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LEARNING FROM THE MULTI-COUNTRY STUDY ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION (MCSIE) IN CAMBODIA

SUMMARY OF INTERIM FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE MCSIE LED BY INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS (IDP) IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CAMBODIA DISABLED PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATION

November 2022

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It was prepared by EnCompass LLC and its partner MSI, a Tetrattech company, for the Data and Evidence for Education Programs (DEEP), Contract No. GS-10F-0245M. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID.

INTRODUCTION

The Multi-Country Study on Inclusive Education (MCSIE) seeks to derive lessons about what works, for whom, and in what context to sustainably advance teaching and learning outcomes for children with disabilities in three countries: Cambodia, Nepal, and Malawi. USAID and its partners will use the MCSIE evaluation to inform adaptations to its inclusive education activities in the target countries, to plan for new inclusive education programming globally, and to provide technical assistance to partner countries on disability-inclusive education.

Specifically, MCSIE examines five themes:

- The overall **process** of setting up an inclusive education system
- Efforts to **screen and identify** learners with disabilities
- **Teacher training** models to build educator capacity
- The activity's **inclusive instructional approaches** for early grade reading (EGR)
- **Unintended consequences** resulting from the activity

This evidence summary draws upon key findings from the [Multi-Country Study on Inclusive Education \(MCSIE\) Cambodia Interim Report](#) produced by Inclusive Development Partners (IDP) to highlight promising strategies in inclusive education for USAID and its partners, as well as other global stakeholders who would like to learn from the evidence generated.

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

INTERIM FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN CAMBODIA

- [Promising Identification Strategies](#)
- [Promising Training Strategies](#)
- [Promising Instructional Approach Strategies](#)
- [Promising Process Strategies](#)

SUMMARY

- [Cross-Cutting Themes](#)
- [Areas for Further Consideration](#)

ALL CHILDREN READING (ACR)—CAMBODIA

In two provinces of Cambodia, MCSIE evaluated the work of All Children Reading (ACR)—Cambodia. ACR—Cambodia was a four-year (2017–2021) activity that delivered early grade Khmer literacy programming to learners from preschool to grade two, with a focus on supporting literacy instruction for students with and without disabilities. Inclusive education interventions were not included in the original activity solicitation. These interventions—including (1) developing student supplementary books, teachers' guides, and resources for mainstream schools and adapting them for braille and Cambodian Sign Language (CSL), (2) providing students who are deaf and hard of hearing with access to basic CSL instruction, (3) conducting school-based hearing and vision screenings for students, and (4) monitoring student learning outcomes through early grade reading assessments (EGRAs)—were added to the activity design after ACR-Cambodia had started. With the onset of COVID-19, almost all work came to a halt as the activity team adapted to the remote schooling realities of the pandemic.

INTERIM FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN CAMBODIA

To shed light on core themes and findings in Cambodia, the MCSIE evaluation team, led by Inclusive Development Partners in collaboration with the Cambodia Disabled People’s Organization, conducted an extensive review of activity documents and stakeholder interviews with activity staff, government employees, and representatives of disabled persons organizations (DPOs)¹. The team also conducted a site visit in April–May 2022. Data analysis was performed through qualitative deductive coding, the use of evaluative rubrics and checklists, and descriptive analyses. The methodological approach was subject to limitations including a largely remote data collection process due to COVID-19 and a related inability to triangulate findings with in-person school-based observations or interviews.

PROMISING IDENTIFICATION STRATEGIES

Under this theme, MCSIE asks **“What methods worked best to identify learners with disabilities?”**

RECOMMENDATION 1: ALLOW SUFFICIENT TIME AND RESOURCES TO DEVELOP SHARED PURPOSE AND CAPACITY AMONG STAKEHOLDERS

The screening process requires buy-in from a wide range of stakeholders, as well as agreed-upon purpose and capacity to execute the procedures. ACR-Cambodia’s screening pilot helped to expose systemic constraints to scaling the approach. These barriers included (1) lack of teacher knowledge and capacity to conduct classroom-based screening following screening training, (2) limited capacity of parents of learners identified as having potential disabilities to follow up on screening results, (3) limited capacity of clinics to perform medical diagnostics or identification, and (4) screening and identification information not designed to funnel educational strategies back to teachers. To improve such a feedback loop, more buy-in from stakeholders, agreement on the purpose and utility of screening activities, and time for coordination and training is needed.

