



**PLAN**  
INTERNATIONAL

Improving the  
quality of  
education for  
rural  
communities in  
Cambodia



## Project summary

Ratanakiri province, where this project takes place, is in remote north-eastern Cambodia and has among the worst education indicators in the country. Attendance rates for primary and lower secondary school lag far behind the national rates. With your support we are **improving children's access to quality lower secondary education** in the province through **construction, teacher training and community and local government engagement**. Through this project we intended to improve access to quality lower secondary education for 675 children. Over 1,500 primary school-aged children will also benefit from school improvements and better trained teachers as a result of this co-funded project.

The overall project is being delivered from October 2014 – September 2016, with the Commission kindly funding activities from January 2015 to March 2016 (a one year grant, with a three month no-cost extension approved on the Commission's set of activities). Specifically, the Commission's funding has supported school construction at one lower secondary school, and school improvement works and training across a further eleven primary schools in the province.

**While the overall project has not been completed, I'm delighted to report that the Commission's activities have been successfully delivered in full and have already benefited over 800 children – an incredible achievement and an increase on our original target of 675 boys and girls.**

Thanks to your support, these children are now learning in a safe and engaging school environment, taught by trained teachers who better understand how to respond to their needs and deliver interactive, quality lessons. The health and hygiene of the children has also been improved through the provision of sanitary facilities and training on good hygiene practices.

## Project aims

Over the course of two years, and working in partnership with another funder, this project is:

- **Improving school and WASH infrastructure** through the construction of a new lower secondary school, a library, latrines, water points and recreational spaces;
- **Strengthening the capacity of primary and lower secondary school teachers** (including head teachers), and staff from the local education authorities to **increase the effectiveness and quality of their teaching**;
- **Increasing awareness** amongst parents and children **on the importance of education**;
- Training School Support Committees (SSC) and Children Councils (CC) to **improve school governance and encourage children's participation** in decision-making that affects them directly.

## Project impact

- **Teachers using improved teaching methods:** teaching methods have become more student-centric and they have been putting into practice new ideas learned such as creating simple teaching aids from locally sourced material.
- **Construction of the new lower secondary school** with a library building, latrine and well has been completed.
- **Delivered hygiene and sanitation training to over 800 students** to encourage more positive hygiene practices and behaviour in hand washing, drinking with safe water, and correct toilet use.

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- **Built the capacity of School Support Committees (SSC) and Children Councils (CC) members** to improve school governance and raise awareness of the importance of education for children.

## Project activities

### Project start-up activities:

We began by introducing the project to the community as well as conducting other essential project start-up activities such as clearing the proposed site for construction work (which included checking for unexploded landmines). To support the construction and rehabilitation work, a school construction committee was formed and trained on their roles and responsibilities for this project. They were also trained by Plan International Cambodia's engineer on how to monitor the progress of the construction work.

**Plan International knows that to ensure we create a long term change for children, it is vital to get the start-up of any project right. Investing time in building good relationships with communities and government officials at the beginning of a project encourages its sustainability and means that generations of children can continue to benefit in years to come.**

### Lower secondary school construction:

With work closely monitored by the school construction committee (as well as with support from Plan International Cambodia's engineer and SSC members), the **construction of one six-classroom lower secondary school (LSS) building, as well as the six-block latrine and school well, was completed to schedule.** The school building was also equipped with appropriate furniture, whiteboards and a school gate. We're extremely happy to report that the school inauguration ceremony to officially handover the **newly constructed lower secondary school building to the government** has also been carried out (in September 2015).



Members of the school construction committee monitoring the construction of the school and library

The new school has been provided with a **new two-room library building.** The construction of this was also closely monitored and followed up by the SSC and construction committee. The library has been equipped with furniture such as a reading table, cabinets, shelves and chairs. In close collaboration with the Department of Education (DoE), suitable reading books e.g. story books, textbooks and dictionaries, for the library have also been purchased.

### Primary schools' improvement works:

The eleven targeted primary schools in Kachoun, Koh Peak and Koh Pang communes have also been **improving their school gardens.** Plant beds were designed into fun shapes, and posters and slogans about child rights and child participation have been put up. With support from the District Office of Education, Youth and Sport (DoEYS), vegetable seeds have also been provided to the students for them to use in their school gardens.

