



Knowledge hub
-
Collection of best practices

Summary of the best practice

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) *

Cambodia institutionalizes continuous professional development to increase competencies and support professionalization of teachers

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

Cambodia

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to *

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) *

Cambodia Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) and UNESCO, through a \$14.4 million Education Sector Plan Implementation Grant (ESPIG) from the Global Partnership for Education

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. *

Political commitment and leadership; sustainability; teacher education; teaching and learning quality; teacher professionalization; continuous professional development; country ownership

6. What makes it a best practice? *

STEPCam's intervention in continuous professional development (CPD) is grounded in the conviction that teachers are the single most important school-level factor influencing student learning outcomes. The intervention is designed to address the issue of low student learning outcomes in Cambodia by strengthening teacher development and professionalization achieved through a high level of country ownership and a system strengthening approach to institutionalize CPD at the national and sub-national levels.

Description of the best practice

7. Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

- i) Which population was affected?
- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? *

Cambodia has made impressive progress in increasing access to primary education, with the national Net Enrolment Rates consistently above 90% since 2008. However, low student learning outcomes in the early grades have repeatedly been highlighted in learning assessments. One of the contributing factors identified was the low capacity of teachers, due to the lack of opportunities for professional development and limited recognition of teaching as a profession, and the large proportion of teachers who do not meet the required level of qualifications set by MoEYS. Recognizing the urgent need to address this, MoEYS has shifted its policy focus towards improving the quality of education. To guide the reform for teacher development and professionalization, MoEYS adopted the Teacher Policy (2013) and the Teacher Policy Action Plan (2015) as key policy documents.

Since 2018, the MoEYS and UNESCO have been jointly implementing the four-year Strengthening Teacher Education Programmes in Cambodia (STEPCam), funded by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and UNESCO's CapED to improve teachers' competencies to ensure higher quality and more inclusive learning opportunities for children. Through STEPCam, MoEYS and UNESCO aim to introduce an integrated teacher development system, including CPD for in-service primary teachers, enhance the quality of early grade learning, qualifications upgrades for teacher trainers, and renovation of teacher training centers.

Prior to STEPCam's intervention, teachers had few opportunities for continued professional growth. The limited, short-term in-service training available is not well-coordinated, lacking an institutionalized long-term plan for in-service training under a unified vision. In-service training has also lacked official recognition by the MoEYS.

STEPCam departs from this by adopting an approach that places teachers at the core of the reform efforts, recognizing their role in providing quality learning at the school level. To address the issue of quality education through strengthening teacher competencies, the programme invested in the institutionalization of CPD by enhancing capacity at the national, provincial and district levels and promoting ownership of a unified CPD system. Critical to achieving a truly transformative change is the political commitment and leadership of MoEYS and synergy of technical departments, ensuring the sustainability of the results and impact achieved through STEPCam.

8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation? *

First, to increase awareness and secure buy-in of MoEYS and education stakeholders, STEP Cam invested significant time and effort in facilitating discussions to highlight the importance of developing an aligned CPD, Teacher Career Pathway (TCP) and Human Resources Management Information System (HRMIS), including models and best practices of CPD and TCP policies in other relevant countries and how they may be applicable in the context of Cambodia. This led to a shared understanding among MoEYS and development partners on the need for policy alignment within teacher reform, and an increased visibility and discussion among MoEYS and development partners around CPD and its connection with TCP. It has also increased awareness about what CPD entails and its importance for professionalism and capacity development of the teaching and school management force in Cambodia. A critical first step was the development of the CPD Framework and Action Plan (2019), which was elaborated through a facilitated consultative process with MoEYS departments and development partners, and stakeholders at sub-national levels, including teachers and school directors.

To operationalize the CPD Framework, STEP Cam provided technical assistance for the development of a unified national CPD system that gives teachers and school management staff access to a selection of accredited CPD offerings. To enhance the interconnectedness and interaction between the CPD system and other systems, the existing HRMIS has been upgraded to register CPD credits of teachers to contribute towards career progression as defined in the TCP. This is made possible by the development of a credit acquisition system, along with an accreditation committee established to accredit CPD providers and offerings based on the quality assurance standards set by the CPDMO. The tracking and official recognition of the CPD credits are critical to ensuring that teachers are motivated to take ownership of their own CPD. The effectiveness of CPD and improvements in teacher competency will be further reinforced and sustained by improved school-based management through the ongoing reform supported by development partners. Additionally, the enhanced functionality of the HRMIS will ensure that all staff employed by MoEYS are effectively deployed and managed and have access to opportunities to develop their capacity in line with MoEYS' objective of bringing better and equitable education to all children in Cambodia.

The introduction of a new CPD system needs to be complemented by initiatives to develop the capacity to achieve institutionalization within MoEYS to manage the system in the longer term. The MoEYS established the CPD Management Office (CPDMO) within the Department of Personnel with a clearly defined structure and functions, supported by dedicated staff members recognized by the Ministry of Civil Service, to manage and regulate the CPD system and shape CPD policies. STEP Cam adopted a system strengthening approach and supported weekly technical training and work sessions to ensure that the CPDMO is equipped to fulfil its mandate moving forward and worked alongside the CPDMO to establish the CPD system processes and procedures. Through the capacity building initiative, the CPDMO, along with other staff from the Teacher Training Department and a few other technical departments, are now established as the national core trainers of the CPD system.

9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? *

STEPCam provided technical assistance for the development and adoption of the MoEYS-approved CPD framework, which represented a strong political commitment to a unified approach to CPD in Cambodia. The framework sets out a vision for teachers as professionals and lifelong learners through school-based learning to upgrade their professional skills.

