of the TOC between actions and expected outcomes should be further explored. The evaluation shows that despite a great amount of UNICEF-supported actions, the commune councils are constantly challenged and hampered in the expansion and maintenance of CPSs. Assistance and guidance is lacking on the ground. Likewise, in terms of quality education, CPS teachers lack training and supervision and operate in isolation with little support. Additionally, UNICEF has not further developed a monitoring and evaluation framework and tools for the LGCR programme, leading to difficulty for UNICEF to identify the impact of its ‘upstream work’ at the level of the national and sub-national authorities and to help local authorities and teachers track children’s improvement (i.e., school readiness and personal and psycho-social development).

It should be noted that both national and sub-national authorities were not knowledgeable about the logical framework behind the CPS modality. They can hardly explain the expected results and most have differing views on the real purpose of CPS.

### 3.2 Relevance

This section addresses the extent to which the CPS modality has fulfilled the needs of the most disadvantaged children aged 3 to 5 in terms of access to quality ECE. It examines the relevance of UNICEF support to CPS through communes within the context of the D&D process as well as other national strategies. The section also explores the extent to which CPS

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35 The most disadvantaged children are those with disabilities, delay, special learning needs, children from low-income families living in remote areas, ethnic minority children and vulnerable or at-risk children (victim of violence, abuse, etc.).
contributed as an entry point for inter-sectoral ECCD services aimed at promoting holistic child development outcomes.

This section addresses the following evaluation questions (1-3):

1. To what extent has CPS addressed the needs of the most disadvantaged children aged 3-5 in terms of the access to quality ECE?
2. How relevant is UNICEF support for CPS through communes in the context of D&D and other national strategies (e.g., the National Strategic Development Plan)?
3. To what degree does CPS contribute as an entry point for the inter-sectoral ECCD services encompassing health, nutrition and hygiene to promote holistic child development outcomes in light of the National Action Plan for ECCD?

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Summary of findings

Considerable evidence has shown that most CPSs address the needs of children aged 3 to 5 in terms of access and enrolment to quality ECE. CPSs are also relevant to the needs of the most disadvantaged children through the establishment of schools in areas in which state schools are not providing preschool education. In 60 per cent of CPSs visited, commune council and CCWC representatives, as well as teachers, try to encourage parents to enrol and send their children to preschool even though they might have disabilities or live in poor conditions. However, significant gaps still exist in providing access to ECE. Although centrally located CPSs enable easy access that allow children to go to school on foot, access is severely hampered for children living one to three kilometres from the school. Similarly, commune councils have difficulty detecting children with disability that drop out or have never gone to preschool. When children with disability have access to education, those with greater physical disabilities, such as inability to walk, are not receiving an education that is adapted to their needs. Teachers are not trained to deal with children with disability, but nevertheless in most cases they try innovative ways to include these children so that they may benefit from an education.

UNICEF has developed long-standing support to communes to help deliver social services. It has also strongly supported a holistic approach to ECE, according to most CPS teachers and commune councils. However, CPSs are not yet an entry point for inter-sectoral early childhood education development services (comprising of education, health, hygiene and nutrition) as teachers are not sufficiently trained on these matters.

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3.2.1. Access to and enrolment in CPS for the most disadvantaged children

Access to CPS has been facilitated and results from the evaluation point to a steady improvement of CPS enrolment.\textsuperscript{36} Centrally located CPSs enable easy access, allowing children to go on foot. Testimonials from parents and teachers living near a CPS confirmed that there is no geographical barrier to accessing schools, as many of them are located in residential areas.

UNICEF has helped establish schools in areas where state schools are not providing preschool education, therefore fulfilling a gap in terms of access to ECE. Among the CPSs visited, 42 per cent are accessible to most children via adequate transportation, but in 43 per cent of cases children cannot access CPS as they live in remote areas or have no access at all. Parents and teachers state that geographical access is difficult for children living one to three kilometres from the schools. In rural areas where CPSs are located,\textsuperscript{37} few parents and caregivers have cars and there is no public transportation system. The present evaluation confirms the EFA 2015 National Review stating that CPSs take part in mobilizing children in areas where schools are unavailable or located far from public preschools.

\textsuperscript{36} No disaggregated data was made available to the evaluation team to assess the evolution of CPS attendance and dropout rates in communes that fall under the scope of the LGCR programme. The assumption of a steady increase stems from interviews with UNICEF zone officers, POEs and DOEs, who commented on the figures during the visits. The evaluation team therefore decided not to elaborate on this issue due to the lack of tangible evidence.

\textsuperscript{37} Those visited and located in communes supported and not supported by UNICEF.
Three main factors contribute to why the most disadvantaged children are not attending preschool. First, access is limited for the most disadvantaged children (i.e., children with disabilities, delay, special learning needs, from low-income families, ethnic minority children and vulnerable or at-risk children). Schools do not provide the equipment and facilities to accommodate children with disabilities or special needs (for physically impaired children, for instance). Observations in most CPSs confirmed the lack of appropriate environment to access schools (e.g., no ramp for wheelchairs)\textsuperscript{38} and that buildings are not safe enough\textsuperscript{39} to accommodate children with disability. This is also confirmed by earlier evaluations:\textsuperscript{40} “Children who are particularly disadvantaged in terms of school access (…) include those from the poorest families, members of minority ethnic groups and those who are disabled”.

Secondly, parents may not want to send their children with disabilities to preschool. According to CPS teachers met during focus group discussions, such parents might think that their children are unable to attend regular classes, as the facility cannot accommodate the child or the child may not be capable of learning; they also fear that other children may discriminate against their child.

Thirdly, some preschools have not operated since 2014.\textsuperscript{41} This was due to a variety of causes: teachers not teaching regularly\textsuperscript{42} or showing ineptitude to teach or interact with parents.\textsuperscript{43} Most CPSs are run by only one teacher, thus making the preschool dependent on an individual’s availability.\textsuperscript{44} As soon as a problem occurs (e.g., illness), the preschool cannot operate. There is no pool of CPS teachers to replace the unavailable teacher; commune councils reported several cases where the replacement of teachers took months.

In other cases, CPSs are closed or teaching is postponed because the classroom is being used for activities other than education (e.g., celebrations for the pagoda or meetings of some sort). Thus it appears that commune councils have not prioritized early childhood by providing a secure and protected learning environment only devoted to teaching.\textsuperscript{45} According to teachers, the unexpected closing of schools affects children’s attendance, as communication between teacher and family is limited. Most parents discover if the preschool is open or not while taking their children to school. Interviews with teachers confirm that disruptive education affects children with disabilities even more as their parents are not always keen on sending their children to CPS.

Evidence shows that commune council and CCWC representatives, and teachers encourage parents to enrol and send their children to preschool, including in cases of families with children with disabilities or living under disadvantaged conditions. Parents may be encouraged only during the monthly village meeting, where the village chief, the commune council and CCWC representatives provide parents with information regarding the importance of preschool and encourage them to enrol their children. Various means of communication\textsuperscript{46} are used to encourage parents, including in remote areas. Parents are also reminded of the importance of sending their children to school. Teachers may make specific transportation arrangements to facilitate enrolment in CPS.

\textsuperscript{38} Example in CPS at Samang, Thalaborivath, Stung Treng.
\textsuperscript{39} Example in CPS at Kampong Phang, Thalaborivath, Stung Treng.
\textsuperscript{41} The visit of the evaluation team took place June and July 2015; the CPS had not been operating for at least six months.
\textsuperscript{42} Example in CPS at Kok Poy, Lo Ak, Phum Phi and Phum Phi Touich (O Chum, Rattanakiri).
\textsuperscript{43} Parents as well as commune councils reported anecdotal cases of violence with children and conflicts with parents.
\textsuperscript{44} As an illustration, in Phum Phi Touich, a case was reported that the teacher had a conflict with the parents and has not been teaching since November 2014.
\textsuperscript{45} The evaluation team saw numerous examples of such situations where CPSs are used for activities other than teaching, for instance in Lo Ak, Kampong Phang, Thalaborivath, Stung Treng.
\textsuperscript{46} Awareness raising took the form of door-to-door campaigns to encourage preschool enrolment and a loudspeaker was sometimes used in residential areas to inform parents of the registration times and schedules of the preschool, although in some communes and villages enrolment is only raised once per year at a village meeting.
Testimonials from commune council and CCWC members maintain that enrolment of children has progressed due to these communication activities and awareness campaigns. With the help of the commune and the teacher, the majority of, if not all, parents met during the focus group discussions believed that their children were gaining skills that would assist them and prepare for a better life. Parents who understand the importance of preschool, with the help of motivated teachers who are engaged with the children and value preschool education, are eager to send their children to preschool; this includes parents with children with disability (i.e., blind, deaf, mute) and those living in very poor conditions. This confirms the value of parental involvement in preschool education.

However, the evaluation underlines the difficulty of commune councils to target specifically children with disabilities (i.e., seeing, hearing, speaking) and adapt appropriate communication with their families. Most commune councils were not aware of children with disability in their area and more generally, those who drop out or have never gone to preschool. School registration is not organized regularly in every village and teachers state that children with disability are not systematically registered due to lack of knowledge. 47 POEs and DOEs are in charge of collecting CPS-related data and face major difficulties in this task. 48

POEs and DOEs confirmed their doubts on the reliability of the data collected by the commune councils, especially when it deals with children with disabilities, unlike data for state preschools located nearby primary schools where principals systematically organize registration. Commune council and CCWC members are not using appropriate tools to identify children with disability (like guidelines for community-based rehabilitation published by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation). Therefore, awareness campaigns are ill-adapted to parents with children with disability. Some communes visited use the UNICEF-supported social service mapping tool to identify the most vulnerable households and respond systematically. 49 The added value of this tool is real and worth expanding across communes with CPSs.

The UNICEF Education programme reported that the provincial administration, especially the division of planning and investment, had conducted quarterly meetings with the communes and village chiefs to review and discuss progress made and plan for the following months. The meetings were held at district level. In addition, the province, with support from provincial departments of women’s affairs, monitored some CPS classes to help communities collect data on children in CPS. 50

Despite children with disability having difficulty in accessing CPS, the evaluation underlines that the teachers accommodated children with disability who attend. Despite no disability-friendly facilities, some children with disability attend school. There is no discrimination regarding access to these children. In almost all CPSs visited in which there were children with disabilities or disadvantaged children, teachers are greatly aware of a child’s disability and try to do everything possible to include these children. For children with sight, hearing or speech impairment, the teachers make special efforts to communicate with the child and ensure the child’s participation and comprehension. 51 As a result, the evaluation confirms that there was virtually no discrimination by the teachers. Likewise, teaching materials do not distinguish

47 Also confirmed by the Evaluation of UNICEF’s ECD Programme with a Focus on Government of Netherlands Funding (2008–2010): “MOEYS conducts periodic monitoring visits and collects data on preschool enrolment (…). However, these data do not include the percentage from the poorest families, the percentage of children with disabilities (…)”.
48 Idem.
49 From 2010, the social service mapping tool was used in 20 communes to identify, support and monitor 782 vulnerable families, women and children, see UNICEF Country Annual Report, 2010.
50 UNICEF Education Section monitoring data on CPS and observations, June 2015.
51 This included placing the child in the front of the classroom, using body language and hand signals to engage the children, and adapting the curriculum and providing special attention to the child.
between gender, size and race, and boys and girls are treated equally. Both parents and teachers insist that all children are treated equally.52

The CPSs examined by the evaluation team follow the trend in Cambodia in which more girls than boys have been consistently enrolling in preschool over the last 13 years. This is due to the implementation of the Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Plan in Education, the development of a sustainable network of home-based preschools, CPS provision and the expansion of formal preschool provision in primary schools.53

However, teachers state they lack adequate training for children with greater physical and mental disabilities, e.g., children unable to walk, who were kept at home and did not receive any education. At present, they can accommodate children with light disability, but they are hesitant to teach those with severe physical or mental disability. The notion of inclusive education is not widely understood. According to teachers who received training, inclusive education was addressed briefly, but not further examined. There is no special training for teaching children with disability. Some teachers received training from NGOs (e.g., Handicap International), but not from the POEs or DOEs. Likewise, most CPS classrooms visited by the evaluation team did not have disabled-friendly facilities. There were no special chairs or equipment for children with physical disabilities. As a result, very few parents of children with severe disability consider sending their children to school.

Teachers were most acquainted with ethnic minorities, as they were trained to teach in several languages, in some regions.

