



Putting Positive Youth Development Into Practice

Youth On The Move

Cambodia's Need for Positive Youth Development

Despite many improvements in Cambodia's education system, less than 35% of adolescents are in lower secondary school and drop out rates nationally remain high at over 20%. Of shared concern within and outside the government is poor educational quality, high numbers of youth leaving school without foundational knowledge and a now widely recognized 'skills gap'.

In recent surveys, employers commonly identify a lack of basic skills such as critical thinking and proper work attitudes among those who did complete school. Surveys with dropped out youth and their families cite low relevance and poor educational quality as key factors behind drop out, in addition to direct and indirect costs, distance and opportunity costs. A recent study by World Education also confirmed students' lack of voice and engagement with their schools, with *over 80% of surveyed students* perceiving themselves as having limited freedom to express their opinions in school and none of the surveyed schools having functioning student councils.

Opportunities to Learn, Serve and Lead

World Education has been working for a number of years to assist the government's efforts to enable all youth to strengthen their employment readiness, career awareness, practical and life skills. World Education's **Youth on the Move (YOTM)** project in Prey Veng is addressing the issue of low student engagement and voice by revitalizing student councils and clubs. The project aims to empower youth and enhance the perception of school relevance by providing students with unique learning and leadership opportunities.



Revitalizing Student-Led Organizations at Schools

By revitalizing student-led groups, YOTM engages youth as vital resources and enables them to contribute as members of the school community. Under YOTM, student councils organize a range of enriched learning activities and provide peer-education in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skills, safe migration, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship. At the same time, teachers and school directors implement a number of other vital services including life skills classes, remedial tutoring, home visits and scholarships.

Students Take Action to Improve School Environment

In Prey Veng secondary schools, World Education is training teachers, with assistance from student council members, to implement the Environment module under the new MoEYS Life Skills Curriculum. The ten-week course is one of thirty developed by World Education under the USAID-funded Improved Basic Education in Cambodia (IBEC) Project (2009-2014).

This is the first time the course is being implemented during school periods, as per the government’s life skills policy. Previously, lack of teacher training prevented schools from using the new resources and curricula. By actively involving youth in the process, YOTM support embodies a real break-through for the roll-out of the government’s new life skills policy.



At Svay Att School and Serei Oddam School, the impact of the new Environment course is literally clear to see: plants and vegetables blossom in a newly sprouted garden and a reduction in the amount of rubbish littered outside of classrooms.

Before the garden was planted, the plot was covered with plastic bags and other rubbish. During the ten-week course, students learned about environmental protection and advocacy. Youth are now putting their knowledge and skills into practice to radically improve the school campus and promote environmental awareness

Exciting Prospects for Scaling Positive Youth Development in Cambodia

The success at both schools demonstrates how youth can play a more engaged, participatory role in the development of life skills. YOTM takes an innovative approach to the challenge of improving school relevance, life skills development and career readiness by collaborating with youth through student-led organizations. The proven elements of YOTM’s peer-led programming approach, are applied more fully within the formal school system, which is the most efficient and effective ‘vehicle’ for reaching vulnerable youth before they drop out and, most usually, then migrate.

With an increased focus on building the capacity of youth and student-led organizations to implement the new life skills curricula, YOTM’s impact represents an exciting new chapter in scaling Positive Youth Development initiatives and outcomes in Cambodia. With exciting prospects on the horizon, it is hoped that revitalizing secondary school Student Councils and Student clubs will not just institutionalize the project’s peer-led programming approach, but help address the low perceived relevance and quality of education that is known to contribute to persistently high drop-out rates in Cambodia’s secondary schools.