

Report from Kandal

February 20-23, 2012

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1. INTRODUCTION



Two Children Looking at the Magazine *Searching for the Truth*

On February 20-23, 2012, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (the Ministry of Education) conducted a quality control including classroom observations and evaluations in four high schools in Kandal Province. The team consisted of two of DC-Cam's staff members, Mr. Khamboly Dy and Mr. Sovann Mam, and two officials from the Ministry of

Education, Ms. Chin Yahan from the Curriculum Development Department and Ms. Teng Sophea Leaksmy from the General Secondary School Department. As part of the classroom observations and evaluations, the team conducted interviews with education officials, school directors, teachers, and students. The team also conducted surveys with teachers and students. At the end of each classroom observation, the team members provided feedback to the observed teachers to improve their teaching effectiveness on Khmer Rouge (KR) history.

Kandal is one of the urban provinces. It consists of eleven districts, eight of which surround the capital city of Phnom Penh. All districts are easily accessible as road conditions and bridges across the rivers and creeks have been recently renovated. In this sense, Kandal's educational infrastructure and quality benefit significantly from its geographical location. Several high schools in the province are considered the model high schools in Cambodia. One high school in Khsach Kandal District is the most modern and well equipped school in Cambodia. Its long name is General Knowledge and Technique Samdech Akeak Mohasena Padei Decho Hun Sen-ROTA Khsach Kandal High School (Hun Sen-ROTA High School). The school consists of internationally-standard components including modern classrooms, a meeting hall for over three hundred audience members, a library, canteen, dorms for

Documentation Center of Cambodia

Searching for the Truth

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students, dorms for teachers, and beautiful gardens. The school's general operations are funded by the Arab state of Qatar and Monithapana Foundation headed by Aun Ponmonirath, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Economy and Finance. However, staff salary and teaching materials are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. The other high schools in the province have the comparative equivalence to high schools in other urban provinces.

Despite its geographical advantages, some schools in Kandal still face a number of challenges like those in other provinces. For instance, Hun Sen-ROTA High School is not able to function independently under the Ministry of Education if the state of Qatar and Monithapana Foundation cut off their financial support. The other high schools still lack of classrooms and



Hun Sen-ROTA Khsach Kandal High School

specialized teachers. The schools have to ask lower secondary school teachers to teach high school level, which is inconsistent with the principle and regulation of the Ministry of Education.

The integration/teaching of KR history in the classroom is considerably limited. All observed teachers conducted the integration through brief oral descriptions at one or more points during their regular teaching. The integration is conducted occasionally, for which teachers cite several reasons. They commented that they do not have enough time to integrate KR history as most of them struggle to finish the Ministry's textbooks within each academic year. Further, they do not have adequate knowledge and materials to teach the history as only one or at most two teachers from each school have had the chance to attend the training on the teaching of KR history. The table below summarizes the observation and evaluation work in Kandal Province.

Quality Control Project Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching of <i>A History of Democratic Kampuchea</i>. • Evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching materials: (1) Democratic Kampuchea (DK) history textbook, (2) Teacher's Guidebook, and (3) Student Workbook • Evaluate the integration of DK history into the daily regular teaching in schools.
Means of Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-hour observation • Interviews • Surveys
Tools for Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom observation checklist • Questionnaire for teachers

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaire for students • Interview questions
Types of Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban, rural and remote areas
Number of Classes Observed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three high schools: Tep Bronam, Hun Sen Koh Thom, Hun Sen Khsach Kandal and Hun Sen Kampong Phnom.
Average Number of Students per Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 45 and 60 students per class

2. PRE-OBSERVATION AND EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

Before conducting the classroom observations and evaluation, the team met with Mr. Ly Chungtheng, director of the Kandal provincial Office of Education. Mr. Chungtheng said that he had known DC-Cam and had participated in many of the center's events, including the 2011 commune teacher training. He totally supported the KR history teaching in formal classrooms and endorsed the observation and evaluation work.