3.2.2 UNICEF support to communes to invest in ECCD

UNICEF supported communes via the development of early childhood policy at national and sub-national levels (mainly POEs and DOEs), the creation of committees (especially CCWCs) and the provision of assistance and tools to teachers and CPSs.

UNICEF’s commitment enabled communes to take on more responsibilities regarding social services, including CPS. The ECD Global Evaluation54 confirmed that there was a greater sense of ownership and commitment to ECD at the commune level due to the decentralization of responsibility for ECD services. UNICEF-supported communes demonstrated capacity in data use, planning and reporting and leveraging resources through the decentralized planning and budgeting system. In 2011, UNICEF, the Swedish Agency for International Development, the Asian Development Bank and the Danish Development Aid Agency signed a memorandum on a programme-based approach to support the 10-year National Programme for Sub-national Democratic Development and its initial three-year implementation plan. This aimed to build capacities and use the national administration and sub-national financial system to improve social service delivery. UNICEF has been publishing specific guidelines to help communes set up CPSs since 2004.55

UNICEF contributed to the mapping of functions currently being done by the unified sub-national administrations (Board of Governors, commune council, line departments at provincial, district and commune level). As a nexus between programmes that support line ministries in functional mapping, the LGCR programme continued to collaborate with partners (GIZ, EU and the Asian Development Bank) to ensure a coherent approach to function

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52 Focus group discussions with parents and teachers explored discrimination issues in terms of children-teacher interaction, involvement of children in activities at school and teaching material. The POEs and DOEs underlined that the training and teaching material were gender-neutral and touched upon the diversity of children profiles and confirmed that they included pedagogy for vulnerable children, but not specifically for those with disabilities.

53 Education for All 2015 National Review.


55 UNICEF, ‘Social Service Delivery by the Commune or Sangkats as part of the Decentralization Process in Cambodia: An Example of Community Preschool Provision’, 2005. The findings on effectiveness will show that this guide is unknown by commune councils and CCWCs.
assignment, contribute to documenting experience and provide practical advice on how to undertake mapping exercises. The NCDD-S took this experience into account when drafting a sub-decree on functional mapping.

From 2011, UNICEF advocated for enhancing the **commune database** so as to include more pro-equity and pro-child indicators. For example, UNICEF expected CCWC members to request increased resources to respond to the most urgent needs based on data generated by the commune database regarding the number of children aged 3 to 5 not benefiting from ECE. 56

UNICEF furthermore supported the District and Municipal Fund and the development of a resource package and capacity development activities for the CCWC at provincial and capital level and 194 district-level CCWCs.

In addition to supporting the framework that would help communes take CPS into account, **UNICEF provided technical assistance and guidance to teachers and CPSs** that included:57

- Teacher training by POEs and DOEs;
- Technical monitoring by POEs and DOEs;
- CPS supply support producing teaching and learning, procured by UNICEF;
- Teacher technical meetings (held once to twice a year); and
- Annual technical review where POEs meet, discuss and share experiences

In addition, UNICEF supported CPSs with an inclusive education component, whereby CPS teachers should be trained on how to manage a class or group of children ensuring inclusion and support to children with disability within the same group.58 UNICEF also provided a multilingual education component, whereby CPS teachers are trained to introduce oral Khmer language in teaching.

**UNICEF supported commune councils to integrate ECCD in their commune investment plan.** Each commune receives funding for which the bulk is used to pay for infrastructure and the balance is used for social affairs. UNICEF encouraged the communes to use 20 per cent of the social affairs budget to pay for CPS, including teachers’ salaries and teaching materials, although the communes used anywhere from only 2 to 10 per cent of the budget. Furthermore, UNICEF supported implementation of the ‘social service envelope’, enabling a number of communes to allocate a portion of their budgets to social service interventions, although analysis of this allocation has yet to be undertaken.59 In addition, MEF issued a guideline to clarify the process related to liquidating funds for social service interventions. In 2014, on average, communes in Cambodia spent around 3 to 4 per cent of their budget on social services, whereas UNICEF-supported communes spent nearly three times as much on social services as a proportion of their budget.60 There is, however, much room for focusing the social services on education and more specifically on early childhood.

All commune representatives (commune councils, CCWCs, village chiefs, etc.) met during the field visit for this evaluation recognized the importance of preschool education and ECCD, yet every commune reiterated that they did not have enough funding to pay for the preschools, especially if external funding were to stop.

56 However, such data were not available when required by the evaluation team. The evaluation team expresses some doubts about the tangible implementation of the database.
57 UNICEF Education Section, July 2015.
58 The evaluation will show it has not happened.
Despite increased interest in early childhood, communes faced difficulties in investing more in CPS. Interviews conducted with commune councils and commune representatives such as the commune clerk and the DOE revealed that although UNICEF advocates for the commune to use 20 per cent of the social affairs budget, this is rarely the case. The funds are often used for other community needs. The communes often face difficult choices and do not have the capacity and understanding of how to spend the 20 per cent of the budget earmarked for social affairs. An ongoing UNICEF study on planning and budgeting of social services reports that citizens expressed economic needs as a priority (of those needs, around 70 per cent of households want to see further improvement in infrastructure). Social services are second priority and households primarily want better access to clean water and sanitation (61 per cent), while health and education were mentioned by half of the respondents (55 per cent and 48 per cent, respectively). This shows that despite increasing interest for education, households face significant challenges to survive and education is not a top priority. The study also reports that social service needs were considered less important than in communes not receiving UNICEF support.61

Commune councils face difficulties related to the D&D reforms. Most communes visited by the evaluation team and those surveyed by the study on planning and budgeting on social services complained about the difficulty in managing the annual budget processes, the bureaucracy and delays in provision of funds. Commune councils lack the capacity to anticipate expenditure, manage the budget process, request funding from national authorities and track their social expenditure. Field visits confirmed the lack of management skills and the absence of basic reporting tools. The UNICEF Annual Report 2008 furthermore revealed significant challenges as well as achievements for the commune councils related to using sub-national planning and budgeting systems that were not functioning effectively.62 Most commune council members called the evaluation team’s attention to the fact that (at the time of the field visit) commune councils had no legal status.

One major constraint was the lack of clarity in the funding-flow mechanisms in the first three-year implementation plan (2011–2013). The first challenge was that the provincial rural development committees were dismantled at the end of 2010 and new funding-flow mechanisms had to be agreed with the NCDD-S. In 2011, the priority of LGCR’s main counterparts, the MOI and NCDD-S, was then to establish new sub-national administrative structures.63 In early 2011, UNICEF thus provided grants to the Commune/Sangkat Fund to help communes operate in the new D&D context, but the funds reached communes only in November, making the disbursement late.64 In addition, focal points for social services at provincial and district levels, meant to help communes manage the funds and design and conduct social policies, were only appointed in September 2011, delaying the activation of the CCWC. For instance, training for CCWC members took place in late 2011. The LGCR programme also faced delays in recruiting three of the five LGCR officers at zone level under the 2011–2015 country programme structure.

In communes where the financial situation was more stable, although not ideal, action plans had been developed and there was a clear idea of how much money would be allocated to CPS.65 Budget programming documents were, however, never displayed during the visit of the evaluation team.

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61 The study assumes that UNICEF support may have helped communes address the social service needs of citizens, minimizing their needs compared to non-UNICEF supported communes.
63 This involved re-defining roles and responsibilities of staff working in provincial and district administrations, creating new divisions and recruiting/transferring more than 2,000 staff.
64 Due to administrative obstacles as the funds were channeled through the IP3 three-year implementation plan of the National Programme for Sub-national Democratic Development account and then through the provincial treasury.
65 As an illustration, in Kdeean Reay, the US$3,000 supplementary aid provided by UNICEF was to be divided in quarters in order to assure teacher salaries that were paid quarterly.
Despite successful ECCD awareness raising among national, sub-national and local authorities, obstacles remain in the effective delivery of social services.

UNICEF supported guides to help communes and sub-national actors operate in social services (e.g., the manual for the CCWC included practical tools to improve the planning of social service delivery, with a strong life cycle and equity approach). However, UNICEF guides were never mentioned to the evaluation team as a tutorial to help the clerk better manage the commune budget and social services. There is no evidence on the ground that UNICEF provided any operational manuals on the CPS and its functioning to local authorities. Nor is there evidence that UNICEF indicated to MOI and the Committee for Democratic Development how to support and encourage the commune council to invest in ECCD via POE and DOE, although such guides exist in theory.

There is a clear working relationship between POEs and DOEs and UNICEF zone officers. However, there is no evidence that sub-national level support reached the commune councils. The evaluation underlines the commune councils’ lack of capacity to operate the CPS, including monitoring, recruitment of teachers, budgeting and programming CPS activities. Most commune council members acknowledged operating without any guidance and framework. There is no direct contact between the UNICEF zone officers and the commune councils. UNICEF zone officers interact mainly with POEs and DOEs and rely on their understanding of the commune situation. Many of them did not receive regular information about the actual status of the CPS and were not informed when the CPS was not operating.66

As a result, despite UNICEF support (training, guidance) and advocacy regarding the needs and functioning of the CPS, few commune councils know how to best run a CPS.

3.2.3 CPS as main entry point for inter-sectoral ECCD services

In addition to the promotion of a holistic approach to early childhood, UNICEF supported the positioning of CPS at the intersection of key developmental issues (health, hygiene and nutrition). The role of CPS as an inter-sectoral point for ECCD services is in reality, however, limited. Of the 101 CPSs visited, there were only a few instances where a referral system was in place, albeit organized on the initiative of teachers. In some cases, the health centre came to the school once or twice per year (e.g., to provide deworming medication or for vaccination campaigns).

In most CPSs, teachers were able to refer children, when needed, to the village health centre. Teachers may refer students to the health centre if they are ill or are in need of special care, but there was little indication of a coordinated and consistent effort at the level of the commune. Focus group discussions with parents confirmed that teachers discuss with parents the health needs of their children on a regular basis, but they do not consider the CPS as an inter-sectoral point for social services (including education, health, hygiene or nutrition). Previous evaluations67 also underline the loss of opportunities for integrated or comprehensive services within the National Policy on ECCD. ECD programming has not emphasized building connections with health and education services at commune level.

There is cooperation between CPSs, social services, CCWC and health centres, although it is neither consistent nor systematic within the commune. The commune councils support the setting of the CPSs and try to make them operational, i.e., having a permanent teacher in the classroom. Commune council members confirmed that this was their first priority and underlined the challenge for commune councils to go further and develop a system through

66 The evaluation team was accompanied for one and half days by the relevant UNICEF zone officer to geographically locate the CPS. This zone officer had never visited the schools in this particular commune, nor met with the commune council and CCWC. Other interviews with DOE confirmed that they had little knowledge of the financial situation of the CPS and of their commune investment plan. They have no means to monitor or time to visit the CPS and commune councils do not follow up.

which CPSs would be a hub of teaching and social services for children. This is far from being attained.

As a result, children will be more or less taken care of, depending on the location of the CPS (i.e., geographical proximity to health centres) and on the possibility of the social services to serve a wide range of CPSs.

### 3.2.4 Opportunity for children to learn healthy, hygienic and nutritious practices

In almost half of the CPSs, children attend a school where the premises, classrooms and facilities are fairly clean, somewhat safe and sometimes maintained. Focus group discussions with teachers and parents confirmed awareness of security issues. Teachers counsel the children on issues such as domestic violence and other perils.

However, the other half of CPSs visited have infrastructure that are dirty, unsafe and inadequate for children. With a lack of facilities and access to water, the CPS does not ensure safety and protection for all children. Long-term support, especially via the WASH programme, has not led to significant improvements in environment and safety. One of the results of a previous evaluation underlines that the WASH programme is not fully decentralized to commune level, whereby councils are implementing activities. This is partially owing to the fact that WASH issues are poorly integrated in commune development plans.

The evaluation team observed many situations in which parents, teachers and children expressed dissatisfaction of the cleanliness of the CPS. It is difficult for teachers to transmit the message of healthy and hygienic practices in such an inappropriate learning environment.

**Despite a lack of training, teachers do their best to train children on health, hygiene and nutrition.** The scoring matrix used for this evaluation indicates that one third of children learned and applied personal care and hygiene skills, with an additional 9 per cent learning, applying and receiving supplies and regular examinations. At the same time, in almost half of the cases children are unacquainted with basic practices despite opportunities to learn about health, hygiene and nutrition. In the worst-case scenario, 9 per cent of children have no healthy or good nutritional practices.