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As planned for this project, the primary schools were to receive funding to have appropriate and safe recreational areas established for the children attending each school. In all, ten spaces have been prepared (with the eleventh to be ready in the coming months), ready for the installation of playground equipment before the end of the project. The SSC, as well as the students themselves, played an important role in the planning, design and building of the recreational areas. We envisage the completed recreational areas will be able to **offer children new spaces to have fun, build friendships and encourage children to attend school regularly.**



Vegetable garden at Kachoun Kraom primary school

In addition, the primary schools have also had their **reading spaces improved**: six schools had new reading centres set up within existing rooms, two schools had existing reading centres renovated, and three schools were provided with additional shelves and books to boost what they already had in place.

## Water, sanitation and hygiene activities:

**A preliminary water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) needs assessment** of the eleven targeted primary schools revealed that two schools had neither school latrines nor wells meaning children either having to go home to use the toilet, or were defecating in the open. Of the remaining nine schools, all have latrines in good working condition but one of the school's wells needs to be rehabilitated. At the time of sending this report, WASH rehabilitation work is still ongoing due to an initial delayed start due to last year's rainy season. However, please note these activities are being supported by the project's co-funder and the Commission's funding and activities are unaffected.



Girls taking part in a handwashing demonstration during Hygiene and Sanitation training

We have successfully **delivered the planned hygiene and sanitation training.**

In collaboration with the Provincial Department of Rural and Development, the first hygiene and sanitation training session was delivered in June 2015 to 713 students (362 girls) from our 12 targeted schools, to encourage more positive hygiene practices and behaviour. Further training was delivered in December 2015 and January 2016 to a total of 880 students (407 girls) taking part – for some students this was a refresher training. The topics covered included hand washing, safe drinking water, and hygienic toilet use.

Even after just one training session, we saw an **improvement in children's WASH knowledge**: at the end of the training, 67% of participants reported being aware of how to use toilets in the correct way, how to ensure water is safe to drink, and how to prevent illness through regular handwashing before eating. Prior to this session, only 30% of children reported knowing what to do – a significant increase.

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## Teacher training and improving the learning environment:

The needs assessment we conducted during the first six months of the project showed that **95% of the primary school teachers we tested needed refresher training on child-friendly school methodologies**. To date, two trainings on teaching methodologies have been developed and delivered by Provincial Office of Education, Youth and Sport (PoEYS) staff. A total of 75 participants (39% female) – **150% of our overall project target** – took part and included teachers from the 11 primary schools we're targeting through this project, as well as those who will teach in the newly constructed lower secondary school.



Training participants are developing teaching material by using locally sourced materials

Through this training, participants were able to strengthen their knowledge on different teaching methodologies, they learned games to encourage study, how to be more inclusive in their teaching, how to develop teaching materials using locally sourced materials and how to effectively plan lessons. In order to assess the impact of the training, we conducted pre- and post-training assessments of the training participants. We saw **increases in knowledge at every level**:

Knowledge of child-friendly teaching methodologies	Before training	After training
Low	58%	0%
Medium	29%	26%
Good	13%	48%
Very Good	0%	26%

Quarterly technical meetings for the teachers were planned as part of this project. Of the six meetings we should have held by this point of the project, we've held five so far but are expecting to meet our target by project end. These meetings are being supported by the project's co-funder. These meetings **are a forum for teachers to share individual learning and troubleshoot problems together**. Teachers provide each other with peer-to-peer support, as well as share techniques and experiences to improve each other's quality of teaching. Examples of issues and solutions discussed included overcoming challenges faced in managing overcrowded classrooms (by seating the children in a circle so all feel included); as well as trying to overcome language barriers faced by new teachers in particular, who may be unfamiliar with local, ethnic minority languages (by using more creative teaching practices such as use of pictures and other visual aids to complement verbal teaching).

