

# មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

## GENOCIDE EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA

### Quality Control on the Teaching of "A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)"

Report from Koh Kong, April 2-7, 2011

By Khamboly Dy

#### 1. INTRODUCTION



**Kaong Kang trees, a symbol of Koh Kong province: a province that sustains a variety of plant and animal species, especially fish.**

arrested and detained at S-21 on 21 April 1978, and he was executed thereafter on an unknown date.<sup>1</sup> Cadres in the zone were more severely purged following his arrest. Koh Kong was liberated on January 17, ten days after the liberation of Phnom Penh—to others it is known as the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia (see map 2). In the present day, Koh Kong is one of Cambodia's eco-tourist sites, with its great forest scenery and a complex of beautiful lakes and sea arms. Situated along the ranges of Cardamom Mountain, the road leading to the provincial town makes up one of the most beautiful scenes in Cambodia and the province is known widely as a tourist province. The education system in the province has improved over time; however, a number of challenges still persist, and these have formed significant obstacles for the quality of education in the province.

Most teachers in Koh Kong are from Takeo and Kampot provinces. Like Pailin province, not many Koh Kong residents have reached a sufficient level of education that would enable them to become high school teachers; albeit, most Koh Kong residents are able to teach primary school students.

On April 2-7, 2011, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) and the Ministry of Education conducted a quality control evaluation in Koh Kong province, one of the remote Cambodian provinces near the Thai border (see map 1). During the Khmer Rouge (KR) period, Koh Kong was under the administrative control of the West zone with Chuo

Chet as the zone secretary. Accused of being CIA, he was



**The red sport is Koh Kong province.  
(Source: Google Map)**

<sup>1</sup> Dy, Khamboly. (2007). "A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)," Documentation Center of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, p. 24.



**7 January 1979 Liberation Map (Source: DC-Cam’s archive)**

As Koh Kong is one of the most remote provinces of Cambodia, not many teachers want to stay there for longer than three years, the minimum term of service that newly recruited teachers are required to stay in one school before they can transfer to another school— according to the interviews with the School Directors. This is among the factors leading to the low quality of education, which will be discussed in greater detail in section 3 below.

The evaluation team consisted of two DC-Cam staff members, Mr. Khamboly Dy and Mr. Sovann Morm, and one official

from the Ministry of Education, Mr. Sopheak Yin. The team observed four classroom teachings and conducted eleven interviews with teachers, students, and School Directors. The purpose of the evaluation was to examine the effectiveness of the teaching of KR history in Cambodian classrooms as well as to look at various challenges teachers and students face in teaching this history. The team also wanted to see the perspectives and attitudes of teachers and students as well as the education officials and survey the population at-large on teaching and learning KR history in the classroom. At the end of each classroom observation and evaluation, the team provided feedback and recommendations for improvement to the observed teachers and School Directors on the areas they should improve to ensure that the teaching of “A History of Democratic Kampuchea” reaches its long-term goals.

In general, teachers, students, education officials, and residents in the provinces whom we met and/or interviewed agreed that teaching and studying KR history in a formal classroom setting was important to prevent the reoccurrence of such atrocities in the future. However, the team found the integration of KR history into the regular teaching in Koh Kong varies from one teacher to another and was dependant on the time available to teachers. Like other provinces, there is no instruction on the form and scope of integrating DK history into the general curriculum. Ultimately, the amount of integration was largely dependant on the willingness of each individual teacher. For instance, one teacher played *Breaking the Silence* and invited guest speakers to talk about their experiences to the students in the classroom. In addition, he taught three chapters from the DK history textbook.

Overall, it was observed that those who had not attended teacher training given by DC-Cam or the Ministry of Education did not pay much attention to the integration of KR history into their teaching.

The table below is a brief summary of the evaluation work in Koh Kong province.