Teachers expressed satisfaction with the training received, which often included modules on health and hygiene. They understood the holistic approach to child development. However, once in the classroom, most teachers expressed a lack of proper, adequate and sufficient hygienic materials.

Teachers faced even more difficulties with regards to teaching nutrition. Focus group discussions indicated that many of them had taught nutrition, but few referred to specific training. Unlike basic healthy habits, nutrition is not a social habit and requires some scientific knowledge that the teachers lack. Class observations showed that there were posters in classrooms indicating nutritious foods and many teachers spoke with parents about good nutrition for their children. However, there is no systematic nutrition programme that would help parents and children change behaviour at home.

This evaluation confirms the findings of the EFA 2015 National Report, stating, “The ability to provide training on early childhood care, nutrition education and using health services has not yet been considered as priority”.

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68 Some 50 out of 101 CPSs.
Evaluation of Community Preschool Modality in Cambodia

3.3 Effectiveness

The section on effectiveness assesses the extent to which the CPS modality achieved its goal to increase the learning and development opportunities for preschool children.

This section explores the capacity of the school environment, the class setting, the material and the activities to stimulate children and foster development outcomes, school readiness and transition to primary school. Furthermore, it examines whether teachers’ capacity has increased and whether curriculum and teaching material have been created, improved and reviewed. The section concludes with the constraining factors that have impacted the effectiveness of the CPS modality.

This chapter addresses the following evaluation questions (6-11):

6. To what extent has the CPS intervention achieved its set goal to increase the learning and developmental opportunities for preschool aged children (3–5)?
7. To what extent has the CPS contributed to teacher capacity, improved curriculum, activities and teaching materials?
8. What are the enabling and constraining factors that influence the effectiveness of the CPS?
9. To what degree has the CPS strengthened commune councils’ capacity to deliver social services at the community level?
10. To what extent has the CPS programme improved the development outcomes and school readiness of children?
11. Are there unintended results, either positive or negative?
### Summary of findings

Evidence from focus group discussions and class observations suggests a clear correlation between the quality of the premises, the teaching material, the teachers’ motivation and parental recognition of the value of CPS. Many CPS settings are of poor quality and teaching material is under-used. Evidence suggests that most teachers have a basic understanding of child-centred and active learning pedagogies despite vast disparities among communes. However, most teachers operate in isolation and their motivation to make the school welcoming to children depends much on the involvement of the commune council and CCWC members and parents, which is often minimal.

When teachers are motivated and received in- and pre-service training, the results on children school achievements are better: children attending CPS show a good level of school readiness and transition to primary school.

Not one teacher met by the evaluators was able to demonstrate the learning achievements of the children. Not one POE or DOE was able to provide evidence of developmental progress of the children attending CPS, as there are no tools in place to monitor or measure progress. Children are not tested or evaluated. Therefore, the evaluation team used qualitative information from focus group discussions with parents and teachers, as well as class observations, to identify whether the conditions were met, which may lead to a potential impact on preschool children.

By using descriptors with levels of achievements, the evaluation team also used the scoring matrix to detect the impacts and factors that enabled or hindered the realization of these impacts. As a result, any evaluation assessment presented in this section should be considered with care, as it provides indications that are documented on ad hoc methodology (agreed by the Reference Group and featured in the Inception Report), but that do not rely on a scientifically based assessment of children’s achievements, which would have required specific testing done prior to the evaluation. This was not the case.

### 3.3.1 Appropriateness of the school environment, class setting, activities, teaching materials and age-appropriate games and adequate stimulation

The learning environment is not always appropriate for children. The CPSs visited were held in various settings, including: a classroom within a primary school, a separate building on the primary school property, a bamboo platform underneath a house, and a shelter with no walls within the teacher’s house or on the teacher’s property.

The classes are also held in shared facilities, such as a facility used for religious reasons. In many cases, children interviewed said they felt as if they were at someone’s house rather than at school. The learning environment is therefore not systematically child-appropriate. Using private homes as a classroom conveys a mixed message for children and parents alike. The parents and children interviewed find it difficult to distinguish between a place where children are looked after (like in a private home) and a place where children learn and are trained by professional teachers. This definitely impacts the reputation of the CPS and the image the parents have of ECE. Teachers are not advised to turn their home into a learning environment. Focus group discussions with teachers teaching from home confirmed that they were unfamiliar with the Early Learning Development Standards.
Box 4: UNICEF-supported Early Learning Development Standards in Cambodia

In Cambodia, UNICEF has a history of promoting ECE for more than learning purposes alone. Since early 2000, it has stressed that ECE should provide more than academic development of young children. The role of play, psychosocial development, and teacher-child interactions is key. UNICEF has been positioning the preschool as a vehicle to address several aspects of child development and promote a holistic approach to ECE. This approach has been endorsed by MOEYS for all models of ECE, including CPS. Between 2006 and 2009, UNICEF provided substantial support to the design of ELDS, meant to guide and frame the expansion of ECE provisions for all kinds of models, including CPS. The ELDS have been instrumental in framing teaching material, teacher training and curricula for all ECE programmes. From 2009, ELDS covered wide aspects of ECCD, much beyond the ‘learning alphabet approach’ and including, for instance, social development or cultural development, among other dimensions.


Disorder is common and floors are sometimes unclean. The child-friendly environment depends largely on the experience of the teacher and her desire to create a space that reflects and encourages teaching and learning.

Observations showed that among the 101 CPSs visited, half had school facilities and environments unsafe for children and were not clean. Few classrooms (about 20 per cent) had decorations and a place to store materials; they were mostly very sparse and not child-friendly. There are no facilities for children with severe physical disabilities (see section 3.2 on relevance). Focus group discussions with teachers underline the negative effect on their motivation when they operate in an environment that is not child-friendly.

By contrast, the evaluation confirms that an appropriate learning environment motivates the teacher to teach. But the appropriateness depends on the teacher’s individual motivation and her/his desire to make the school welcoming to children, even with very few financial and material resources. Teachers are not aware of corporate guidance meant to improve the learning environment.
Evaluation of Community Preschool Modality in Cambodia

Box 5: Snapshot of poor conditions at a community preschool in Kampong Cham Province

The CPS class is located in the teacher’s house. On the day of the interview, only five students attended. The location is not appropriate for children as it is unhygienic. During the rainy season, class is held on a high floor of the teacher’s house (at least four metres high) without proper and safe stairs for the children to climb. The school does not seem to be open every day. The teacher is often occupied by other tasks requested by the health centre chief and village chief.

Source: Learning Avenue

The majority of teachers received the MOEYS materials from the CCWCs directly after their training. The teaching material is regularly renewed. Most were content and found materials to be adapted to the children’s profile, gender neutral and age appropriate. Teachers reported that they often did not know how to use the material for pedagogic purposes and who could help them maximize the potential of the teaching material. None of them has the possibility to contact POE or DOE staff or to interact with colleagues. CCWCs organize monthly meetings that the teachers greatly appreciate. At these meetings, the teachers can exchange experiences and concerns to improve their methods and the use of the material. There were many anecdotes concerning the difficulty to properly use the material. Few, however, reported that they have been able to maintain or repair the teaching material, like playgrounds.

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70 The evaluation team collected numerous testimonials from the POEs and DOEs on their perception of the qualitative shift in the pedagogy and the training material. The POEs and DOEs credited UNICEF expertise.

71 As an illustration, teachers explained that within the box of materials there is a deflated ball with no pump and a jump rope, both of which are unsuitable for a dusty environment.
This information reveals that the in- and pre-service training was insufficient in equipping teachers with the tools to operate efficiently in classrooms. The most innovative and motivated teachers with whom the team met had strong personalities and relied on prior experience to provide solid pedagogy. As the vast majority of the CPS teachers are new, with limited education and young, they need more training as well as regular supervision and counselling, which the POE/DOE are unable to provide. The commune councils and CCWCs are supposed to make the CPS function, not to address the content and the pedagogy aspects that are left to CPS teachers.

3.3.2 The development of teaching capacities

Despite a robust arsenal of quality standards, their implementation on the ground remains challenging for the teachers in UNICEF-supported communes. Most teachers with whom the team met have a basic understanding of child-centred and active learning pedagogies. The teachers who received training reported that they have a clearer idea of the holistic approach to child development and interactive pedagogies. Nevertheless, most, if not all, of the teachers are aware of their limited understanding and request more training and assistance. Lesson plans are a recurrent concern; most teachers confessed that they did not know how to sequence the sessions, especially within a limited time span (two hours). Balancing activities remained another challenge (e.g., how to best sequence a session on pre-math and on free play). Adapting the activities to a diversified audience is rarely done, although teachers know some children are more advanced than others.

During the interviews, teachers mentioned that the DOE was rarely prepared or willing to answer their questions. In addition, training sessions address concepts that are totally new to participants who have never taught before and are confined by a cultural model where the senior transmits knowledge to the younger. Hence the notion of teacher-children interaction is a complex concept to grasp and many teachers faced difficulty in turning the concept into reality once in the classroom.

Therefore, developing teachers’ understanding of child-centred and active learning pedagogies may be an issue that extends across several of Cambodia’s administrative divisions as well as within UNICEF. Another issue relates to the limited opening hours of the CPS and the irregular opening of the CPS during the week. Planning lessons for less than two hours and preparing an iterative construction of knowledge over the year is almost impossible. Therefore, teachers are unable to track precisely children’s educational progress. Only some

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72 During focus group discussions with teachers, participants were encouraged to express what they learned during the training session in order to avoid suggesting answers. The team collected open responses on the holistic approach, interactive teaching-learning, role of play in child development.

73 Discussions with UNICEF staff in Phnom Penh and UNICEF zone officers confirmed that the new pedagogies placing the child at the centre of education are a western concept from developed countries that should be adapted to the Asian culture where the hierarchy of values is different. Even though Cambodian national officials endorsed these approaches to early childhood, the cultural shift at the field level in remote areas will take more time and will require advocacy as well as extensive hands-on training to sub-national levels, commune councils, CCWCs, teachers and parents.

74 The evaluation team conducted more than 80 class observations and systematically discussed with the teachers the application of the concepts learned in the training sessions. Most teachers showed a vague understanding and the understanding varied from classroom to classroom. Most complained they could not further explore a concept that they found relevant to early childhood but inapplicable for cultural reasons and lack of professional experience.
indications based on the teachers’ personal impressions indicate that the children made progress.

3.3.3 Revision, improvement or creation of CPS curricula, activities and teaching materials

The evaluation team did not see that curricula were reviewed regularly and improved nor were teaching materials upgraded. Most teachers with whom the team met in focus group discussions claimed that their curriculum was structured and followed MOEYS guidelines. Along with the POE and DOE, teachers value the usefulness of the curriculum. However, given the issues of insufficient training and teachers’ limited understanding of the lesson plan, planning the curricula may be difficult for some of the teachers.

There is no evidence that the curriculum was adapted according to the children’s specific needs. Most CPS teachers expressed their lack of confidence in their own pedagogical capacity and did not feel skilled enough to adapt the curriculum, which constitutes the backbone of their teaching. Only some senior teachers who had long-standing experience in various settings customized the curriculum or revamped it, while still retaining the ECE objectives for the benefit of children. This happened mostly in areas with very vulnerable children or in multilingual settings. Again, such adaptation of the curriculum depended on individual desire and ability and was not institutionalized.

3.3.4 Innovation capacities of teachers

Some teachers are innovative in the classroom, but their inventiveness relates to the individual capacity and will, not the CPS modality. The evidence collected shows that innovation occurred in cases in which children with disabilities attended class. Teachers would use techniques such as speaking louder for those with hearing difficulties, placing letters and books closer to children with limited sight, using teaching materials in a different way to render them more accessible (e.g., using mobile black boards for visually impaired children that allowed all children to work in smaller groups).

Many CPS teachers were maximizing what they could do with limited resources and training. Realizing these difficulties, some teachers asked for teacher networks to be established in their communes through meetings with the commune councils and CCWCs. Some went further and asked for meetings with ECCD actors further up the hierarchy, including more meetings with the DOE and higher government officials. Nevertheless, teacher empowerment and initiative were not very encouraged neither by POEs and DOEs, who lack time and are not present, nor by commune councils and CCWCs who do not know how to provide remediation actions. Commune chiefs and other commune council members often shared this sentiment.