**"I have learnt and practised many methodologies from the facilitators such as working groups, [how to] develop simple teaching materials, develop an effective lesson plan, participatory teaching and learning. I have created my personal [teaching] plan which has included all the methodologies I have learnt. It is very useful for my teaching especially teaching students from different levels and ethnic groups, where I have to use more materials in order to get them to understand better."** Mr Reth, LSS teacher

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## Improving school governance:

The eleven primary schools targeted through this project already had existing School Support Committees (SSCs) and Children's Councils (CCs) and so Plan's role through this project has been to **re-invigorate them and build their capacity by providing training on their roles and responsibilities**. The CC members are being supported and guided by Plan staff, and the SSC members have, to date, received two trainings facilitated by DoEYS staff. In all, 55 SSC members (22 women) attended the first training session and 56 members (13 women) attended the second. They have been **trained on their roles and responsibilities to strengthen their skills and capacity to play a more active role in schools and their local communities**. The content of the training followed the national SSC guidelines set out by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS). As for the teacher training, pre- and post-tests were conducted to assess the impact. The table below shows the results after the first training and we see here also that even just one relatively short training period has contribute greatly to improving members' understanding of their roles after the training:

Knowledge SSC roles and responsibilities	Before training	After training
Low	50%	10%
Medium	25%	5%
Good	25%	85%

School Support Committees (SSCs) and Children Councils (CCs) also conducted **eight meetings to discuss issues and solutions related to school discipline, the school environment, school property, school dropouts, children who leave the village to help families during busy farming periods, and low levels of community participation**. For example, commune council members or village chiefs have been asked to talk to parents whose children have dropped out of school to encourage them to return; another example is the efforts made to reduce student absenteeism during harvesting periods by trying to explaining to parents the value and importance of educating their children.



SSC members discussing the final evaluation of the school and library construction work

After each meeting, any issues that require commune council and/or local authority support are reported to them. The SSC and CC members will then follow up on the actions taken by the commune council in a future meeting.

**It is through enforcement mechanisms such as these that members of SSCs and CCs can hold teachers, and other relevant stakeholders, more accountable and ensure that duty bearers meet their obligations to the community, and more importantly, to the children.**

## Parent and community sensitisation on the rights of children to education and the importance of girls' education:

The school mapping exercise was conducted during the first six months of the project across the 11 primary schools in the project area. The exercise involved drawing out what looks like a road map,

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showing where school-aged children live, their family situation (e.g. income level of the family), and distance of their home from school. In this week-long exercise, teachers, head teachers and SSCs worked together to identify students from poor families, students struggling to keep up in school, and school drop-outs (and also those at high risk of dropping out from school). This information has been used to help plan project activities, ensuring they **meet the specific needs of the children, as well as helped us to identify individual students who need closer monitoring** and follow-up.

School enrolment campaigns were conducted across three schools (not all project schools as this work was already being done by the Department of Education (DoE). In coordination with the DoE, school principals and teachers, students, parents and members of the wider community participated in these campaigns. The **purpose of the campaigns was to raise awareness of the local education services available, as well as encourage parents and caregivers to enrol their children for the new academic year.**

A 'Learn without Fear' campaign was also held in February 2016 – which covered all eleven primary schools. The **campaign focused on raising awareness of the three forms of violence most commonly faced by children in schools:** sexual violence, bullying and corporal punishment. A representative from the DoE was a guest speaker at the event and stressed the importance of children's education, the importance of regular teacher attendance and how children's rights to education and protection should be met within safe and protective environments.

## Monitoring and evaluation

Plan Cambodia and the school construction monitoring committee closely monitored construction activities and ensured that all plans were delivered as intended. The wider community have also been kept involved and even moved to contribute their own time and resources to help build the school fence around the new school building.

The project team continuously gather information to measure against the key indicators we have developed to review the project's impact. Findings from the school mapping exercise in particular have also been invaluable in helping to inform the work of this project.

Representatives from the District office of Education, Youth and Sport (DoEYS) also visited the 11 primary schools targeted for this project. They provided capacity building support to ensure school staff were adequately fulfilling their expected roles, as well as conducting general oversight of the teachers' work and offering advice in areas which could be developed.



Mr. Phorn Tha, Kachounkraom primary school director

## Challenges and lessons learned

The project did face some initial delays in commencing activities including, delivering our enrolment and Learn without Fear (LwF) campaigns and the planned water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) activities. Some initial delays were caused by a change in the Plan Cambodia Project Officer, and due to the people we needed involved (e.g. head teachers and local education authority staff) not being available at key points in delivery. However, this just led to adapting the initial project work plan developed, as opposed to not delivering any of the planned activities or meeting our commitments to the children and wider community.