<b>Quality control project objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching of <i>A History of Democratic Kampuchea</i>.</li> <li>• Evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching materials: (1) DK history textbook, (2) Teacher's Guidebook, and (3) Student Workbook.</li> <li>• Evaluate the integration of DK history into the daily regular teaching in schools.</li> <li>• Examine students' and teachers' attitude toward learning and teaching DK history in the classroom.</li> </ul>
<b>Means of evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One-hour observation</li> <li>• Interviews with students, teachers, school directors, and parents.</li> <li>• Surveys with students and teachers</li> </ul>
<b>Tools for evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom observation checklist</li> <li>• Questionnaire for teacher</li> <li>• Questionnaire for student</li> <li>• Interview questions</li> </ul>
<b>Types of school</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban: Koh Kong High School</li> <li>• Rural: Botum Sakor and Sre Ambel High Schools</li> <li>• Most remote areas: Thmor Sar High School</li> </ul>
<b>Number of classes observed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four</li> </ul>
<b>Average number of students per class</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Between 45 and 50</li> </ul>
<b>Approximate number of students with textbook</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately 23 percent</li> </ul>
<b>Approximate number of teachers with Teacher's Guidebook and student workbook</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only teachers who participated in the training have guidebook and a student workbook on hand.</li> </ul>
<b>Approximate number of students with student workbook</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No single student has ever received the student workbooks.</li> </ul>

## 2. PRE-EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

### A. Meeting with education officials

Arriving at Koh Kong province, the team visited the Provincial Office of Education in order to present permission letters and related documents from the Ministry of Education to the office for



**Mr. Khamboly Dy and Mr. Sopheak Yin in a meeting with the Head of Koh Kong Office of Education Mr. Nget Loeng**

information and endorsement. The team met with Mr. Nget Loeng, Head of Koh Kong Provincial Office of Education, and Neak Sang, Deputy Head of Administrative Office. The two officials reviewed the permission letters and endorsed our work to observe four schools in the province. They said that Koh Kong consists of five high schools and eighteen secondary schools. This represents a low number of secondary schools in the province. Located near the Thai border where cross-border businesses with Thailand are so prosperous, education seems to be marginalized by business and poverty. Many students decide to drop out of school to either work in Thailand or help their families on production and farming, the products for which can be exported to Thailand.

With regards to the teaching of *A History of Democratic Kampuchea*, the two officials said they received several thousand copies of the textbook in late 2009. They distributed all of the textbooks to all secondary schools. Each school received about a hundred copies. However, the provincial office has never received any information about the integration and the teaching of DK history in the province. Since the DK history textbook is not in the program of the Ministry of Education, it is considered as merely supplementary material, which teachers refer to as guidance when needed. This aspect of the provincial education system supports the hypothesis (as stated earlier) that the integration of DK history depends on the willingness and desire of each individual teacher.

## **B. Meeting with School Directors**

Before each day's classroom observation, the team met with the School Directors to both present the permission letter and relative documents for observation and evaluation work. This also allowed the team to introduce how the evaluation process is conducted. With permission letters from the Ministry of Education and endorsement from the Provincial Office of Education, the School Director facilitated our observation and evaluation work. They also arranged rooms for interviews. With regards to the integration of DK history into the classroom teaching, the School Directors had similar comments to the officials of the Provincial Office of Education. The School Director seemed to not be aware of how much history teachers have integrated DK history in their respective schools. The School Directors received copies of the textbook from the provincial office but the only information conveyed to them, with respect to these textbooks, was the fact that the textbooks were officially endorsed for use in schools nationwide. They have little knowledge about the need to integrate because there has not been a formal instruction from the Ministry of Education.

The table below shows the number of teachers, students, and classrooms of each school.

<b>No.</b>	<b>High School</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Classroom</b>
1	Koh Kong High School	97	29	2,300	42
2	Botom Sakor High School	20	5	399	8
3	Thmor Sar High School	13	0	326	8
4	Sre Ambel High School	58	17	1,433	32



### 3. CLASSROOM AND GENERAL OBSERVATION

#### A. General comments

All observed teachers used traditional methods (i.e., the Banking approach) in their daily teaching. Their routine consisted of tossing random questions to the students who in turn provide answers. Most of the time, the answers to the questions already existed in the textbook. To answer these questions, students did not need to think; they could find the answers in the textbook and just recite what was written. In addition, teachers used the dictation method in which teachers summarized their lessons and read for students who wrote the summary into their notebooks. Teachers appeared to have wasted a great deal of time in doing these activities and would consequently have trouble finishing lessons on time and effectively.