The Quality Control Team Meeting with the School Leaderships

For each classroom observation, the team met and held discussions with the school directors to learn the general conditions and challenges of each school. Director of Tep Bronam High School mentioned that there were five high schools in Ponhea Lueu District, the district that has more high schools than other districts in the country. (For example, in comparison with Ratanak Kiri Province, where only three out of nine districts have high school education. The other six districts only have lower secondary school level.) For another instance, ninety percent of teachers working at Koh Thom High School are former students of the school. This condition allows the school leadership to preserve the competent teachers to ensure a better quality of education. To a greater extent than other schools, Hun Sen-ROTA Khsach Kandal High School goes further to provide education on special skills such as electronics and mechanics. However, due to a lack of technical teachers, these special skills will not start until the next academic year.

Hun Sen Kampong Phnom High School has a bitter history, in comparison with the other three observed schools. The school was built in 1966 and adopted the name "Put Sangkum Niyum Lower Secondary School." It was turned into a prison during the KR. After 1979, the school was reopened as a primary school. Sim Ny, deputy director, said that during the civil war period from 1970 to 1975, Neak Loeung was the hot battle field between the KR and Khmer Republic forces. Hundreds of people from both sides, especially the villagers, were killed. During the KR period, people from Leuk Dek District were taken for execution in Koh Kantheay Island killing site.

The table below summarizes the schools the team observed and evaluated.

No.	Name of School	Teachers	Female Teachers	Students	Female Students	Number of Classrooms
1	Tep Bronam	89	24	1,985	895	44
2	Hun Sen Koh Thom	76	16	2,315	1,100	46
3	Hun Sen-ROTA Khsach Kandal	38	8	976	437	NA
4	Hun Sen Kampong Phnom	70	27	1,571	764	36

3. CLASSROOM AND GENERAL OBSERVATION



Eleventh Grade Students in Hun Sen-ROTA Khsach Kandal High School

According to the interviews with school directors and deputy directors, all observed schools still lack several specialized teachers, although the shortage is smaller in number when compared to the schools in the remote provinces such as Ratanak Kiri, Stung Treng, and Preah Vihear. Proun Va, director of Tep Bronam High School, said that considering the number

of students and the number of teachers, his school does not have a problem with the quantity of teachers. However, taking into consideration of each subject, the school still needs at least ten more specialized teachers in mathematics, biology and chemistry. Hun Sen-ROTA Khsach Kandal High School borrows teachers from lower secondary school to fill in the gap. The school deputy director said that his school needs several more teachers who are specialized in computer science, English and life skills such as art. The key reason that the school continues to face this challenge is that most teachers are from Phnom Penh. The teachers stay in the school for about two years and then seek to return back to Phnom Penh where they are able to earn more income from private courses and alternative businesses.

The dropout rate is between five to eight percent which is not very different from the schools in the remote provinces. Most dropouts are female students who quit school in order to work in various nearby garment factories and factories and business centers in Phnom Penh. Some students drop out due to poverty and because they live far from the schools. To deal with this issue, Tep Bronam school leadership seeks financial assistance from various private donors and non-governmental organizations. Tep Bronam High School is able to obtain up to fifty scholarships per year. The school established a committee to select the scholarship

holders. The committee members consist of the school director, deputy directors, commune chief, and district chief. The scholarship winners have to be students who live in poverty and have high scores in the class. On the contrary, Hun Sen-ROTA High School provides scholarship indiscriminately. The scholarship is based on a first-come-first-served basis. However, as the applicants grow in number, the school will conduct a lottery system as a measure for selection in the coming years.

The quality of the students is a real concern for teachers and the school leadership. Hun Thy from Tep Bronam High School said that the Ministry tries to get students to pass on to the upper levels in order to achieve quantity objectives, yet the actual knowledge of the students does not always suit their grade level. Several teachers claim that some students in grade nine do not know how to read and write properly. Two deputy directors at Tep Bronam High School have to teach classes themselves because they want to know the quality of the students. The deputy directors said that they do not entirely trust their teacher's reports.

The national syllabus from the Ministry of Education requires that teachers teach thirty-eight weeks per year. With this syllabus, the Ministry of Education has already deducted the national holidays and two vacations. However, in practice, teachers are able to conduct only thirty-two weeks per year. There are two main factors for this shortfall. First, teachers who claim to have inadequate incentive and encouragement are involved in outside businesses. They usually miss some classes. Secondly, during each national holiday, students take extra days off. For example, students are allowed to take only three days off for the Khmer New Year. However, students take one week ahead of the New Year and the other one week after the New Year. Thus, students take two weeks off just for Khmer New Year alone.