3.3.5 Enabling and constraining factors that influence the effectiveness of the CPS

Below are the key enabling and constraining factors identified by the evaluation team. They comprise seven categories: financing, teacher training, supervision, teacher retention, enrolment, functioning of CPSs, compatibility of CPS schedules with parents’ working days.

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75 Curriculum for CPS was developed in 2004–2006 with UNICEF support and has been updated regularly, according to UNICEF Education.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Enabling and constraining factors</th>
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| Financing                              | **Enabling factors:** Salaries are provided regularly (monthly or quarterly), contributing to teacher retention and motivation.  
**Constraining factors:** Funding and financial management seemed to be a major issue for most CPSs. As 20 per cent of the budget was allocated to social services, which include CPS, often choices were made to spend the funds received on issues that the commune council deemed more important or more significant (e.g., repairing health centre, providing financial support to deprived families). The commune councils were not confident that they would be able to ensure sustainable independent funding for CPS. |
| Teacher training                       | **Enabling factors:** Teacher training has equipped teachers with the minimum required to teach small children and all value the quality of the training received.  
**Constraining factors:** Teacher training is inconsistent, whereby some teachers receive minimal training of one or two days and others may receive five or 10 days. Some do not receive any training prior to taking on their role as teacher. Teachers did not receive special training to deal with children with disability or handle stress in the classroom, although some complained of stress and/or feeling overwhelmed by the number of children in the class and the responsibility. No specific training has been given (e.g., in terms of stress management or parent-teacher interaction) or these issues were very quickly addressed. |
| Supervision                            | **Constraining factors:** Teachers are rarely supervised and none receive advice, except during monthly meetings with CCWCs. Activity books are not used to the full extent and teachers do not have assistance. The DOEs are not available. There is no network among CPS teachers, including within the same commune. The POEs_DOEs do not receive feedback from teachers on their concerns or remediation activities. |
| Teacher retention                      | **Enabling factors:** Schools operate for two hours daily, offering teachers the ability to carry out an additional income-generating activity. Some teachers were older and felt that there was not more they could do than teaching.  
**Constraining factors:** Teachers who had stopped teaching left for reasons including seasonal migration, taking a better paying job, CPS ceased to operate or there was little to no opportunity for career advancement. Commune council members do not know how to motivate teachers except via funding, which is limited. Some visionary chiefs of village tried to deploy alternatives to retain the teachers, but none are assisted in this matter and are unable to prepare the replacement of the leaving teacher. |
| Enrolment rates for children in CPS    | **Enabling factors:** The CPS schedule coincides with parents’ work schedules, which dramatically increases CPS enrollment rates. Often teachers may adapt school hours to better accommodate parents. There are no after-care programmes. In many communes, information campaigns on the merits and importance of enrolling children in CPS further encouraged enrolment.  
**Constraining factors:** Distance from CPS to home in remote areas. In most cases, no transportation was provided and children had to remain at home. Parents often kept children at home who had physical difficulties such as walking or moving. Alternatives were theoretically offered through the health centre, yet UNICEF and/or local authorities did not pay transportation costs so it was unaffordable to many families. Seasonal migration led many families to leave their villages for work in other areas of Cambodia or Thailand, bringing their children with them. |
| Functioning of the CPS                 | **Enabling factors:** Thanks to UNICEF advocacy and the policy engagement of the Government of Cambodia, the value of ECE is high and shared by many CPSs. Evidence shows that the CPS motivates teachers and parents. The commitment of the chief of village is key, as well as other members of CCWCs.  
**Constraining factors:** The irregular opening hours of CPSs, as well as periods of unexpected closing, compromise the quality of teaching and increase the dropout rate. Parents’ trust is affected and teachers are demotivated. The D&D reforms have not clarified the allocation of functions and funds, |
Evaluation of Community Preschool Modality in Cambodia

| Compatibility of CPS schedules with parents’ working days | Enabling factors: Parents appreciate that the CPS opens early so most of them can pick up their children from 8:30 a.m. or 9 a.m. and then start the workday. In many cases, caregivers such as grandparents pick up the child so parents can go to the field or the factory before the CPS closes. Constraining factors: Devoting early morning to early childhood means that children stay at home the rest of the day with their parents or alone. Teachers complained about the limited time devoted to ECCD. Parents tend to consider two hours of training sufficient, while a true holistic approach would require various sequences of activities that cannot take place in the current situation. There are no after-care programmes to take care of children and prolong the pedagogical mission of the CPS. |

3.3.6 Contribution of CPS to enable children to acquire skills to enter primary school

Initially, it was difficult to gather accurate data on the number of children who benefited from commune-led interventions due to delays in transferring funds to commune accounts. Teachers and authorities lack the relevant data on educational improvement as there are no tools to test performance. The evaluation team therefore cross-analyzed results from focus group discussions with parents and teachers as well as the scoring matrix on school readiness and transition to primary schools.

Both teachers and parents stated that children attending CPS gained social, behavioural and basic educational skills. Children are considered well prepared to enter primary school. As confirmed by the UNICEF Midterm Review (2013): “ECE would help encourage attending primary and lower secondary schools, as children who attend preschool are more likely to progress well, stay in school and develop to their full potential. School readiness was deemed necessary to expand the provision of ECE to more children in order to increase the proportion of children starting primary education on time.”

Both teachers and parents stated that children attending CPS were more polite, confident, social and able to better manage their emotions. Focus group discussions with parents confirmed that children would return home and proudly show their parents what they had learned at school.

All children in CPS seemed to be learning the curriculum, however, the evaluation team was unable to confirm these claims.

The impact of UNICEF support on school readiness is largely positive. In almost half of the cases, 90 per cent of five-year-old children in CPSs examined seemed literate and equipped with specific educational and social skills. Long-term support, i.e., when UNICEF supported the CPS for over five years, led to slight improvements in school readiness, albeit limited. There has been an 18 per cent increase in the number of CPSs belonging to the 90 per cent category. These results come from the evaluation team’s scoring matrix; the informant was unaware of any use and implementation of the UNICEF conceptual framework on school readiness at national, sub-national, and commune council and CCWC levels.

Children with vulnerabilities and those with strong disabilities do not have the same educational opportunities. Access is more difficult for them and once at school, they do not receive an

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78 During class observations, CPS teachers showed how five-year-old children could succeed in pre-math and pre-teaching, knew the alphabet and could recognize colours and respond correctly to some numerical exercises contained in the activity book.
adapted education as teachers are not specifically trained for this. No evidence was found that inclusive education was implemented in school.\textsuperscript{80}

Except for the most disadvantaged children, all eligible children were prepared for and had access to primary school. Some teachers followed up on their former students through their parents and the primary school teachers or primary school directors. There was no evidence of children not accessing primary school because of lack of ECE.

The triangulation of testimonials from the DOE, parents and teachers – some having taught in primary and were acquainted with the curriculum and what could be expected from children entering primary school – indicated that children going through CPS had received a sufficient education to go to primary school with no particular difficulty. The triangulation and class observation made with teachers taking care of five-year-old children allowed the evaluation team to highlight the satisfactory level of transitioning from CPS to primary school. There is a range of indicators that leads to the conclusion that \textit{the CPS programme prepared children to transition to primary school}. In 39 per cent of cases, most children in the CPS developed the required skills to enter primary school and performed better than those without ECE.\textsuperscript{81} Only in 14 per cent of cases was the transition to primary school minimal or non-existent. Some teachers followed-up on children whom they had in class and transited into primary school. They did this either by contacting the new teacher, the director of the primary school or through the parents and confirmed the successful inclusion of the children in primary school. They also reported that primary school teachers could have identified the level of readiness of those who attended CPS from those who had not.\textsuperscript{82}

Long-term UNICEF support has led to significant improvements in the transition to primary school. There has been a 45 per cent increase in the number of CPSs where most children developed the required skills and performance to enter primary school. Focus group discussions led the evaluation team to assume that teachers received refresher courses and that the CPS modality benefited from constant technical and financial support. This however remains an assumption.

The commune usually led a campaign encouraging parents to enrol their children in primary school. In some villages and communes, CPS teachers participated in these campaigns. In some communes, the commune chief was the main supporter, while in others it was the CCWC, the teacher, or the entire commune council. All depended on the leadership and personality of the stakeholders involved.

### 3.4 Efficiency

This section explores the extent to which the technical and financial support for teachers and the schools’ operation enabled qualitative ECE services. It will also identify the ways that the costs incurred to implement the CPS justify the child development achievements.

This section addressed the following evaluation questions (4-5):

4. How efficient is the current CPS administrative system in terms of the technical and financial support for teachers and the school’s operation?

\textsuperscript{80} As part of the current country programme’s focus on equity, UNICEF is playing a more important role in inclusive education by piloting inclusive preschools with CARE and Handicap International, both in state-run preschools and CPSs.

\textsuperscript{81} The evaluation team conducted numerous side interviews in villages with parents who did not send their children to preschool, as well as teachers who could make the difference between those who attended CPS and those who had not or only attended irregularly.

\textsuperscript{82} Despite anecdotal information collected from the evaluation, it confirms that attending CPS prepares the transition to primary school, as demonstrated by research and reports. See OECD, ‘Starting Strong III, A quality toolbox for early childhood and care’, OECD Publishing, 2012.
5. In what ways and to what extent do the costs incurred to implement CPSs justify the result on child development?

### Summary of findings

As far as efficiency is concerned, the evaluation indicates that UNICEF has supported teachers, who highly value the quality of training and teaching materials. However, most teachers lack the appropriate knowledge and skills to enforce the ECCD concept, which is relatively new to them. POEs and DOEs provide minimal help as they lack of time and do not supervise the CPS teachers on a regular basis. Despite guides for teachers and teaching material that have been widely disseminated, most teachers operate in isolation and rarely share practices or ask for help.

Commune councils are challenged in running CPSs efficiently, due to a shortage of managerial skills, despite the training commune council members received. They find it difficult to arbitrate funding among the many priorities of the commune. Most commune council members and households give priority to economic development, namely infrastructure, and education often comes second. Funding social service delivery is progressing, but remains low. There is no earmarked funding for CPSs.

Nevertheless, the engagement of commune council and CCWC representatives and parents, where effective, is the strong driver to quality improvement of ECE services, including in cases where communes have limited funding.

### 3.4.1 Technical support provided by the CPS system and quality education

With UNICEF technical and financial support to MOEYS, some CPS teachers have regular opportunities to improve their professional capacity through initial and in-service training. POE and DOE staff hold training sessions for newly recruited CPS teachers onsite, near their residence or close to their future CPS. All teachers interviewed valued the quality of the training. Many teachers had been trained before, especially in cases where teachers were replaced on short notice. By contrast, many understood their lack of skills and hence required more training to improve their teaching aptitudes.

However, the evaluation indicates that the greatest impediment to providing quality education to children within the current CPS system is the lack of teacher training. Every teacher interviewed needed or requested additional training. Among the teachers met by the team, 50 per cent confirmed having received five to 10 days of pre-service training at the provincial offices, sometimes provided by the DOE.

Occasionally, a refresher course is provided either yearly or quarterly to teachers. Neither commune councils, CCWCs nor teachers themselves know about the frequency of refresher courses. There is no training plan provided by POEs or DOEs. A fifth (20 per cent) of the teachers met have never received a refresher course.

Discussions with commune councils and CCWC members indicated they were under pressure when having to replace teachers; filling the available position was their first priority as there is a limited choice of candidates and no quality-based recruitment criteria. As a consequence, most newly recruited teachers did not receive training.

In 2015, the government decision to extend the training package to 35 days stands as a timely and appropriate initiative that is highly anticipated by the new teachers, as well as those with some seniority, who complain about the lack of refresher training.

**Overall teachers are satisfied with the teaching material, but do not use it to its full extent, thereby limiting its effect on quality education.** About half the teachers interviewed received materials from DOE that they found useful as well as the educational kit, which includes the activity book. However, most do not make full use of the teaching material. The

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83 Figures on training hours per district and province were not obtained. Most figures contained in this section come from declarations from POEs and DOEs and teachers met in the field.

84 I.e., some 90 teachers interviewed during the site visits, in CPSs of UNICEF-supported communes or not supported by UNICEF.
majority of teachers interviewed stated that they did not understand all the activities or lessons in the activity book, despite the training. They pointed out the limitation of the training, which raised many aspects like pedagogy, health, social attitudes and creativity. Most do not have a strong educational background. Many teachers picked lessons with which they felt comfortable teaching. Others, two in particular (Taneah, Kouk Kong), taught children even when they themselves did not have a firm grasp of the subject matter.

