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PILOTING RESIDENTIAL AND LEARNING FACILITIES FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL-GIRLS IN RURAL CAMBODIA

A technical assistance was initiated in 2006 to pilot-test a model for residential facilities and learning centers for girls in three upper secondary schools in three selected provinces in Cambodia to address some of the major access constraints for girls to education.

To date, a large volume of studies worldwide have clearly demonstrated significant positive impacts girls' education has on socioeconomic development. Unfortunately, more than 60 million girls are still not in school, accounting for more than half of all unschooled children.¹ Worldwide, for every 100 boys who are out-of-school, there are 117 girls.²

Secondary education for girls, in particular, is believed to foster critical thinking and equip girls with academic discipline that would enable them to participate substantially in economic, political, and social undertakings as they transition to adolescence and adulthood. As a result, evidence suggests that sending more girls to secondary schools increases family incomes, prevents early/adolescent marriages, reduces fertility and maternal mortality rates.

In Cambodia, while primary education enrollment rates have improved significantly—with participation rates of 84% for boys and 81% for girls, the enrollment rates for secondary education have dropped drastically over the last six years to 17% for boys and 8% for girls in upper secondary grades. This is the lowest in the Southeast Asian region.³

Girls represent only one-third of both lower and upper secondary enrollment in Cambodia. Some of the major access constraints for girls, especially in districts with secondary-age population, include distance from schools, cost of school transportation, and lack of residential facilities or dormitories for girls. Traveling distances of more than 5 kilometers (km) to lower or upper secondary schools is identified as an access barrier, and parents are particularly concerned about their daughters' safety. Cultural norms attached to girls' responsibility for household chores and income generation also keep them from attending schools.

Experience from the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction project on Targeted Assistance for Education of Poor Girls and Indigenous Children shows providing scholarships increases the enrollment and retention of girls in secondary education.⁴ However, given the multiple constraints, it was unlikely that scholarships alone would boost the currently very low secondary enrollment rate by girls.

Piloting Girls Dormitories through Technical Assistance

Cambodia's Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MOEYS) has adopted a gender mainstreaming strategy, which focuses on ensuring equal access by girls to education, and is interested in exploring strategies to expand facilities for secondary school girls.

In line with this strategy, MOEYS started an ADB-assisted technical assistance (TA) 4777 CAM: Dormitories and Learning Centers for Secondary Schoolgirls⁵ in April 2006 to pilot-test a model for residential facilities and learning centers for girls in three upper secondary schools in Kampong Thom, Kratie, and Siem Reap provinces. The project aimed to improve equity and reduced access barriers to secondary education for poor girls in Cambodia.

The residential and learning facilities were completed in March 2007 and have started to provide accommodation and learning opportunities outside the formal school curriculum. These were also installed with information, communication and technology (ICT) equipment. Female staff have been selected by the school management to manage the dormitories, and operational guidelines for dormitory management and residential facilities were likewise formulated and disseminated.

Scholarships (\$90/student per school year) were provided to 230 girl students from low-income households.⁶ In total, 216 girls students were admitted to the residential facilities, and only three of them have dropped out due to family reasons such as deaths. According to the school directors, the schoolgirls' overall performance of the schoolgirls has been fully satisfactory because of the provision of additional tutorials. Due to the generally lower educational standards of the schools of origin and the late enrollment of girls in 2006, additional tutorials were financed on a cost-sharing basis by the Government and TA 4777.⁷ All students passed grade 10 exams.

Modules for life skills training had been developed in Khmer and English in cooperation with the MOEYS, the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA), and the schoolgirls themselves. Likewise, gender mainstreaming workshops were conducted in the three facilities for the provincial director, school authorities, and dormitory supervisors.

In October 2007, a business plan was developed to identify strategies for income generation to make the learning centers and dormitories self-sustaining. The business plan—the first in Cambodia—assessed the feasibility of the pilot schools to finance its operational costs through its own income generated by ICT facilities.

Scaling-Up TA Outcomes

The establishment of dormitories and learning centers for secondary schoolgirls guaranteed safety for them, addressing one of the barriers in secondary education for girls. Moreover, providing basic ICT courses and life skills training expanded academic opportunities and increased chances of career development for its schoolgirls.

The next steps for MOEYS are to sustain TA 4777's outcomes, increase the number of beneficiaries, and expand the current curriculum to include other appropriate lessons not covered by secondary education.

These steps are already being taken. It is already programmed that ADB-financed Education Sector Development Program II (EDSP II)⁸ will include the provision of selected residential facilities for girls. Moreover, the MOEYS is reviewing the composition and amount of government scholarships for students staying in residential facilities⁹ since they require additional items, such as food allocations as part of the scholarship benefits.¹⁰

Hopefully, the gains achieved by the TA would be sustained long enough to prove that the education of girls and women is one of the best means of achieving sustainable development and economic growth.

Endnotes

- ¹ Available: http://www.netaid.org/global_poverty/girls-education/.
- ² Available: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTERNAL/EDUCATION/0,contentMDK:20298916~menuPK:617572~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:282386,00.html>
- ³ Available: <http://www.adb.org/Media/Articles/2006/10000-Cambodia-secondary-education/default.asp>
- ⁴ ADB. 2006. *Technical Assistance to Cambodia for Dormitories and Learning Centers for Secondary Schoolgirls* (Financed by the Poverty Reduction Cooperation Fund). Manila.
- ⁵ TA 4777 CAM: Dormitories and Learning Centers for Secondary Schoolgirls. TA Approval Date: April 2006. TA Completion Date: December 2007. TA Amount: US\$ 800,000 was financed by Poverty Reduction Fund (contributed by the United Kingdom Department for International Development Fund and administered by the ADB) and US\$150,000 from the Cambodian Government. Executing Agency: Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.
- ⁶ Dr. S.B.Mathe. 2007. Progress Report October 2007. ADB TA 4777-CAM.
- ⁷ Available: <http://www.adb.org/Documents/PIDs/39036012.asp>.
- ⁸ ESDP II aims to improve access to high-quality upper secondary education through the construction of model upper secondary schools with science and computer laboratories.
- ⁹ There are 2 additional facilities in the northern part of Cambodia financed by other funding partners.
- ¹⁰ NPRS-PRF Semi-Annual Project Status Report for the period: July to December 2007.

This case study was written by Mario Randolph Dacanay, ADB Consultant with inputs from Barbara Lochmann, Project Officer of TA 4777, and Sonomi Tanaka, Senior Social Development Specialist, ADB. The views and assessments contained herein do not necessarily reflect the views of ADB or its Board of Directors or the governments they represent. ADB does not guarantee the accuracy of the data and accepts no responsibility for any consequences of their use.

For any queries, contact:

NPRS-PRF Secretariat
nprs-prf@adb.org