**A slogan in the school compound describing children's rights: 1. Right to life, 2. Right to protection, 3. Right to development, and 4. Right to participation**

Almost all teachers complained on the issue of the Ministry of Education's pattern of adding more programs for each grade without providing sufficient time during the academic year to finish the programs already in place. It is true that the Ministry of Education has introduced a number of new programs. However, according to Mr. Sopheap Yin (a national teacher who participated in the evaluation process), the Ministry of Education has made efforts to balance the addition of new programs with the availability of time.

On the other hand, during the overall evaluation process for the past year, the team has found that a partial explanation for the teachers' complaints stems from an inefficiencies in school administration and lack of discipline in upholding compulsory education standards. For example, during each national holiday, students do not return to school on the regularly



**Ms. Im Vantha, a teacher at Koh Kong High School, is teaching in the classroom.**

scheduled time—choosing instead to take additional vacation days. As one would expect, this indiscipline affects the school administration's ability to start school on time and maintain an orderly schedule. More specifically, students are supposed to take off from school for only three days for the Khmer New Year's Day. In reality, students take off for more than two weeks before and after the actual

holiday, and the school leadership does not do anything to cope up with this circumstance either in terms of compelling students to return on time or revising the school calendar to provide teachers the time that they have been allocated for completing their curriculum. In addition, teachers share some blame in this issue as many teachers come to class late. In some cases, what is assigned as one-hour of teaching, ends up becoming only thirty to forty minutes.

Another case that strongly affects the quality of education is the number of teachers who lack expertise or credentials in their fields. In some schools, teachers who hold credentials in solely elementary school are asked to teach high school students. As one would expect such teachers have significant trouble establishing credibility as their capacity to teach at the high school level is at best questionable. In other cases, history teachers are assigned to teach Citizen Morality courses and vice versa, posing equally troubling questions of competency. For instance, Ms. Im Vantha's expertise is geography, yet due to the lack of teachers, she was asked to teach three additional courses (on top of geography): History, Khmer Studies, and Citizen Morality.

Quite expectedly, schools have requested more teachers; however, the assigned teachers do not meet the needs of the schools. For example, while the schools requested history teachers, math teachers are given instead. In addition, among thirteen teachers in Thmor Sar High School, there are only two teachers who hold a bachelor's degree (BA). By law, teachers who teach in high school are required to have a BA and go through a one-year pedagogy training at the National Institute of Education (NIE). Obviously this standard is not met.

Teachers are also limited in their ability in designing their own lesson plans. Some teachers use lesson plans that they had designed five years ago. As a general recommendation, lesson plans should be improved from time to time in order to adjust to the needs of the students and maintain the currency of the profession.

Village chiefs usually hold general forums with their villager one to provide public announcements to the people and to discuss any challenges or public concerns. In these forums, villagers complained that their students do not receive satisfactory knowledge. Some teachers were also present in the forum and presented their issues, which primarily centered on difficulties on the job and their ability to meet their own survival needs.

## **B. Excerpts from classroom teaching**

Below is an excerpt from a classroom teaching in Thmor Sar High School.

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### **Ven Vanny, Thmor Sar High School, Botum Sakor District, Koh Kong**

#### **Chapter 3: History of the Asia Pacific Region Lesson 1: Indonesia**

##### **Objectives:**

- **Students describe the economic and political conditions of Indonesia.**
- **Students compare Indonesian politics during and after World War II.**
- **Encourage students to synthesize these experiences in their own outlook on Cambodia and how Cambodia can learn from Indonesia.**

**Materials:** Social study textbook for grade 11 of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, pages 162-167, and other related documents.

**Procedure and Process:**

**Step 1: Classroom administration:** Teacher examines students' disciplines, sanitation, and attendance. The class monitor reports on the class attendance.



Mr. Ven Vanny, a teacher at Thmor Sar High School, is teaching in the classroom.

**Step 2: Recalling the last lesson:** Teacher asks students to answer the following questions: After the Angkorean period, how many administrative divisions were created? How many stone scripts did Preah Bat Chan Reach Chea create? What countries make up the Southeast Asian continent?

**Step 3: New lesson:** Teacher instructs two to three students to read sections on page 162

aloud. The teacher explains some of the difficult terms, such as youth movement and colonialism. What year was the youth congress established? What year was Mr. Sukano born? Students answer and write answers down in their notebook. After these activities, the teacher divides students into four groups.