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An ongoing difficulty is securing community members' time to participate in some project activities. This challenge affects all of our projects and not just this one. Important commitments such as harvest and planting seasons, and other daily obligations, mean that it can be challenging to get families as involved with the project as we'd ideally like. For instance, during harvesting and planting seasons, families often take small children to the fields with them, as well as have their older children help them with harvesting or sowing. Seeing this, SSCs and teachers have spent time trying to encourage parents to keep their children in school by explaining the importance of education. We continually seek ways to mitigate such challenges while taking care to be respectful of people's daily lives.

## Project expenditure

**The Commission's grant of £100,000 has been spent in full** and we have spent approximately **71% of the overall project budget to date**. Some activities are still pending completion and some expenditure incurred during this reporting period will be processed in future periods – these expenditures are therefore not reflected in the table below, but do not reflect an overall project underspend.

As this project is being funded in partnership with another donor, some budget adjustments were made over the life of the project, but overall project aims and objectives were not affected in any way.

Please note, that as per the Commission's criteria, no Plan UK support costs have been met from JOAC's grant.

Activities over two years (overall project with co-funding from JOAC and another donor)	Original budget (£)	Revised budget (£)	Expenditure to date (£)
Construction of one six-classroom building	79,157	60,842	54,398
Mapping exercise to help reduce barriers to education	1,373	2,746	2,671
School Support Committee construction monitoring costs	624	1,248	0
Construction of one two-room library building (including the provision of library books)	18,097	18,097	19,843
Construction of one well	1,997	1,997	2,103
Construction of one six-cubicle latrine building	4,992	4,992	3,711
Hygiene and sanitation training for students	562	2,246	1,856
Improvement of WASH facilities at 11 primary schools (latrines and water points)	14,041	12,355	0
Provision of learning materials, classroom equipment and play equipment at 12 schools	8,986	5,991	2,438
School compound improvement and contributions towards school gardens	9,735	30,920	20,872
Capacity building visits from local government education authorities to school staff	499	874	748
Training for teachers, school committees and communities	24,148	17,921	8,899
Community-level campaigns to raise awareness of importance of education, particularly for girls	2,496	4,992	1,787
UK Project management and technical support (met solely by co-funder)	6,550	6,550	3,413

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School and library handing-over ceremony	1,872	0	0
Technical support costs including Education Specialist project visits and stakeholder review meetings	3,168	2,254	821
Plan Cambodia staff costs including Education Project Officer for 12 months	19,448	23,918	17,223
<b>Total</b>	<b>£197,745</b>	<b>£197,943</b>	<b>£140,783</b>

## Case study: a chance at a future her brothers couldn't have

Ari is 14 and lives with her mother and three other siblings in the remote area of Kachoun Kraom village. Ari has just enrolled into the new Kachoun lower secondary school, which has been established thanks to the Commission's funding. She was worried that she would have had to drop out after Grade 6 (the last year of primary school) as the next closest lower secondary school was 14km away. But the new school we have been able to build due to your generous support is just 2km away! Through this project, Ari has been given a potentially **life-changing opportunity to continue her education.**

"I am very happy that I have enrolled into Grade 7 at Kachoun lower secondary school because I can learn at this school in my village. I may [have had to] drop out school after Grade 6 because my family is poor and my mother is deaf and a widow. She could not have afforded me to study at the school located 14 kilometres away from my home. But now I need only a bicycle to travel to school."

With a smiling face, Ari tells us, "I want to study until Grade 12 and I want to become a nurse so I can help to treat my family and communities."



Ari with her bicycle



Ari's mother, Choy Moy

Ari's mother, Choy Moy, works on the family farm with her older sons to support the family. Her sons had to drop out of school as the next nearest lower secondary school was too far away and she couldn't afford to get them bicycles to get to school. But now she wants her youngest, Ari, to have the chance to study further. "Because of poverty and the long distance between home and school, my sons had to drop out of school. But I will encourage my last daughter to study until Grade 12 or at least Grade 9 as there is a new lower secondary school nearby home. I won't stop her [schooling to get] married as I want her to get a better job and earn more income than me," she said hopefully.

on behalf of the children in Ratanakiri province, we thank you for your support!