Teachers lack a support system or a network where they can obtain clarification or explanation for lessons they did not understand. The CPS system does not foster a sense of community between teachers.

There are some annual meetings at POE or DOE where teachers meet and have an exchange regarding their experience. However, focus group discussions confirmed that teachers work mainly in isolation and rarely meet.

The POE and DOE are not prepared to provide advice or effectively supervise CPS teachers so they may improve their pedagogical skills. Discussions with POEs and DOEs confirmed that they lack time to oversee the CPS teachers who are geographically dispersed. The POEs and DOEs do not know how to identify teachers’ needs and help them (e.g., via peer reviewing, meetings or counselling). Discussions with POEs/DOEs demonstrated that most have vast experience in primary or secondary school and are unfamiliar with the holistic approach and the associated pedagogy of ECCD and are therefore unable to address the CPS teachers’ needs properly.

There are no tools by which to assess children’s educational progress, which brings into question the effectiveness of the pedagogy used by CPS teachers. In addition, there is no peer-review system whereby CPS teachers can be observed in the class and advised by experienced senior pedagogues on how to improve teaching methods. Commune councils and CCWCs are not qualified to supervise teachers in terms of pedagogy. The evaluation therefore considers there is no adequate response to teachers’ technical needs.

3.4.2 Financial and operational support to CPS

The current CPS administrative system does not provide sufficient technical support. Teachers have limited opportunities to expand their knowledge and skills and have little room to innovate. International experience and research demonstrate that ECCD is an evolving sector where creativity is essential and personal and behavioural aptitudes are as important as a solid pedagogical background. The UNICEF teams participate in regional networks (e.g., the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood) and are connected to the early childhood-related projects. UNICEF is therefore very well acquainted with ECCD and its evolution and remains a legitimate expert, wisely advising ministerial authorities on early childhood.

The one major hindrance UNICEF faces is to translate such in-depth expertise into tangible initiatives that impact teachers and the quality of education offered at CPSs. There are many institutional constraints, like the D&D context and the commune councils’ or CCWCs’ limited competencies. The CPS modality has not been designed to directly impact quality education. It should foster commune councils’ capacity to best develop and manage CPS as well as improve CPS quality, without being directly involved with CPS and its teachers, except via training and teaching material that have proved relatively efficient.

As a result, this is a major loss for the current CPS modality in terms of efficiency. The financial and human resources investment of UNICEF does not translate into tangible improvement of

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86 The D&D reforms blurred the responsibilities of the different levels, including MOI, POEs and DOEs.
quality education. The sub-national levels (POE, DOE and commune council) are not yet capable of ensuring and improving the quality education of the CPS.

**Box 7: CPS teacher salaries**

CPS teachers are paid between US$25 and $30 per month. UNICEF provides US$12 per month on average. State teachers are paid between US$100 and $150. Teachers in private schools may earn up to US$300 per month.

*Source: Learning Avenue*

Visits to 101 communes confirmed that the vast majority of teachers were paid regularly and on time. Teachers were usually paid monthly, quarterly or every semester. Salaries for CPS teachers are low compared to salaries paid by the state or NGOs, which are supporting schools. Such differences have not prevented teachers from being recruited. Commune councils and CCWCs complained of a lack of retention provisions, which would help preserve teachers and build a preschool community. This would also ensure trust with parents and stronger relationships with the POE/DOE. In interviews with commune council and CCWC members, there was a great sense of fear that teachers would leave to teach at NGO- or state-run schools as the salaries were higher.

### 3.4.3 CPS teachers’ retention rate

The evaluation team gathered anecdotal information, making it difficult to have a consolidated view of teacher’s retention. There is a wide range of motives for teachers to remain, as well as drawbacks that lead teachers to leave the CPS for another type of employment. It was not possible to clearly identify the reasons why teachers remain in CPS, but here are three possibilities according to interviews with POEsDOEs and teachers:

- Age and seniority in the profession: teachers might be too old to change to another occupation;
- Affiliation with the commune: teachers might be assigned to the post by the commune council because of family links in the village and there is no reason for them to move out of their commune of origin;
- Full occupation at CPS: when teachers are not fully satisfied with the salary or social recognition, they might quit their job. If they are well treated or their social status is positively viewed by the commune council or the parents, they feel more engaged and stay.

These reasons for retention depend on a teacher’s individual decision. The evaluation confirms that national and local decision-makers for early childhood have not created provisions and incentives to retain teachers. Teachers remain primarily because they like their job and have a personal interest: working with children and the salary compensation being the two main reasons.
3.4.4 Investment in CPS contribution to increase ECE for children unable to attend state preschools

Investment in CPS in UNICEF-supported communes was beneficial in terms of enrolment of children aged 3 to 5. The shift of UNICEF support to communes located in the six provinces from 2003 onwards enabled a steady increase of children in areas lacking state preschools. Overall, the LGCR programme has contributed to providing ECE to 9.36 per cent of total children aged 3 to 5 in the target commune villages.87

Commune council members face many challenges with regard to overseeing CPS functions, such as teacher recruitment and budget management, as well as understanding the possible resources for the next year. In some cases, budget management was effective, yet there was no clear vision of what the financial resources might be for the next year, making

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87 UNICEF Education Section, Stock Taking Matrix, 2015.
it difficult to have a long-term budget strategy. It appeared that the commune councils, CCWCs and the clerk had a very limited understanding of the Cambodian Government’s D&D framework as well as the UNICEF project, as previous evaluations confirmed.⁸⁸

Commune council members have been trained to run and manage CPSs, however, financial management is usually handled solely by the clerk so that the commune council has no idea of the commune’s budget process. Commune councils then have to make choices and define priorities for their commune with a limited budget. The newly released guidelines to help commune councils plan their budget in order to deliver social services is a timely and appropriate response.

One major result of the evaluation is that there are propitious conditions to foster ECE in communes where the village chief is strongly committed. The involvement of the village chief, along with other commune council and CCWC members, resulted in providing adequate premises, mobilizing citizens to repair the school where needed, recruiting quality teachers and anticipating their replacement, and raising interest of parents, including for those living in remote areas and those with children with disability. Such an environment motivated CPS teachers and more generally boosted the status given to CPS in the commune.

Conversely, there were situations in which CPS teachers did not feel supported by the commune councils and were even requested to give their time to communal affairs (e.g., helping the clerk), distracting them from preparing their classes. In the latter case, teachers expressed their desire to find another place to teach or to change jobs.⁹⁹

Local authorities’ positive attitude towards CPS is not always the direct result of UNICEF interventions, as UNICEF does not have regular relationships with chiefs of communes. However, local authorities all recognized the value of UNICEF support in terms of educational provisions (e.g., the annual pedagogical toolkit) and teacher training. They were less enthusiastic on the value of the support to manage the CPS and many did not even know about the guides and the work done by UNICEF with the POE and DOE.

### 3.5 Sustainability

This section identifies the bottlenecks to obtaining sustainability of CPS (in terms of human and material means). It explores the sense of ownership of the community and local authorities regarding the CPS modality and underlines whether there is a planned and effective strategy to ensure CPS sustainability.

The section addresses the following evaluation questions (12-16):

12. What are the key bottlenecks to obtaining sustainability of CPSs?
13. What are the possible solutions for CPS to be integrated and implemented under the full ownership of the Government, both financially and administratively?
14. To what extent has UNICEF support through communes enhanced sustainability of CPSs?
15. To what extent has UNICEF support been internalized and/or replicated by the Government to address needs in areas where UNICEF has not provided support?
16. What lessons can be learned from past experience to ensure full government ownership and funding in the continuation/discontinuation and/or expansion of the CPS modality?

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⁹⁹ Class observations enabled candid conversations with the teachers on their status and perception of their role in the commune. There is a clear correlation between the buy-in from local authorities, namely the chief of village and teachers’ involvement in their education responsibilities.
Summary of findings

The recognition of CPS as a regular model for ECCD is a major factor in ensuring the model’s sustainability. Despite UNICEF support, the issue of funding ECCD and CPS, the unstable context of D&D, the sharing of responsibilities between MOI and MOEYS, as well as the low level of parental engagement in CPS threaten sustainability. In case of UNICEF’s withdrawal, many commune councils would be unable to operate the CPS as they still need extra funding and technical assistance to operate social services delivery.

3.5.1 An official recognition of ECE and the CPS as a model among others for ECE delivery

As an introduction to the sustainability section, the evaluation recalls UNICEF’s steadfast support for CPSs (and home-based programmes) as a recognized model for delivering ECE services in Cambodia. Similarly, the constant advocacy for a holistic approach has resulted in the official commitment by MOEYS and partners. Early childhood thus became an intersectoral policy, which is quite rare in Cambodia, according to MOEYS officials. These are two major achievements that ensure the sustainability of the CPS model in terms of official recognition and ECE approach.

UNICEF support to MOI and MOEYS contributed to the recognition of CPS as a regular model for ECCD. Previous evaluations value the commitment of UNICEF to develop several ECE models, including lower-cost models like CPS, even in a context where the Government had not set ECE as a priority. UNICEF has been the main donor supporting the ECE Department. It helped the ECE Department develop the CPS model and funded teachers’ salaries, among other activities.

CPSs are stipulated in the National Strategic Plan 2003–2013 as well as the EFA National Plan. Meetings with secretaries of state and high ministerial officials at MOI and MOEYS confirmed the Government’s commitment to ensure robust legal foundations for CPS. Cambodian ministries, including MOI (which is not specialized in child-related affairs, but is in charge of the development and management of CPS), confirm UNICEF’s reputation and its recognized expertise in many child-related areas. The evaluation emphasizes the agility of UNICEF Cambodia to adapt its interventions (in the case of CPS, with the specific modality being evaluated) to the authorities responsible for ECCD. UNICEF has taken the specificities of the various ministries into account. To some extent, UNICEF has bridged these various ministerial actors, specifically MOI and MOEYS, in support of ECCD. This constant commitment has enabled CPS to become one pillar among four early childhood models in Cambodia.

Other actors are operating in ECCD within the country and a large number of NGOs operate at the field level and advocate ECCD to the ministries, along with UNICEF, thereby reinforcing UNICEF action. UNICEF’s strength is its wide geographical span (NGOs focus on a limited number of communities and CPS) and the ability to maintain a consistent position on ECCD, drawing upon its knowledge, understanding and expertise as well as other UN agencies.

90 The National Policy on ECDD, endorsed in 2010, designates MOEYS as the coordinating agency for policy and specifies the roles of and responsibilities for ECD across 11 ministries, parents and families, development partners and civil society.
3.5.2 The human and material means ensuring the CPS daily activities

The evaluation confirms that UNICEF support is an essential component of the monetary and material calculations for CPS according to the POE/DOE and commune council members (clerks in particular), especially for teachers’ salaries. Should UNICEF involvement be reduced, many of these actors fear that some CPSs would close, although all commune councils interviewed stated that efforts would be made to avoid such a scenario. According to MEF sources, one of the problems with decentralization is that commune council members do not often have the required skills to create and establish a budget. When they do, they are often times replaced after five years due to elections. Finding clerks with basic accounting skills is not easy in rural areas, which is why more technical training is needed by MOEYS.

According to MOEYS, decentralized technical support has improved. Yet there is a contradiction where, on the one hand, the legislative branch is pressured to give more responsibility to the communes with limited technical knowledge, while at the same time there is little and ineffective improvement in technical support to these communes. In the meantime, MOEYS has prepared a letter with MOI urging commune councils to allocate more budget to CPS and teachers’ salaries. After discussions with a full range of commune council members and clerks, this does not seem feasible in communities that already have limited resources. According to them, an increase in budget to be allotted to social services, and early childhood in particular, would necessarily imply more funds from the central administration and/from donors. As earlier mentioned, commune councils are lacking skills to request funds.

While MOEYS claims that some budget is allocated to CPS through technical support provided by the Department of Early Childhood, there is still no official national budget to support CPS. Communes receive money that is not specifically earmarked for CPS. The money received is usually divided by 80 per cent for infrastructure and 20 per cent for social affairs. CPS is included in the social affairs section and is therefore not a separate category. This can cause issues in terms of budget priorities for CPS, concerns that MEF pointed out by stating that primary, secondary and higher education were also priorities of the Government. With this amalgam of stakeholders, commune councils need to be able to arbitrate properly, though in most cases do not have the capacity or training to do so.