- Group 1: What did the congress want to show by raising a flag?
- Group 2: Why did Poland detain Mr. Sukano?
- Group 3: In 1941, what did Japanese air forces do?
- Group 4: What date did Indonesia declare their second independence?

Students work in groups and answer the above four questions.

**Step 4: Strengthening knowledge:** The teacher asks students the following questions to assess students' understanding. What countries exercised colonial power over Indonesia? What is the date in which the Khmer Rouge genocide came to an end and victory was declared? What did Pol Pot's regime destroy? Students answered these questions and wrote the answers down in their notebooks.

**Step 5: Recommendation:** Teacher asks students to study hard at home.

#### 4. OBSERVATIONS OF STUDENTS

In general, Koh Kong has a high dropout rate that is similar to Banteay Meanchey and Pailin



**Students writing answers into their notebook**

provinces. The high drop-out rate is caused by poverty and the willingness of many students to forego school for work in Thailand. Each year, there at least ten to fifteen percent of the students drop out of class and go to Thailand to work in various factories and farms. Some students take a very long leave to work in the sugar farms as they can earn about

2.50 USD per day. Other students work in the casino

at the border to help their families, while others help their fathers in fishing. After leaving school for about two or three months, the students return back and ask for permission to continue their study. The School Directors said they typically disregard the standard set by the Ministry of Education in which students who are absent for more than 52 hours are deemed failing and are required to repeat the class automatically. In some cases, however, students are absent for more than three months, and even in these cases, the School Directors feel compelled to allow such students to resume their class. In a few cases, some students drop out by reason of having insufficient funds to buy exam papers from teachers. Some School Directors said, "If we strictly follow the regulations of the Ministry of Education, there will not be a single student left in the school."

The School Directors said that they have informed these challenges to the district chiefs who have authority and access to the companies' managers. The School Directors requested that companies not accept students who have not yet finished grade 9. However, the School Directors whom we met said that they have not seen any change. Moreover, poverty continues to compel students to drop out of school.

With regard to the study of DK history in the classroom, all interviewed students voiced their interest in learning more about this history. They described how they would hear their parents talking about their experiences during the KR, and they would wonder, "Why did the KR leaders decide to lead the country in this way?" Questions that have been asked by many students and teachers in other provinces include: Why did the KR kill their own people? What did they want to achieve? Who were behind the KR leaders?

Overall, students' attitude toward learning DK history was positive. The students whom the team interviewed were able to describe the stories their parents told them. Some of them also borrowed the DK history textbook from their school libraries to read.

There have been a lot of generalizations among researchers and the press with regard to the students' belief in the existence of the KR regime and its crimes. Most of the time, the media has written that Cambodia's younger generation do not believe in what happened during the KR, and this is an indication of the possibility that such events would reoccur in the future.



In order to give an accurate statement on the belief of Cambodia's younger generation on DK history, one has to consider the age level of the children. Children who are studying in primary school will certainly say they have no idea of the KR regime as well as the suffering that older generations faced. These primary school students are too young to perceive such an atrocity, and they have no idea and no interest in learning DK history. They are more interested in playing with their peers, drawing, watching TV, and other typical activities for their age group.

As one moves to higher grades, particularly in secondary school and high school, one begins to see a completely different view toward DK history. For instance, one student from Koh Kong High School said, *"Before, I believed but I was not clear on what really occurred. Now I believe and I am clear on what happened because now there are more documents and TVs and more descriptions from survivors."* All of the students the team interviewed and surveyed said they believe in what happened during the KR period because they read books, magazines, and newspaper articles, including watching the film screening of 7 January every year. Most importantly, their parents told them about their experiences during that period, and the students maintained their parents would not lie to them. Ms. Kuon Kimcheng and Mr. Tai Meng of Thmor Sar High School said, *"My parents have told me about their stories. I believe in what they said because I am sure that they would not lie to me."*

## **5. INTEGRATION OF DK HISTORY COMMENTARY**

The integration of DK history into the classrooms in Koh Kong province has been relatively small. Our classroom observations and interviews (with teachers, students, and School Directors from four schools in three different districts) showed that teachers rarely integrate DK history into their teaching. Some teachers have integrated short oral narrative descriptions at the beginning or end of the class, but there is no use the DK history textbook. The answers to the questions are based primarily on students' prior knowledge, which they learned from their relatives and media sources. Generally, teachers would pose two or three fact-finding questions that did not allow any critical thinking and self-learning on DK history.