4. OBSERVATIONS OF STUDENTS

Nou Kun, deputy director of Tep Bronam High School, said that in the past, when he taught his students, they had a hard time to understand and believe the stories narrated to them. For instance, students did not believe him when he told them that the KR used palm tree midribs to cut people's throats as a means of execution.

However, in the present day, students learn KR history to some degree through family descriptions.

Thy Theavy, a sixteen-years-old tenth grade student of Hun Sen Koh Thom High School, said that she learned the KR history from her grandfather. Her grandfather worked non-stop but was allowed to eat only watery rice porridge. The KR killed the educated and kept the ignorant. Her grandfather saw the killing and dead bodies with his own eyes. Theavy said that she believed her grandfather because she has seen films on TV, read books, and watch the live broadcast of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (KRT) hearings. Knowing about the inhuman



Students Reading Books in the Library

acts during the KR, Theavy said that she felt angry but did not want to take revenge. Theavy did not discriminate against her friends who are children of the former KR cadres. She really wanted to go more deeply into the history. "I don't understand why they did that as they are also Khmers," said Theavy.

Saing Chhinhong, another student from Hun Sen Koh Thom High School, also learned some of the KR history from his parents who told him that people were asked to work even when they were sick and did not have enough food to eat. His grandfather was executed because he refused to be evacuated to live in another place. His grandmother died of sickness without medical treatment. Chhinhong believed that the KR committed a lot of crimes and there is plenty of evidence. He is angry with the KR and wants to take revenge. However, he will not discriminate against the friends whose parents are former KR cadres. "I don't want the regime to happen again," said Chhinhong.

Thoeun Sokunthy, a student from Hun Sen-ROTA Khsach Kandal High School, also learned KR history from her parents. Her parents told her that they were living in the prison-like village. They were moved from place to place. For them, it was like a nightmare and unbelievable event. Sokunthy said that, "I don't know if I could have survived if I were living in that regime. I used to watch the films. The KR killed people for just catching frogs to eat." In addition to her parents' descriptions, Sokunthy also learned the history from her teachers. In class, she has had a chance to learn the history of Nazi Germany and compares the two regimes. Sokunthy said that from her understanding, the German Nazis killed Jews while the KR killed their own people. She said that the KR adopted Maoist ideology. She wants to learn more about the KR history because she wants to know if her parents got married properly at that time. She does not want the regime to happen again.

Seng Mengsong has similar knowledge on KR history. He learns the history from his parents as well. His mother was just about six years old when the KR came to power. His mother was assigned to look after the newly born babies. At school, Mengsong learns more about the KR, world wars, and the battle between the KR and Lon Nol's forces. He learned that people were lured into the KR by trickery. Mengsong feels angry with the KR and wants to take revenge. However, he said that he would leave it to the law. He is interested and wants to learn more because the history allows him to understand the root cause of the war and invasion. "As a Khmer, I have to know the war history in my country," said Mengsong.

5. INTEGRATION OF DK HISTORY COMMENTARY

The Integration of KR history depends on the content of the regular lessons. Hun Thy from Tep Bronam High School said that he often integrates KR history by comparing the previous Cambodian political regimes to that of the KR. For example, during the KR period, the capital city was empty, which is different from its usual form in which the capital is the center of education, economics, and politics. Hun Thy said that his students are moved by the history and ask many questions related to religion, education and daily life of the people. Asked if he has difficulties in teaching the KR history, Thy smiled and said it is easy because he came through the regime and knows the details. He can answer all questions related to daily life and daily practices of the people. However, some teachers have a different opinion from Hun Thy. Nou Kun from the same school claimed that teaching KR history is not easy. "We know,

but the children don't know, and it is difficult to explain them," said Kun. He added that teachers need photos and films to show to students so that they can better grasp the history.

All observed teachers integrated KR history through brief oral descriptions at one or several points during the regular teaching. Siek Bunnath, a teacher from Hun Sen Koh Thom High School, taught about the growth and fall of the population. She then talked about the sharp decrease of the population during the KR regime. She told the students that couples were forced to get married. They did not have a chance to see each other. Family planning did not exist. Bunnath also talked about the undeveloped medical science during the KR. People used traditional tree herbs for basic treatment. People faced a severe food shortage and lived in unsanitary conditions. After that, Bunnath asked students about the effects of not having enough food. Students answered that the malnutrition could cause diseases, bad health, weakness, and lack of concentration. The integration lasted for a few minutes. She said that she dared not talk too much; otherwise, she could not finish the lesson on time.