RECOMMENDATION 2: IDENTIFY LOCAL DISABILITY RESOURCES BEFORE ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION

In order to mitigate the potential for process breakdowns related to limited resources, prior to the start of screening ACR-Cambodia conducted a scoping or mapping of disability services for learners with disabilities and used the information to create a local referral source: the Online Disability Service Directory for Cambodia. This directory served as a valuable resource to the activity overall. However, other breakdowns in the process limited its impact on identification in Cambodia. Mapping of local resources, if used in conjunction with a broader analysis and mitigation plan for systemic gaps, promises to be an important aspect of screening and identification.

¹ Disabled persons organizations (DPOs), also known as organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), are civil society organizations run by and for persons with disabilities.

PROMISING TRAINING STRATEGIES

Under this theme, MCSIE asks **“What training model(s) worked best to provide teachers with the resources and support they need to best meet the needs of learners with disabilities?”**

RECOMMENDATION 3: INTEGRATE EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES TO LITERACY AND EDUCATOR INPUT INTO TRAINING DESIGN

ACR-Cambodia integrated evidence-based approaches to literacy into its training design, including practices that focus on the five components of reading.² As training was developed, ACR-Cambodia involved a variety of stakeholders, including consultation with government counterparts and educators to make the materials teacher-friendly. The result was simple materials, focused on immediate and practical application to fit the local realities and needs of teachers, while maintaining fidelity to evidence-based instructional practices and obtaining essential government buy-in for widespread dissemination.

RECOMMENDATION 4: INCORPORATE COACHING INTO TRAINING DESIGN AND ENSURE COACHES HAVE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION TRAINING

Teacher professional development extends beyond in-service training, and coaching is one strategy for embedding this development within schools. An important feature of ACR-Cambodia’s training model is the follow-up coaching support provided by literacy coaches. Coaching in Cambodia surfaced both positive reinforcement of the practice and potentially challenging aspects of the approach used in the activity. The coaching provided a forum for the continued focus on the content presented in training and an opportunity for teachers to practice with feedback, thereby extending the learning. However, the literacy coaches were not specifically trained to evaluate indicators and support inclusive education practices, and the indicators that were captured were not analyzed. As a result, the MCSIE evaluation concludes that, while the value of coaching as a general practice was reinforced, at this interim stage the evidence on its impact on inclusive education is limited.

PROMISING INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH STRATEGIES

Under this theme MCSIE asks, **“What instructional models worked best to improve classroom instruction and reading outcomes among learners with disabilities?”**

RECOMMENDATION 5: EMBED TIPS IN MATERIALS THAT ENCOURAGE UDL AND POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Teacher training can be reinforced by embedding reminders of key messages and practices in the teaching materials themselves. In Cambodia, teacher guides embedded inclusion tips throughout, which provided regular reminders to teachers to encourage participation, as well as use of universal design for

² USAID used the “five Ts” (Time, Texts, Tongue, Teaching, and Testing) as an organizing principle for Agency investments in early grade reading from 2011 to 2018. USAID’s Reading MATTERS Conceptual Framework provides more insight on the current USAID framework.

learning (UDL) approaches (without naming them as such). Evaluators noted that certain aspects of UDL were less prominent and there was some inconsistency in their use across semesters and grades, so recognition of their value should drive future activities to take extra care in the design and execution of such tips.

RECOMMENDATION 6: ADVOCATE FOR SEQUENCE AND PACING CURRICULUM CHANGE ON A NATIONAL SCALE TO SUPPORT STRUGGLING LEARNERS

One far-reaching strategy ACR-Cambodia used to support inclusion for all learners was embedding strategic opportunities to slow the pace of instruction for all learners and to increase the amount of time available for review and practice. This was particularly relevant in the context of the Khmer language, which has complex linguistic components requiring ample exposure and practice to master. Stakeholders in Cambodia considered the negotiation and approval of this slowed pace of instruction with the government to be a hallmark of the activity's success and consistent with inclusive teaching practices that support struggling learners and students with disabilities. This is a positive example of advocating for strategies that implicitly support struggling learners by making systemic, national changes to curriculum design.