Ms. Im Vantha from Koh Kong High School said the Ministry of Education has changed the program several times within the last two years. These changes affected the general teaching as the DK history program. She mentioned that last year she was able to almost complete the entire DC-Cam's DK history textbook including the Ministry's social study textbook by the middle of the academic year. She also used the textbook to design questions for monthly exams. However, she was not able to teach any DK history this year because she struggled to finish the newly added programs. The Ministry of Education took seven chapters from grade 11 and inserted them in grade 12. Another teacher from Thmor Sar High School Mr. Ven Vanny said that upon returning from the commune teacher training, he invited a 61-year-old villager to talk to students about his life during the KR regime. He played *Breaking the Silence* for students and taught three chapters from DC-Cam's DK history textbook. He made use of the methods he gained from the training. The integration this year is much smaller comparing to that of last year. Like Ms. Vantha, he is also struggling with the new program from the Ministry of Education.

In order to have a broader integration of DK history into the actual classroom teaching, all observed teachers and School Directors recommended that parts of the DK history textbook should be extracted and included in the Ministry of Education's social study textbooks so that teachers and students will teach and study this history by mandate. Moreover, DK history can be broadened through exams.



**Meeting with School Director and teachers**

Because DK history has appeared in both semester and national exams for two years in a row, students have begun borrowing the DK history textbook from the school library. In light of this fact, each school can integrate questions on DK history into their monthly and semester exams for the purpose of encouraging students to pay more attention in their study of DK history. The KR studies have also been integrated into other exams such as the exam for outstanding students in Phnom Penh, noted in the table below.

### **Exam for Outstanding Students in Phnom Penh**

**25-26 February 2011**

**Khmer Studies, Grade 12**

**Duration: 3 Hours, 100 Scores (For Day 1)**

#### **Extracted poem**

Men and women change their sexes. They die without knowing the reasons. The body becomes weak. The seasons change. The date stops moving. Live with gifts from the sky and wind. Angkar is the father and mother and the owner of our homeland and rice. They cannot find dependence. The holy persons give up merit and gratitude for what they have. They warn the virtue of their parents. Bird and gibbon cried in the forest and mountain. They see the torture and dead piling up. Mosquitoes and flies are frightened and sick because they are afraid of ghost haunting. Merit people got lost; they have human bodies with an animal mind. They no longer recognize their brothers and sisters who have the same nationalities. They arrested and killed people. They are so cruel and totally confused. They are a complete darkness. They no longer know their nationality, relatives and friends. They devoted their own country in order to serve the ideas of the Beijing cliques. They fight their own nationality and shout repeatedly that they are fighting the enemies. They see all Cambodian corps, but their eyes are still dazzled. They are offensively foolish to accuse Khmers as unfriendly. How could they do that? They do not wake up when the sun is shining all over the ground. They are so stubborn and believe what they did was right. They do not look at the world to understand all kinds of things. They teach people to hate and bury the gratitude of their parents. They determined enemies to be both inside and outside Buddha. Please imagine the evil story in the past during Uddong Empire of King Ang Chan's reign. They were totally confused and greedy and killed their own nationality. But this event is not as great as the Pol Pot regime in which Khmer killed Khmer. It is hot like a furnace.

### **I. Questions on articles (45 scores)**

1. Define the following terms:  
Offering, Savage, Warn, Humanity, Confused, Foolish, Stubborn, Opinion, Ancient, and Jealousy.
2. What does the word "Angkar" refer to? Who are the leaders of Democratic Kampuchea?
3. Which countries did Democratic Kampuchea have relations with? Which countries have good relations with Democratic Kampuchea?
4. In Democratic Kampuchea regime, how many kinds of people did they divide? What kinds? What were the differences between these people?
5. What is collectivization? What were the purposes of collectivization in Democratic Kampuchea? What were the effects of collectivization on Cambodian families?
6. What does the above poem mean? Please explain each section.
7. What method do the poets use to write poems? What languages do they use? Please cite references.

### **II. Essay (45 scores)**

Subject: In Pol Pot regime, the leaders adopted democracy in leading the country but the country was ruined. Why does current Cambodia adopt democracy? Give examples to clarify.