A Student Reading Section of the Lesson Loudly in the Class

Students answered "Yes", and pointed to the Democratic Kampuchea regime. She continued the lesson by asking students to work in groups and discussing several questions on World War Two. After that students wrote the answers on the board. In the middle of the class, she linked the discussion on Germany to the social class structure under the KR regime. She explained that the KR wanted to abolish all kinds of classes but emphasized the peasant class. She compared the four-year plan of the KR to that of the former Soviet Union. Students answered that the KR four-year plan failed while the former Soviet Union five-year plan succeeded. Sopheap went further to ask about the general events during the KR. Students said that at that time "Khmers killed Khmers and people did not have anything to eat."

Roeung Sopheap from Hun Sen-ROTA Khsach Kandal High School taught about the important events before World War Two. She began the class by recalling the previous day's lesson and asking several questions to link the old lesson to the new one. Then she asked one student to read one section of the book. As she discussed the dictatorship in Germany, she asked students if Cambodia had experienced a dictatorship.

Sophea was born after the KR, but she learned a lot of the suffering experiences that her parents and other older relatives went through during the KR. Each family member of one of her relatives was killed at that time. She narrated this story to her students. Sophea said that she had taught a lot of KR history to her students upon returning back from the training. She proposed several questions on KR history to the examination committee. One of her questions appeared in the national exam for grade twelve. She is proud to have this success. Several of her students made phone calls to her and thanked her for teaching them KR history.

With regards to the actual teaching of KR history, ninth graders receive two hour-long assignments, and twelfth graders receive ten hour-long assignments within an academic year, according to the new schedule from the Ministry of Education. Nou Kun and Hun Thy agreed that students may find it hard to understand as the content is too short and incomplete. During the integrations, students do not show surprise or strong reactions as they are unfamiliar with the short content, claimed some teachers.

6. TEXTBOOK, GUIDEBOOK, AND WORKBOOK AVAILABILITY AND USE

Each observed school has received between forty and eighty copies of the DK history textbook, which is stored in the library for collective use. Students from Kampong Phnom High School received over one hundred copies as they attended the public education forum conducted by DC-Cam in the nearby pagoda. The observation and evaluation team brought extra copies and gave an additional twenty-five copies to each school. All school directors requested more copies of the textbook for their libraries so that all students have access to the textbook.

Teacher guidebooks and student workbooks are not available in any school. Only teachers who attended the training possess these materials. The other history teachers have only the DK history textbook that they obtain from the library.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The educational condition in Kandal Province is more favorable than that in the remote provinces, as Kandal itself benefits significantly from its geographic location. Most districts are located around the capital city of Phnom Penh, and the schools in these districts receive more qualified teachers from Phnom Penh. Moreover, both teachers and students can take advantage of the rich resources in the city. In spite of these facts, the schools in Kandal still face the same challenges as do the schools in the remote provinces. Some female students drop out of school to become factory workers or to find work in Phnom Penh. Though classroom space is not a major challenge, the lack of specialized teachers continues to concern the schools' leadership.

The integration/teaching of KR history in formal classrooms remains a challenge. It is understandable that teachers and students begin to talk more about the history inside the classroom and that they have access to a wide variety of resources when compared to the past decade, yet the teaching and discussion is still considerably limited. Usually, teachers claim that they do not have enough incentives and time to go beyond the Ministry of Education's textbooks. Many teachers claim that they will wait until the end of the academic year to begin teaching KR history because the KR history is incorporated in the Ministry of Education's history textbook for the second semester.

From the teachers' perspectives, in addition to KR history, teachers have the responsibility to teach other histories required by the Ministry of Education. Therefore, the teachers have to balance the amount of integration and teaching of KR history, ensuring that the teaching of

KR history does not dictate too much time out of the total time allocated for other history lessons. To have a wider teaching of KR history in the schools, teachers may need to conduct extra curricula teaching, which requires effort and devotion of time. Teachers can conduct film screenings and guest lectures once a week so that the students are continuously informed and encouraged to investigate more deeply into the KR history on their own.

END.

The Project is funded by the Open Society Institute (OSI) with core support from USAID and Sida (Sweden).

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