As analyzed earlier, commune councils are challenged to allocate a significant budget to social services, as the top priority from commune council members as well as from households relates to economics (infrastructure). In social services, education (with health) is ranked second priority after water and sanitation.

The National Action Plan aims to address budgeting and costing deficiencies across the 11 ministries involved in ECE and indicates that the Government would increase its support for ECCD in phases over the 2013–2015 period.

3.5.3 The community and local authorities’ sense of ownership regarding the CPS

Decentralization has generally increased ownership of CPS by commune councils, but contradictions arise in the process. According to MEF staff, the CPS budget formation structure is down-up: commune councils present a draft budget to MOI, which is then presented to MEF for approval. There is confusion in this process given that, while theoretically there is no national budget for CPS, MEF also allocates resources in terms of population size. This means that uniform criteria for budget exist at a central level. It remains unclear to what extent a commune can realistically receive funds based on their own budget proposal without

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92 UNICEF provides an additional US$12 per month for a salary of US$20-30 to CPS teachers.
93 Information as of 2015. The situation is changing fast in Cambodia, as high-level discussions are occurring on whether early childhood should be a mandatory function of the communes or not. Other discussions are taking place on a possible assignment of legal status to CPS.
heavy interference from ministries in the capital. As a result, commune council members feel that they have little responsibility regarding CPS funding.

The commune council planning and budget committee supports CPS funding and functioning. Visits to 101 CPSs showed that the committees’ strength and efficiency vary from commune to commune. Discussion with commune council members underlined that they have little knowledge of funding mechanisms. They do not see the POE and DOE as partners to assist them in monitoring the CPS. The guides designed with the help of UNICEF are unknown or not in use. Parents are not an influencing factor that could trigger committee activities. The study on commune planning and budgeting for social services indicates that planning and budgeting committees were relatively unknown, as only 20 per cent of households had ever heard of them. The parents are therefore unable to influence the commune councils in their investment on social services and on early childhood in particular. The study highlights that commune engagement with citizens and citizen involvement in budgeting processes are the two factors most likely to influence a commune’s expenditure on social services. It also underlines the instrumental role of social service mapping.94 While mapping was not used to its full extent to identify children with vulnerabilities, it helped households voice their concerns on social services. Few participated in the exercise (less than 20 per cent of households surveyed), but most recognized the value of participating and expressing their needs. Social service mapping is therefore a vehicle to encourage parental involvement and encourage exchange on their needs with regards to CPS.

The CPS modality lacks tools to assess cost effectiveness, while monitoring tools are at a nascent stage. Previous evaluations stated that costing of ECD interventions remains a knowledge gap.95 Monitoring and evaluation of CPS remains critical. The POEs/DOEs do not or cannot consider ECCD as a key sector in which to develop human capital. Supervisors at DOE are rarely conducted in CPS. They therefore cannot assist commune councils in improving the running of the CPS.

Promising avenues have recently emerged on the front of capacity development in Cambodia, specifically targeting several levels, including sub-national levels that could foster the running and monitoring of ECCD in Cambodia and CPS in particular. In 2011, UNICEF Cambodia launched the Capacity Development Partnership Fund (CDPF). CDPF is a multi-donor fund managed by UNICEF and financed by the EU.96 The principles are ownership, alignment, harmonization and simplicity. It aims to support capacity development at four levels: sector institutional level; central MOEYS (in planning and management processes for improved sector performance and system modernization); organizational capacities at provincial and district level for improved service delivery in line with the Government’s reforms in public finance management; and D&D and school management and education service delivery through increased community involvement and governance arrangements.97 Although CDPF does not focus on CPS specifically, there is clearly room to increase the management capacity of the POEs/DOEs and commune councils.

94 Social service mapping is an exercise conducted at the village level and led by commune councils and CCWCs. The maps attempt to identify the most vulnerable families in the commune, especially women and children, with indicators focusing on social sectors. This method can be implemented before or after a special programme to measure its relevance and efficiency. The technique has been implemented since 2009 by UNICEF Cambodia, employing the following process of analysis: Firstly, a geographical area (a city, town or neighbourhood) is delimited. Secondly, its social infrastructures and institutions have to be located. The indexes and variables have to be defined and their way of measurement have to be united and relevant. Then both quantitative – revenue of the households, level of education – and qualitative methods (interviews) are proceeded in order to have a better understanding of the neighbourhood, and more particularly its social difficulties (insecurity, lack of education, drug addiction). Then the results are mapped. This technique shows remarkable patters and phenomenon, for instance the areas and populations that most need a specific programme. See: http://www.unicef.org/cambodia/Report_Internal_Assessment_SSM.pdf
96 The fund is granted by the EU (€7,450,000), the Government of Sweden (SEK 21,000,000) and UNICEF (US$1,500,000).
97 Delegation of the European Union to Cambodia.
3.5.4 Parental implication is weak and sense of ownership is limited on CPS

Field visits at CPSs and class observations confirmed that parents were not fully engaged in the running of CPS. Despite increased awareness of the importance of ECE, as indicated earlier, parents have not been encouraged to be involved in CPS activities. By contrast, visits to NGO-supported preschools showed examples of parents creating or repairing playgrounds, preparing snacks to feed the children, assisting the teachers to decorate the classroom and even participating in certain courses on hygiene and nutrition. This was not the case on the sampling of CPSs visited by the evaluation team. The impact of UNICEF support on parental involvement has been practically non-existent. In 51 per cent of cases, parents were associated with some additional school activities (such as helping to prepare lunches). In 38 per cent of cases, parents have not helped or have hindered the early childhood care process by not taking their children to school regularly. UNICEF longer-term support has not led to a tangible increase in parental support to CPS.

Focus group discussions with parents underpinned difficulties in adjusting schedules to the CPS operating hours. Most CPS in UNICEF-supported communes open from 6:30 a.m. to 8 a.m. or 9 a.m. at the latest. The operating hours represent a small part of the day, leaving time for parents to take their children with them or send them to caregivers (generally relatives in the village) so they can go to work in the fields or at a factory. Sending children to CPS is not disruptive to their daily routine and teachers assume this has led parents to feel less implicated, as they do not need to re-organize their own schedule. During the data collection, the evaluation team visited CPS supported by other organizations that followed another model, which operated during the day. In these cases, the involvement of parents is more expected, as they would assist the teachers and help the CPS function all day (e.g., to prepare lunch, assist teachers in activities, look after children during the afternoon nap).

Commune councils and CCWCs also mentioned the lack of parental involvement and difficulty to find assistance in motivating parents.98 Focus group discussions with parents underlined that they had not been asked to provide assistance in any way so that they did not necessarily feel they had a role to play in the CPS system. There is clearly room to improve the parent-teacher interaction in CPS and improve the parental initiatives and buy-in. Triggering parental responsibility remains a challenge in Cambodia. For instance, the UNICEF-supported Parenting Support initiative encountered difficulties in positioning and implementation, as the role of the programme vis-à-vis other services and initiatives was unclear.99 As mentioned earlier, the irregular opening hours of some CPSs and the lack of communication to parents, especially those living far from the school, hinders the possibility for parents to be involved, as they do not consider the CPS as a functioning model.100 Previous evaluations confirm the CPSs “do not include specific mechanisms to engage parents and current training for CPS teachers may not adequately address the importance of parent engagement”.101

In addition, parents have few interactions with commune councils and do not feel fully engaged in communal policy matters. Most citizens, by extension including parents, are unable to share their concerns and needs with commune councils. A study indicates that approximately 44 per

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98 Interviews with NGOs like Save the Children, Enfants & Développement or Plan International indicated that commune councils are supported to set up parental committees associated with one CPS and living in the vicinity. Parents get specific training in their villages or in the premises of the CPS, on education, nutrition, health, hygiene and other issues that are taught at school to their own children.


100 Several testimonials from parents confirmed that an irregular opening time discouraged them from bringing their children to school early in the morning. Some were informed by neighbouring parents that the school had reopened, but with no guarantee that it would be functional the whole week. Other CPSs had been closed for months, then opened for a couple of weeks before closing down again. This made it hard for parents to engage in the daily life of CPS in the village.

cent of households in Cambodia knew about the commune councils’ roles and how to contact the commune council members.102

3.5.5 Planned and effective strategy to ensure CPS sustainability

Despite such achievements and official recognition of the importance of ECE by the Government, there is a shared belief that the current CPS model remains fragile.103 Not only is CPS a component of a large set of priorities among many within MOEYS, MOI and MEF, but resources are also still being diverted. For instance, the MEF has been focusing on repairs caused by floods as recently as 2014. Given that Cambodia aims to become a middle-income country, MOEYS’ main concern is that many of its donors and partners will reduce funding at the same time. There have already been reductions in some areas and the Government is attempting to have more ownership over programmes and budget. In 2013–2014, nearly 100,000 CPSs closed after the EU reduced their aid in Cambodia.104 All stakeholders are thus questioning the sustainability of CPS throughout Cambodia.

Commune councils recalled repeatedly that there are no earmarked funds for CPS and budgets depend on MOI allocation. The stocktaking report of EFA 2015 in Cambodia confirms, “Expansion of ECCD programmes has not yet been regarded as an investment priority despite the fact that it is the foundation for ensuring children enrol in subsequent educational grades”.105 In this respect, UNICEF’s commitment to contribute to a new programme formulation of the Global Partnership for Education to invest in ECE is worth mentioning.106

Whatever the outcome of talks between stakeholders on the future model of CPS, Cambodia’s complicated situation must be taken into account in order to assess what best guarantees quality and sustainable pre-primary education. NGOs are not necessarily the best at maintaining a permanent presence and this has affected many NGO-funded CPSs. On the other hand, CPS teachers in NGO-sponsored communes receive much higher salaries and retention rates drastically increase.

3.5.6 Ensuring mid- to long-term autonomy or independence in financial and administrative terms

UNICEF is concerned by the imbalanced expansion of CPSs across the country. MOI is in charge of the managerial aspects of CPS and how to best equip commune councils. The POEs and DOEs are in charge of instigating the development of CPSs by assisting commune councils and CCWCs. UNICEF accompanies the POEs and DOEs by offering adequate training plus teaching material and general expertise where needed. However, UNICEF lacks levers that would activate directly the capacity of commune councils to strengthen ECCD using the CPS model. Responsibility of setting up CPS lies first in the communes and depends on their will, possibility and financial capacity, which are specific to each of them. It is impossible for UNICEF to operate at the CPS level. It is challenging for UNICEF zone officers to provide steady assistance to all commune councils.

As CPSs are not up to the same quality as state preschools according to several studies (e.g., EFA National Review), UNICEF is exploring how to close that gap. The project CDPF, through local and international advisors, is supporting the mapping of the piloting process in Battambang Province where the delivery of CPS is being reviewed. Full devolution of power was piloted at the end of 2015 and a review of the Battambang pilot project is planned. MOI

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103 Interviews with representatives of ECE Department, MOI, UNICEF, POE, The World Bank, as well as three NGOs.
104 Testimonials from the EU Delegation in Cambodia, June 2015.
105 Education For All 2015 National Review.
106 UNICEF already contributed to raise funds for ECE by influencing the programme of the Fast Track Initiative (2007). The Global Partnership for Education grant allocated in 2013 of US$38 million should serve ECE for half.
and MOEYS will decide how many provinces will be running fully on their own and how fast they can actually go.

At the time of the evaluation, the evaluation team understood the following elements from interviews with ministerial officials, UNICEF staff and the POEs and DOEs:

- The commune councils are awarded an annual sum by MOI.
- The commune investment plan devotes 80 per cent to commune affairs and 20 per cent to social activities that include CPS.
- There is no earmarked budget for CPS – only for social activities, which include CPS.
- Fulfilling the needs of the population is the commune councils’ main concern and is reflected in decision-making. In the event of a catastrophe like flooding, the social budget is first mobilized to help the most deprived inhabitants at the expense of CPS.
- The commune investment plan stipulates expected funding and expected expenses. When the commune investment plan is enforced, commune councils complain that funds are unavailable. There are bottlenecks that no one is able or willing to identify.
- Few commune councils are able to submit a funding demand to the POE and DOE. Commune council members have little knowledge of the funding mechanisms and the POE and DOE lack the time to closely follow the commune councils. Some POEs and DOEs overlook this aspect of their responsibility that deals with budgetary mechanisms with which the staff is not always familiar.