### **III. Style (10 scores), questions on articles (5 scores) and essay (5 scores)**

## **6. TEXTBOOK, GUIDEBOOK AND WORKBOOK AVAILABILITY AND USE**

All observed schools received between 20 and 100 copies of DK history textbook. In particular, Botum Sakor High School lent the textbook to grade 12 students for the whole academic year. However, the other three schools the team observed (Thmor Sar, Sre Ambel and Koh Kong High Schools) kept the textbook in the library. The interviewed students said they were not aware of the presence of the textbook in their school libraries. Even though the first two schools distributed copies of the textbook to students, teachers do not use the textbook for teaching and integrating for the academic year 2011-2012. Ms. Im Vantha from Koh Kong High School and Mr. Ven Vanny from Thmor Sar High School taught several chapters from the textbook last year. This year, integration consisted of simple oral descriptions without making use of the textbook. Among 99 students the team surveyed, 23 have the textbook on hand; this accounts for 23 percent.

Like other provinces, only teachers who attended DC-Cam's teacher training workshops received copies of the Teacher's Guidebook and Student Workbook. Though they have these materials on hand, they have not shared them with their colleagues. However, these trained teachers use the methods such as group division and presentation while teaching their regular lessons. The team gave several sets of teaching materials to each observed school so that the other teachers could benefit from these materials.

## 7. IMPACTS

Provincial teachers whom the team met during the observation and evaluation said that they were not clear on a few methods in the guidebook while they were attending the provincial teacher training workshop. For instance, Ms. Im Vantha, a provincial teacher from Koh Kong, said that when she attended the training in Phnom Penh they received little knowledge on certain methodologies. She became clear on these methodologies when she was assigned to train commune teachers in Pursat province. She said she stayed until 1 AM to draft the lesson plans with the other provincial trainers.



**Two students writing the answers on the white board**

One commune teacher Mr. Mao Sitha said that some national and provincial teachers possess limited capacity to provide clear explanation on the methodologies when he attended the training in Preah Sihanouk province. He added that national and provincial teachers in some cases did not have conformity in answering questions from participants. They had different views toward one particular method. Some

provincial teacher trainers do not hold a BA degree. As stated earlier, some schools lack teachers with expertise; therefore, the schools have to recruit teachers from secondary school to teach in high school. And among these teachers, some were chosen to participate in the provincial teacher training. After the training, they automatically became provincial teacher trainers. This kind of recruitment, to some degree, compromised the quality of the commune teacher training. However, this does not mean that it jeopardized the whole training as most participants gave high evaluation on the training. To have a more effective training for the subsequent trainings, Mr. Mao Sitha suggested that provincial teacher trainers be selected from those who have BA degrees with full credentials and capacity. "Though some secondary school teachers are able to teach, they do not have the credibility."

In Koh Kong, the team met Ms. Em Mony—the Deputy School Director of Botum Sakor High School and a civil party of DC-Cam's Victim Participation Project (VPA). During the meeting, she said that she and other civil party members in Koh Kong wanted compensation. However, the VPA team explained to her that the compensation could only be in the form of a school building, hospital, or memorial. There would be no cash compensation. She said that she wanted a memorial built in her village so that people can make dedications to the spirits of their deceased family members. As she is a direct victim whose family members were killed during the KR period she claimed that she will encourage the teaching of DK history in her school. Her emotional sensitivity is still strong. She cried while describing her life during that period. The team suggested that she consult the guidebook when teaching DK history to avoid teaching students through emotion.



## 8. CHALLENGES AND LESSON LEARNED



**Mr. Sopheak Yin, a national evaluator, leading survey with students**

The information provided to the teachers and the School Directors to be observed was not sufficiently clear. A few teachers were confused on what they were supposed to do during the observation and evaluation. Mr. Ea Eab from Sre Ambel High School was absent during our visit. The team had informed him and the School Director one week in advance, however, he was assigned to attend a workshop in Phnom Penh. The team informed him

of this miscommunication back to the provincial office of education. The Head of the Administration said that the School Director, as he already knew about the observation and evaluation work, should not have assigned Mr. Ea Eab to anywhere on that day. As Mr. Ea Eab was absent, the team spent two hours observing another history teacher, Ms. MOUNG Vattey. The observation proved no different from the other teachers. Ms. Vattey used the same traditional method of asking students to read the text aloud in class and asking questions to learn students' understanding.