PROMISING PROCESS STRATEGIES

Under this theme, MCSIE asks **“What worked in the process of setting up an efficient, effective, and sustainable system to focus on improving the quality of education for learners with disabilities?”**

RECOMMENDATION 7: RECRUIT STAFF WITH DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS AND EMBED THEM IN THE OVERALL ACTIVITY

ACR-Cambodia drew from an extremely limited pool of qualified candidates with the necessary technical expertise to fill inclusive education roles. Through internal staff reallocation, multiple rounds of recruitment, and the addition of inclusive education consultants to fill gaps, the activity was able to source technical expertise to meet activity needs. However, staff working on inclusion were sometimes siloed from general activity work. As a result of this approach, while these staff were able to provide demonstrated support in specific aspects (i.e. deaf education), they had limited influence on broad inclusion for all learners. Distributing inclusion expertise throughout an activity has the potential to expand the impact of their work.

RECOMMENDATION 8: RECOGNIZE THE ACTIVITIES' ETHICAL INFLUENCE AND PLAN FOR BROADER IMPACT OF DECISIONS

ACR-Cambodia leadership reflected an appreciation for the strong ethical influence they held in decisions related to inclusive education for students with disabilities and took steps to address the potential impact of programmatic choices. For example, the activity stressed the importance of taking a person-centered approach while country-level capacity in inclusive education is being developed and chose approaches driven by quality over meeting large-scale metrics. That decision led to the prioritization of providing high-quality instruction to all students over immediate identification of

learners with disabilities using unreliable methods. The activity also took measures to reinforce student-centered instructional approaches consistent with the principles of UDL that include students of all learning styles and abilities, enabling classroom teachers to provide support even if a disability is not identified.

SUMMARY

The findings described in this brief reflect what we were learning from the MCSIE in Cambodia at the point of the interim report. While not conclusive, these interim findings have surfaced compelling cross-cutting themes and areas for additional consideration.

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

Taking a broad look at this work in Cambodia—as well as across all three MCSIE countries—several overarching themes stand out in the findings. These include:

- The need for technical expertise in content areas (e.g., disability, screening, assessments) to be embedded across the activity to ensure best practices are integrated into programming.
- The value of DPO identification and engagement in all areas of inquiry.
- The importance of early assessment and planning to mitigate process breakdowns due to immature screening and identification systems.
- The necessity to embed UDL in all activities to avoid addressing disability in isolation and limiting the reach of disability-specific approaches.

Recognition of these key ideas can inform and enhance programming in all areas of inclusive education.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND PROGRAM CONSIDERATION

In addition to providing valuable insight into good practice, MCSIE is also bringing to light areas where further study is recommended for all who are engaged in disability-inclusive education. The following areas are suggested for continued investigation.

- Identify additional strategies to mitigate barriers in the screening and identification feedback loop.
- Engage in deeper analysis of the impact of teaching strategies and materials on learner engagement and achievement.
- Develop the evidence base to support advocacy for national curricular approaches to support struggling learners and learners with disabilities.
- Identify strategies to negotiate common understandings of the meaning of disability and inclusive education prior to activity design and implementation.
- Investigate the impact of UDL teaching approaches on learning outcomes for struggling students in environments with few material resources.

For additional information on any of the findings and recommendations in this document, or on the MCSIE in general, please see [Learning from the Multi-Country Study on Inclusive Education](#) on USAID's Education Links site.

REFERENCES

USAID. "[USAID Reading MATTERS Conceptual Framework](#)." Washington, D.C. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 2019.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Valerie Karr, Hayley Niad, Heike Boeltzig-Brown, Brent Elder, and Ashley Stone of Inclusive Development Partners, along with their local partner Cambodia Disabled People's Organization (CDPO), and Sereisatya Ros and Leah Maxson of USAID for their contributions to and review of this brief. The MCSIE evaluation is managed by the LASER (Longterm Assistance and Services for Research) PULSE (Partners for University Solutions Engine) program funded through USAID's Innovation, Technology, and Research Hub.