The CPS model is not yet sustainable with regards to funding. Within a context of political tension due to the ongoing D&D process, it is not possible to have a clear understanding of MOI’s financial commitment to the commune councils. No evidence was found on the existence of an agreement like a memorandum of understanding between the commune councils for the funding and the POE/DOE for supervision.

As stated earlier, UNICEF zone officers are not expected to intervene at the commune council level, but focus at POE and DOE level. Their knowledge of the budget situation of each commune is therefore limited to information transmitted by provincial and district authorities, which is not always reliable, and the POE and DOE have no remediation tools to assist communes in leveraging funds. The evaluation team estimates that, of the sample 101 CPSs, 9 per cent of schools visited were no longer functioning. The reasons for closing were unknown by UNICEF. Interviews with commune council members and teachers who intervened in those schools reported that the lack of funding and the resignation of CPS teachers had been the causes of closing.

As of September 2015, major decisions were being prepared regarding the assignment of functions to local governments at district level. CPS will continue to be implemented by commune or sangkat councils. The Government seeks to make community preschooling a mandatory function, but CPS is not an official function under MOEYS, but under MOI. The MEF therefore cannot allocate an increased budget to MOEYS for a function that does not fall under its jurisdiction.

The final decision regarding the transfer of functions to district and municipality level has not yet been made. There is a tentative list of functions proposed for the transfer of all district education staff to work under the local governments at district and municipality levels. If adopted, a key change is that district and municipality governments can make autonomous decisions regarding teacher deployment within their jurisdictions and infrastructure

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107 A dozen cases of 101 CPSs showed lack of information on the situation of CPS within a commune. The field visit led to the discovery that some CPSs were not operating for months or had been closed by commune councils with no reporting to the POE and DOE.
development and maintenance. Education staff would report to the Board of Governors and will no longer be paid by MOEYS, but by the local government.108

Another concern for sustained funding of ECCD relates to the issue that the Cambodian Government does not seem to translate its priorities as featured in national strategies into real financial commitment. This limits the impact of UNICEF support.109 The Government's financial commitment to ECE continues to be very limited. In 2010, ECE received only 0.5 per cent of the MOEYS programme budget. However, there are signs that the Government will invest more in ECCD as the percentage share quickly rose to 0.58 in 2011 to an all-time high of 0.80 per cent in 2012.110

3.5.7 Income-generating activities that cover CPS expenditures

There is no evidence that commune councils have developed income-generation activities for CPS. No micro-credit systems or rice banks exist like in other areas where NGOs support commune councils in expanding the income sources. The community is neither systematically solicited. For instance, pagodas plays a limited role while in other areas they financially contribute to the running of CPS. In the case of the evaluation, pagodas occasionally provide the premises, but CPS cannot operate when religious events occur.111

The CPS modality has not explored alternative funding models with commune councils. There was no evidence on any reflexion on external funding of CPS either at MOI or at POE and DOE levels.

3.5.8 Replication of UNICEF CPS modality of support, formalization and sharing

The major achievements of the UNICEF modality are the increased capacity of commune councils to identify the educational needs for small children and the emergence of a new set of data, when aggregated at district and province levels.

Social service mapping is key and likely to be expanded across the country as an appropriate identification tool. Further research should explore why such mapping has not been systematically used across communes on a regular basis in order to update data on specific populations, particularly the most vulnerable children. Likewise, there is no resource mapping that would allow local decision-makers to set priorities among social activities according to the allocation of budget. Discussions with chiefs of villages and clerks showed the discrepancy between the diagnoses that the commune council members were able to conduct thanks to social service mapping and local officials' inability to set up priorities when it came to funding.

No evidence was found at the field level on the use of a standard monitoring tool that would help commune councils run an effective CPS that functions on a regular basis: steady funding, recruitment and training of teachers, parental and community implication.

In terms of guidelines, there are guides on specific aspects of ECE (like teachers’ guides),112 but not a comprehensive guide that would comprise all aspects of a well-functioning CPS.

108 Technical assistance to MOI, supplementary interview, September 2015.
110 Education For All 2015 National Review.
111 The pagoda ensures the role of a public space where the people can meet and talk, possibly with the intermediary of a monk. It is a place of sociability, where celebrations and feasts take place. It is a place of education, where boys receive their primary education. This institution also has a goal of social protection, as it hosts vulnerable populations, such as travellers, orphans, the sick, and the mentally disabled. The pagoda further plays a role of social redistribution: for prestige, wealthy Cambodians traditionally give money to monks in the pagoda and their names are featured on the walls of the temple. With this money, the Buddhist monks are able to ensure their social activities, creating a parallel system and network of social interactions and organizations to the NGO system. Guillou, Anne Yvonne, ‘Ethnicité et bouddhisme au Cambodge’, Les Cahiers du Ceriem, Centre d’Etudes et de Recherches sur les Relations Interethniques et les Minorités, pp. 9-17, 2002.
There are no guidelines on the recruitment of teachers and the management of a teaching career for CPS. National curriculum for teacher training does not include CPS specificities.

There are, however, toolkits for pedagogy and teaching material that are appreciated by teachers. The tools are the direct result of UNICEF support to CPS, but are not yet fully embedded by Cambodian counterparts, particularly at POE and DOE levels. There is no platform where the tools can be posted, enriched and disseminated. There is a national resource centre on early childhood, hosted at Krousar Youeng headquarters and at the National Institute for Teachers Training in Phnom Penh, but underutilized by ECCD actors. UNICEF does not cooperate with the centre. UNICEF has made major improvements in internally capitalizing on lessons learned since the start of CPS support. There is, nevertheless, limited sharing of such information with Cambodian partners and there are thus opportunities to cross-fertilize UNICEF support to CPS with other children-centred initiatives.

National data are collected on enrolment, attendance and dropout. The POEs and DOEs, however, do not consider the data collection system robust as data are based on declarations by school directors (when CPS share premises with primary schools) and commune councils via the clerk. The evaluation pinpointed the unreliability of data: there is no data transcript when a CPS closes down or stops functioning. Aggregated data at district level include CPSs that have not been operating for months and for years, in some cases.

As CPS are not directly supervised by MOEYS, there is no incentive to expand the evaluation system when it comes to assessing the impact of government funds. UNICEF support or other external support. MOI has no performance monitoring tools for governing and managing commune councils. Likewise, MOI has no expertise on pedagogy so there is no incentive to improve the monitoring and evaluation tools that could capture the changes in and improvements to teaching and learning at CPS. UNICEF is not using nor has developed any evaluation tools on children’s progress. Such tests exist in other areas that have been designed by NGOs and bilateral donors.

This lack of monitoring and evaluation tools hinders the Government from ensuring a seamless D&D and effective use of funds. In addition, reliable feedback on teaching and learning performance is not possible. It is impossible to compare advantages of ECCD models at the national level. Likewise, results-based management and planning for ECD is inhibited by the absence of comprehensive indicators for ECD and incomplete monitoring of programme-specific results, as the evaluation of 2010 on UNICEF’s ECD programme underlines.

The UNICEF Annual Report 2011 states, “MOEYS has a comprehensive Education Management Information System (EMIS) in place, but available data should be used more effectively. Reliable statistics on ECE, children with disabilities and children from ethnic minorities are lacking”. The UNICEF Country Programme Midterm Review highlights the following, directly related to data: “Inconsistencies in population estimates; discrepancies between enrolment as reported by the EMIS and actual attendance reported by all other data sources; discrepancies in rural and urban enrolment because EMIS does not include the private school population, neither it includes CPS and home-based programme data”.

There is, however, notable recent progress. MOEYS finalized the Monitoring Framework in 2015 and has just started regular monitoring and data collection based on it. Monitoring forms for CPSs are now incorporated to set a minimum quality standard and monitoring. At the time of the present evaluation, data were not available. It is worth noting that the current regulatory

113 Evaluation of Center on ECCD, 2014, not published, Enfants & Développement.
115 Based on testimonials from the POEs and DOEs met during the field visit and backed by evaluations such as UNICEF, ‘Evaluation of UNICEF’s ECD Programme with Focus on the Government of Netherlands Funding (2008-2010)’, 2011.
116 E.g., Plan International, Save the Children, United States Agency for International Development.
framework still does not allow for MOEYS to allocate priority-based budget for CPS monitoring due to absence of the necessary legal certification (the CPS is not a legal entity so far). Practically, current monitoring of CPSs is dependent on external resources such as Global Partnership for Education, UNICEF and NGOs. MOEYS is currently consolidating the collected data in a database. In addition, an ECE subsector coordination system was only initiated in 2015, meaning MOEYS has only recently begun jointly reflecting on the policy-level priority agenda and monitoring progress.118

Regarding the monitoring of UNICEF activities at upstream level, the evaluation of UNICEF’s upstream work in education in 2014 underlined the absence of an explicit monitoring and evaluation framework for systematically measuring the impacts of upstream work.119 The present evaluation met the same difficulty and obtaining results on performance indicators have been challenging to assess, if not impossible.

3.6 Impacts

This section seeks evidence of the contribution of CPS to the better quality of life of children and their families. It also seeks to explore the improvement in social delivery by communes.

The section addresses the following evaluation questions (17-18):

17. Is there evidence of the extent to which CPS may have contributed to a better quality of life of children and their families?

18. Has UNICEF provided support to CPS in the context of strengthening local administration capacity for social service delivery for children, had any impact on the actual social delivery in terms of budgets and implementation of commune-led social service initiatives?

Summary of findings

The evaluation has found little evidence of impact of CPS on children. The most robust evidence collected shows that overall, children progressed on educational and social skills. The absence of children’s performance tests prevents Cambodian authorities and UNICEF from having a more precise and reliable picture of the impact of UNICEF support and country engagement in ECCD and CPS in particular. Likewise, UNICEF’s additional social support to communes is quite recent and has not yet yielded increased capacity of commune councils to deliver social services, such as education provisions, maternity services and health protection information more efficiently.

3.6.1 Evidence that CPS contributed to a better quality life for children

There is little evidence available on impact of CPS on children. Former evaluation reports and research gather an array of assumptions.120 This section of the evaluation focuses on evidence associated with impacts, as a result of the scoring matrix. That matrix was designed by the evaluation team to compensate for the lack of available evidence. The scoring matrix gave a score to some types of impacts identified with the teachers and the parents during the focus groups. The evaluation team asked informants to provide at least two pieces of evidence per scoring to ensure a good level of reliability. The results are presented in the table below. The left column indicates the type of impact. The middle column indicates the information on impact based on evidence collected during site visits. The right column rates the robustness of the evidence collected. In case of middle or low evidence, the information on impact should rather be considered as an assumption. All information is based on the sample of 101 CPSs.