In another case, one teacher taught for only about half an hour and thereupon turned to the evaluators with the expectation that they would integrate DK history into her lesson. For subsequent quality controls in other provinces, the team has to provide clear messages to both teachers and the School Directors about the processes of the evaluation and observation work. The evaluators are not supposed to do anything during the teaching hours. The job of the evaluators is to sit in the classroom and observe the teaching. Only after the observation do the evaluators distribute surveys for students and conduct interviews. Moreover, teachers who are designated to be observed must be present on the appointed date.

For many teachers the team observed, integration meant textbook distributions and oral descriptions. All teachers the team observed did not know how to integrate DK history fully into their teaching. For effective integration, teachers have to be sure to devote one of the three objectives they are expected to complete to DK history. Integration in this manner ensures that at least some activities involve DK history. In the subsequent trainings, the trainers must clearly explain how teachers can integrate DK history into their daily regular teaching. For example, trainers could encourage commune teachers to compare DK history to the core lessons in the Ministry's social study textbook in their regular teaching.

Some teachers complained that their schools do not have enough copies of the DK history textbook. Students in grade 12 especially need to read and study this history because it appears in the national and semester exams. Because there are an insufficient number of copies, teachers typically use a teacher-centered approach—for example, a teacher would

ask a student to read aloud for the rest of the class, followed by comprehensive questions. Mr. Ven Vanny from Thmor Sar High School said that he has only one copy to teach his students. However, when the team visited the school library, there are about twenty copies collecting dust. The library looks like a store room and appears to have been left unused for a long period of time.

## **9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The integration of DK history into daily classroom teaching is small. Like other provinces, only teachers who have attended DC-Cam's teacher training workshop pay attention to the teaching and integrating DK history. Those who do not attend the training are not aware of the program and have no idea on how to integrate DK history into their teaching and what materials to use. However, according to interviews with students, those untrained teachers who grew up during the DK period still refer from time-to-time about life during the KR to their students. Like teachers in other provinces, teachers from Koh Kong stated that in order to have a broader teaching and integration of DK history, there has to be an instruction from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport for all history teachers nationwide on how to teach or integrate DK history into their classes. Moreover, the instruction should state clearly the amount of time and material required per class, including specific instructions on which texts to use and the specific time assigned for each text. Otherwise, teachers are unlikely to take the extra effort in integrating DK history, given the fact that they are already struggling to finish the heavy program assigned by the Ministry of Education. In addition, it is expected that the Ministry of Education may have to allocate additional hours for history class instruction.

Cambodian students' interest and knowledge on DK history varies depending on their ages. Students in the lower grades, mainly primary school level, have no idea on what the KR regime is and how and why they should learn about this history—which for them seems to be abstract and a folktale. In contrast, students in secondary and high school have a high knowledge of DK history and consequently are more interested to learn about this history. Their attitude changes as they mature, allowing them to grasp the reality of such atrocities that they hear about from time to time. Among the students the evaluation team surveyed and interviewed, no one claims disbelief in what happened during the KR. They simply want more clarification and additional information on certain events which to some extent appears too extreme as to almost seem unbelievable. Many students claim that they believe in what their parents have told them because they are confident their parents would not lie to them. In general, students' understanding, knowledge, and interest toward learning DK history is much higher when compared to the past five or so years.

The challenges to teach or integrate DK history into classroom teaching also comes from the general conditions of education in Cambodia. Teachers have little incentive to conduct their own research or to assume a new curriculum, which for them is a burden on their well-being and time. Some teachers are engaged in private businesses outside the school and for some teachers the income from private classes encourages them to pay more attention to these rather than their public school duties. Therefore, teachers may not want to spend the time on the activities that do not benefit them personally even though they know these activities give long-term benefits to their country and the people at-large. On the other hand, some

teachers do go beyond their personal interests in serving the public. For instance, two of the four teachers the team observed did take the time to teach from the DK history textbook and screen KR documentary films for their students.

For a broader and more effective teaching and/or integrating DK history into Cambodian classrooms, more teacher trainings are needed. Of particular note, the Ministry may need to produce an instruction letter that allows teachers to teach and/or integrate DK history on a regular basis.

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