The development of a single national CPD system that is sustainable and affordable is key to the institutionalization of CPD in Cambodia as it represents a decisive shift from the short-term, project-based offerings in the past. The CPD system is now operational and being piloted at 100 schools and CPD training programmes and materials have been developed to train national and sub-national staff in the system. Once fully rolled out nationwide, approximately 94,000 teachers will have access to CPD offerings through the new system. Increased teacher competencies supported by an effective CPD system is well-aligned and mutually reinforces the priority reform of MoEYS to implement effective school-based management.

The CPD system is equipped with capabilities to embrace all existing and future teacher professional development activities supported by the Royal Government of Cambodia and development partners that meet the accreditation standards. With the establishment of CPDMO and the accreditation committee at MoEYS, the list of CPD providers can be expanded further to include higher education and teacher institutions, and other private CPD providers. CPD credits can be further integrated in the future as part of the performance appraisals of teachers, such that teachers with positive appraisals are appropriately recognized – for example, with progression along the TCP to ensure that CPD credits contribute to professional development and advancement for teachers and management staff.

Additionally, the establishment of the CPDMO contributed further to achieving institutionalization at the MoEYS. STEPCam has supported the CPDMO staff to consolidate their skills and knowledge to ensure the CPDMO has the capacity and commitment to be fully autonomous beyond the programme.

To gather early evidence from the pilot to further refine the CPD and HRMIS systems, a mid-term evaluation was conducted in March 2022. The evaluation revealed encouraging results of STEPCam's intervention in CPD. For example, over 70% of teachers participating in the pilot recognized the need for CPD and consider that teachers should be lifelong learners, already indicating a shift in teachers' understanding of CPD. Around 80% of teachers stated the CPD pilot has improved their knowledge and skills, resulting in greater effectiveness and confidence in the classroom. Importantly, teachers already reported early indications of a positive impact of their own engagement in the CPD pilot on improved quality of learning for their students.

10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? *

STEPCam's support to the MoEYS is underscored by the recognition of the need to shift away from a project-driven model of interventions to create a sustainable and affordable CPD system. One of the most important catalysts during the implementation process was promoting among different stakeholders a shared understanding of the CPD system, and their interaction with TCP and HRMIS, to the level of inter-ministerial and inter-department work. The political commitment resulted in a high level of importance placed by MoEYS on CPD. This is evident in the buy-in into the accreditation and benchmarking of CPD. For example, for the implementation of early grade learning assessments, MoEYS requested modifications to the training programme such that it meets the standards required for accreditation.

Next, it is critical to ensure that there is an understanding within the MoEYS of the integral role of HRMIS and generating a shift in the perception of how the HRMIS can be transformed into an effective tool that is central to the operationalization of the CPD framework. The increased awareness of how CPD, TCP and HRMIS are interlinked is essential for the successful implementation of any sustainable teacher reform. The upgraded HRMIS with capabilities to register and manage earned CPD credits allows these credits to contribute to the performance appraisals towards career advancement for teachers along the TCP. A mobile application called HRCPD has been developed to enable teachers to easily access their HRMIS data, view CPD credits and enrol in CPD offerings.

STEPCam's systems strengthening approach to the partnership between MoEYS and UNESCO has proven to be successful in ensuring sustainability of STEPCam's intervention, by focusing on enhancing capacity at MoEYS technical departments, working closely and synergistically with department technical experts to promote ownership of the systems, policy documents and activities.

The high level of trust and collaboration between MoEYS and UNESCO have been highlighted by MoEYS department officials as a critical element that has ensured the success of STEPCam and its interventions, creating synergy that resulted in efficiencies, including budget savings which were reallocated to other, or even additional, activities to achieve results beyond STEPCam's original targets.

11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”. What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? *

Evidence of best practices from a wide range of countries shows that competent teachers and quality teaching based on professionalization and supported by strong human resource policies is the most important factor influencing learning outcomes.

In Cambodia, past interventions supported by MoEYS and development partners to address poor student learning outcomes focused more on improving the curriculum for early grade learning but did not sufficiently address the issue of teacher capabilities. To raise the professional status of teachers, STEPCam’s intervention not only supports the professional development of teachers and management staff, but considers and addresses motivation and incentives on the part of teachers and staff to take ownership to actively engage in CPD.

What sets the interventions of STEPCam apart as a ‘best practice’ is the approach to promote high level of country ownership and political commitment that truly supported the institutionalization of continuous professional development and the ‘culture’ of teachers as lifelong learners across different levels of the education system. The systems strengthening approach by STEPCam to build capacity at the national and sub-national levels, including weekly training sessions working in synergy and close collaboration to support the establishment and operation of the dedicated CPDMO unit within MoEYS.

Steps have been taken for the creation of a dedicated budget line for CPD by the Department of Finance at MoEYS, which will be a critical next step to ensure the dedicated financial resources are allocated to realize the commitment to support Cambodian teachers to complete 100 hours of CPD per year, as stated in the CPD Framework and Action Plan.

12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. *

GPE (2018). Program Document for a Grant to Cambodia (Fixed Part). Washington DC: GPE.
International Task Force on Teachers (2019). Teacher Policy Development Guide. UNESCO. Paris.

MoEYS (2013). Teacher Policy. Phnom Penh: MoEYS.

MoEYS (2015). Teacher Policy Action Plan. Phnom Penh: MoEYS.

MoEYS (2019). Continuous Professional Development Framework for Teachers and School Directors. Phnom Penh: MoEYS.