118 UNICEF, Education Section, December 2015.
120 UNICEF, ‘Evaluation of UNICEF’s ECD Programme with a Focus on Government of Netherlands Funding (2008-2010)’, 2011: UNICEF has supported multiple studies related to outcomes for children who participated in ECE programmes. Although this research does not provide conclusive evidence of the effects of preschool services, the findings generally reinforce the notion that CPS models are beneficial to children.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of impact</th>
<th>Evidence-based information</th>
<th>Robustness of evidence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children are literate and have better specific educational skills</strong></td>
<td>At all CPS visited, children know how to count, recognize shapes and colours, and can sing educational songs.</td>
<td>High: Scoring matrix based on focus group discussions with teachers and parents</td>
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<td></td>
<td>In almost half of the schools, 90 per cent of the five year olds examined are literate and have educational and social skills.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The impact of UNICEF support on transitioning to primary school is successful. In 39 per cent of cases, most children in the CPS developed the required skills to enter primary school and performed better than those without ECE. In addition, another 38 per cent of schools showed that the CPS helped children develop the required skills to enter primary school. Only in 14 per cent of cases was transition to primary school minimal or non-existent.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Long-term support has led to significant improvements in the transition to primary school. There has been a 45 per cent increase in the number of CPSs where most children develop the required skills and performance to enter primary school.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Long-term support has led to slight improvements in school readiness, albeit limited.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Children have better social skills</strong></td>
<td>In all cases of CPSs visited, children were considered respectful and polite.</td>
<td>High: Testimonials from CPS teachers triangulated with focus group discussions with parents, including parents whose children do not go to CPS or who went but no longer go due to closing of CPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents are acutely aware of their children’s improved capacities and progress</strong></td>
<td>Parents see a change in their children’s social attitudes. They are unfamiliar with the educational progress and do not have the capacity to compare when their children enter primary school. They do not have an assessment grid to position their children on a success scale.</td>
<td>High: Testimonials from parents, scoring matrix, interviews with primary teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parents of vulnerable and/or children with disability are aware of the possibilities of rehabilitation and schooling adapted to their needs</strong></td>
<td>Vulnerable children, especially those in remote areas, have more difficulty accessing CPS. CPS teachers take care of children with disability even though they have not been specifically trained to do so. Inclusive education is non-existent in the CPSs visited. Testimonials showed that children with disability are not sent to schools by parents, who are unaware of the opportunity to develop their children’s social and educational skills at CPSs.</td>
<td>Medium: Interviews with parents in remote areas, limited possibility to interview parents with children with disability</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers’ motivation to learn</strong></td>
<td>The impact of UNICEF support has been mixed in terms of teachers’ motivation and ability to inspire children. On the one hand, 31 per cent of teachers were somewhat motivated. 43 per cent of teachers tried to inspire children to be interested in learning. In nearly 10 per cent of cases, teachers were using innovative ways to inspire children, and in such cases children</td>
<td>Low: Class observations, self-declaration of teachers, difficulty of parents to assess the motivation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation of Community Preschool Modality in Cambodia</td>
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<td>are motivated to learn. However, 13 per cent of teachers were not motivated and passed this sentiment on to the children.</td>
<td>degree of teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Children participate in other social activities</strong></td>
<td>Where available, children were keen to participate in social activities. This is, however, not systematic and participation depends on teachers’ capacity to propose a variety of teaching sessions.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Children have learned good hygiene and nutritional practices. Children/parents adhere to the benefits of better nutrition</strong></td>
<td>32 per cent of children have learned and apply personal care and hygiene skills, with an additional 9 per cent learning, applying and receiving supplies and regular examinations. In the worst-case scenario, 9 per cent of children have no healthy or good nutritional practices.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Long-term support by UNICEF has improved CPSs’ health capacity.</td>
<td>Teachers do their best, but there is limited evidence on their proficiency in nutrition.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents confirm that the children convey the new messages at home on hygiene and nutrition.</td>
<td>The learning environment is not safe enough and prevents greater learning about hygiene.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>High</strong>: Scoring matrix, class observations, interviews with POEs/DOEs, CPS teachers and parents, earlier evaluation reports</td>
<td><strong>Medium</strong>: Class observation, interviews with CPS teachers</td>
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</table>

Source: Learning Avenue

**Evidence on improvement of social service delivery**

The communes getting UNICEF extra support spend nearly three times as much on social services as a proportion of their budget, compared to other communes. Despite this huge difference, there is limited evidence that the support has increased the capacity of commune councils to provide quality social services (such as education provisions, maternity services, health protection information). There is no proven correlation that extra support has resulted in increased effectiveness of the social services. The volume of social services has progressed in UNICEF-supported communes but their quality remains questionable.
Commune councils’ awareness regarding CPS has increased and is now recognized as a regular activity falling under the 20 per cent budget allotted to social affairs. This is a considerable change compared to the situation 10 years ago\textsuperscript{123} whereby communes did not pay attention to early childhood.

\textsuperscript{123} Testimonials converge from all CPS visited, especially the ones with some seniority on CPS management. Commune councils and CCWCs are more acquainted with early childhood in 2015 than in 2003 when the UNICEF-supported CPS modality started.
4. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

It is important to reiterate that these conclusions, and the following lessons learned, are based exclusively on the findings from the CPS examined in this evaluation and should not be automatically applied to other national contexts.

There are positive signals emerging from the evaluation of the CPS modality in Cambodia. Overall, efforts put into CPS by both the Government and UNICEF have been worthwhile, as this has resulted in consolidating the ECCD agenda in Cambodia. Legislation on early childhood is being designed and implemented.

The CPS modality (i.e., assisting commune councils in the programming of policies and initiatives on CPS) is in line with the national framework put in place. The communes are now strongly aware and supportive of ECCD, which was not the case in earlier years although many communes are hesitant to give higher priority (and financial resources) to social services and within these, to education.

However, considerable challenges remain with regard to CPS implementation, as listed below:

- The intermediate level (i.e., de-concentrated levels of MOEYS as POEs/DOEs) is not fully engaged.
- The D&D process is not yet stabilized and blurs the commune’s responsibilities in social services (that include early childhood).
- The communes lack the skills and especially the budget to independently manage the CPS.
- The teacher training remains too short and superficial.
- The two-hour span of operation of CPS (6:30 a.m. – approx. 9 a.m.) makes it difficult for teachers to build effective ECCD pedagogies.

Above all, a gap remains between management support at communal level and the tangible implementation of ECCD, especially in terms of the holistic approach that should prevail in early childhood (including education, health, hygiene and nutrition). The communes have difficulties using the existing management guides supported by UNICEF and lack needed support and regular monitoring on how to implement the CPS.

The teachers’ ability to teach the ECCD approach is not sufficient. The effectiveness of the CPS model is most closely linked to the teachers’ ability (supposed to be gained through appropriate training). Reality showed that teachers were not sufficiently trained. Most work in isolation from one another and do not have opportunities to network to allow for cross-fertilization of experiences.

Parents, although in general supportive of CPS, are mostly absent from CPS implementation and support and there is no community being formed around CPSs.

Feedback, monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, and children’s performance remain loose. This makes it difficult for POEs and DOEs and UNICEF to track results and impossible to learn about the impact of CPSs on the children.

In other words, although results in terms of policy structure and specific tangible outcomes, such as training guides and curriculum, have been achieved, implementation on the ground remains hampered. In fact, there is no particular incentive nor regular monitoring provided that would make CPS more operational.
This leads to **questioning the sustainability of the CPS model** that essentially depends on the communes to function. While the ‘upstream work’ may be functional in many instances (i.e., at ministerial level), it lacks the support and much-needed motivation from a ‘midstream’ level (i.e., at the level of the POE/DOE and at the level of the communes that manage CPSs).

A number of lessons were learned by the implementation of the CPS programme and will form the basis of the recommendations. The following are the main lessons identified by the evaluation team:  

- **Assigning responsibilities:** The chain of roles and responsibilities from the national level, via the mid-level, through to the communal level needs to be clearly defined and operational for the CPS modality to be functional. Otherwise, the CPS may be well designed, but implementation is too dependent on the community level and without sufficient technical support and feedback or monitoring loops allowing for adjustments and improvements. The capacity of the communes makes the CPS model operational. This presupposes that they have the necessary knowledge, skills and financial capacity to implement (which may not be the case). Therefore, capacity building for members of local decision-making or advisory bodies within the communes should be a priority.

- **Roles of parents and communities:** Parent and community involvement is essential for lobbying and putting pressure on local authorities to place early childhood at the centre of social policies. Therefore, support to engagement of parents and community members is likely to help commune councils better consider CPS in their policies.

- **Teacher support system:** In order to avoid isolation of CPS teachers, mentoring, in-service training and network support should be encouraged beyond occasional trainings. This will foster a sense of community and improve cross-sharing and cross-fertilization of good practices.

- **Children’s results assessment:** The assessment of preschool children’s results offers precious feedback for POEs and DOEs as well as UNICEF. A robust tool, easily manageable by teachers and under the supervision of POEs and DOEs, is necessary to measure children’s results. The holistic approach of early childhood (i.e., education, health, hygiene and nutrition) requires the measurement of these multiple, interconnected aspects.

- **Holistic approach to ECD:** Following a holistic approach, considering that education, health, hygiene and nutrition are key levers for successful development of children aged 3 to 5, is the ideal model for ECD.

- **Monitoring systems:** It is worthwhile considering a monitoring assistance system managed by POEs and DOEs, which are more operational on the ground, as well as by commune councils and NGOs operating in early childhood. Providing guidelines to commune councils is not sufficient as commune members are new in the decision-making process and early childhood is not yet a priority in all communes.

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124 It should be recalled here that gender, human rights and equity were considered ‘add-on’ topics to that evaluation. There was no possibility for the evaluation team to draw lessons learned at as much depth as would have been ideal.
5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are derived from the evaluative analysis based on the results of the site visits, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and scoring matrix and two validation sessions with UNICEF and MOI and MOEYS representatives.

The recommendations target three different types of stakeholders. Firstly, MOEYS, associated government authorities involved in CPS and those who benefit from the CPS modality. In addition, the evaluations should serve the countrywide strategy for early childhood care.

Secondly, the evaluation recommendations are geared towards UNICEF and its programmes that are greatly involved in early childhood care development in Cambodia, including CPS; UNICEF Country Office in Phnom Penh; and UNICEF zone officers who operate in the field.

Thirdly, NGOs, donors and other organizations playing an increasing role in early childhood care in Cambodia will also benefit from this evaluation and its recommendations.

The main recommendation relates to the integration of CPS into a wider discussion of the effectiveness of UNICEF support to make change happen in ECCD on the ground, i.e., to improve the quality of ECE for all children, irrespective of their socio-economic conditions and locations.

The evaluation recommends three main tracks of improvement:

1. **Involve high-level authorities** to strengthen implementation of the ECCD National Action, embedding cross-sectoral programming and developing a sustainable services and funding model for ECD.

2. **Monitor and support commune councils** in the process of implementing D&D reforms and assist UNICEF to better target interventions.

3. **Explore field intervention and pilot-effective CPS in the most disadvantaged areas** by refocusing on a limited number of CPS so as to better reach the most vulnerable children, including children with disability, along with UNICEF’s mandate.

Below are the operational recommendations and likely timelines to ensure an effective sequence of their implementation. Three periods are considered: 2016 (immediate implementation), 2016–2018 (midterm implementation) and 2016–2020 (such recommendations might require more time to be implemented, as more complex). There is a need to start in 2016 and terminate before 2020 to raise the effectiveness and ensure the sustainability of CPS.

There is no specific recommendation on gender issues, human rights or equity. The main focus of the evaluation was the results of the CPS programme and how it benefits the main stakeholders: children. Gender analytical frameworks could certainly be applied with children, but the difficulty of collecting reliable quantitative indicators (neither from UNICEF nor the communes) on exact enrolment data and gender-specific data made it impossible to assess. As a consequence, there are no specific recommendations on that front.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Involve high-level authorities – Recommendations:</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>UNICEF:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>o Education section within the Country Office should support MOEYS to provide technical assistance to the POEs and DOEs to improve professional qualifications of teachers, embedding cross-sectoral programming and financial and human resources for CPS to provide sustainable early education services to children (2016–2020).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MOI, MOEYS and MEF:
- Should allocate earmarked funding or identify options for sub-national expenditure related to CPS and should ensure that a legal framework is in place between MOI and MOEYS to clarify CPS roles and responsibilities in the context of D&D at the national and sub-national levels (2016–2018).

2. Monitor and support the commune councils – Recommendations:

UNICEF:
- Education section, alongside the LGCR/Community Development section of the Country Office, should support MOI and MOEYS to adapt existing guidelines in a way that they are clearer, thorough and easily comprehensible for local decision-makers (commune councils and CCWCs) on how to set up a CPS and promote a holistic approach to child development (2016–2018).
- Education section should support MOEYS to design and use a child performance evaluation tool that measures and documents the impacts of ECCD on children (2016–2018).
- Should conduct a stand-alone evaluation of UNICEF’s upstream and midstream work in Cambodia, especially in terms of relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of support at all government levels (ministerial, provincial, district and commune) (2016–2018).

MOEYS:
- Should design a comprehensive CPS teacher training framework encompassing career progression, quality standards, teacher training plans and integrating earlier achievements (2016–2020).
- Should strengthen capacities of POEs and DOEs to supervise CPS and assist commune councils (i.e., funding, programming) in the context of the D&D process (2016–2020).
- Should integrate CPS into the national Education Management Information System (EMIS) to track progress on a regular basis (2016–2018).

3. Explore field-level intervention and pilot-effective CPS in the most disadvantaged areas – Recommendations:

UNICEF:
- Education and LGCR/Community Development sections should assist MOI, MOEYS and MEF to design a local, multi-partnership CPS model, drawing upon the success factors of the CPS modality (i.e., parental support, commune council engagement, quality teaching material and trained CPS teachers) and cross-fertilizing with other stakeholders’ experience in inclusive education (2016–2018).

MOI, MOEYS and MEF:
- Should clearly budget expansion of the pilot model experience to multiple deprived areas (2016–2020).