

12th Commune Teacher Training in Battambang

Battambang Regional Teacher Training Center, Battambang Province

January 25-30, 2014

By Dy Khamboly

1. INTRODUCTION

January 25-30, 2014, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (the Ministry of Education) held the 12th commune teacher training in Battambang province. The training took place at Battambang Regional Teacher Training School. Fifty teachers from Battambang and fifty teachers from Banteay Meanchey participated. However, five participants were withdrawn from the actual training to form a control group in order to test the effectiveness of the training. Participants were divided into four large groups. Three groups consisted of twenty-three people and the last one consisted of twenty-four people. Ten national teachers from the Ministry of Education and four DC-Cam staff members led the training.

This training, like previous trainings, utilized the existing program and materials. The core materials are the textbook *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* and the *Teacher's Guidebook*. Other materials include DC-Cam's monthly magazine *Searching for the Truth*, the bulletin *The KRT Observation* and booklet on ECCC's case 002. In addition, three documentary films (*Behind the Wall of S-21*, *Cambodian Children*, and *Prisons in Tuol Sleng*, *Prey Veng* and *Baset Mountain*) were screened. At this 12th training, four special guest speakers participated to enrich the training. They are Professor Kar Sunbunnat (Cambodian leading psychiatrist), Tarik Abdulhak (senior international prosecutor from the ECCC), Dr. Kokthay Eng (DC-Cam's Research Director) and Mr. Youk Chhang (DC-Cam's Director).

2. PREPARATION FOR THE TRAINING

DC-Cam's team travelled to Battambang two days in advance to prepare the groundwork for the training. Immediately after arrival, the team met with Mr. Sok Hing, Director of Battambang Regional Teacher Training School, to prepare the hall for the opening ceremony and set up chairs and whiteboards in each assigned classrooms. The team also discussed the refreshment, microphone and other facilities necessary for the training. At the end of the meeting, the team checked the actual classrooms, making sure that all things were well prepared in advance of the training.

The next day, the team met with Mr. Ngy Set, Head of Battambang Provincial Office of Education. In addition to inviting him to preside over the opening ceremony, the team discussed the importance of genocide education and the challenges arising during the training. Mr. Ngy voiced strong support for the training given his personal concern that his children could hardly believe what he had told them about his experiences during the KR. Mr. Ngy Set claimed that if the KR history is not brought to the classroom today, it will become a folktale in the future.

In the afternoon, DC-Cam's team met with national and provincial trainers to discuss the detail plan for the next day training. During the two-hour meeting, the trainers discussed four important issues: the general regulation governing their conduct during the training, roles and responsibilities for each trainer, the training program which is subjected to change,

and the challenges the trainers had faced during previous trainings. Then, all trainers retreated to their group division to discuss the detail lesson plan for the next day.

3. THE TRAINING ACTIVITIES

The Opening Ceremony

On January 25, the training started with the opening ceremony presided over by H.E. Ms. Ton Sa Im, Under-Secretary of State of the Ministry of Education and education officials in Battambang province. Three guest speakers addressed the opening ceremony.

Mr. Ngy Set, Head of Battambang Provincial Office of Education: Mr. Set welcomed the training and all participants. He then introduced the overall educational condition in the province. Mr. Set marked that Battambang experienced the increases in both the number of schools and students in the recent years. Specifically, though the number of students in primary and secondary school levels increases, the figure appears to drop at the high school level. With regard to the commune teacher training, Mr. Set expressed his wholehearted thanks to DC-Cam for making this training happen in Battambang. He personally observed that young people born after 1979 do not know about the atrocities which happened during the KR period. He believed the training would lead the spirit of the youth to understand their national history. Mr. Set requested that this kind of training be conducted continuously.

Mr. Vanthan Peou Dara, DC-Cam's Deputy Director: Mr. Vanthan thanked the delegates, trainers and trainees who spent time to participate in the training. He emphasized that the training focused on the KR history and the teaching methodologies. The training is made possible through the agreement between the Ministry of Education and DC-Cam and the financial support from the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Mr. Vanthan drew the attention the past activities within the framework of the Genocide Education Project. Since the first agreement in 2008, DC-Cam and the Ministry of Education have conducted many activities such as national teacher training, provincial teacher training, commune teacher training, genocide education memorial, training for police and military, book distribution, and public education forum. Mr. Vanthan stressed that the training aims at promoting the historical understanding among Cambodian children so that they can become informed citizens and agents for the promotion of human rights, democracy and rule of law.

H.E. Ms. Ton Sa Im, Under-Secretary of State of the Ministry of Education: Ms. Ton Sa Im thanked all the participants for participating in the training. She gave the background of the teaching of KR which started since 1979. The teaching had been put on hold during the 1990s for the sake of national reconciliation. Ms. Ton Sa Im raised an important issue regarding the debate surrounding the meaning of the term “genocide.” She stated that not only do Cambodians question the use of the word “genocide” in reference to the KR, the world also does not use this term. However, the decision by the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) regime to use the term was proven correct with the establishment of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (KRT). She claimed that genocide destroyed both national infrastructure and human resources. The teaching of KR history will help change the people's attitude about doing good things for a better future.

Daily Instructions

The first day of training was totally packed with information about the KR history and methodologies. The morning began with Chapters One and Two of the history textbook. In the afternoon, the trainers presented the teaching methods that corresponded to the content in

the textbook. In addition, the trainers conducted model teaching exercises to prepare the trainees for the next day's teaching practices.

In day two, the presentation of the textbook and the guidebook were conducted in the morning with an interval break. In the afternoon, the trainees were assigned to do the teaching practices among their peers with assistance and observation from the trainers. Each trainee had thirty minutes for their teaching practices which were pre-assigned. During the practices, the trainees were required to use the methods they learned in the morning from the guidebook. After each teaching practice, the rest of the trainees would provide feedback to improve the teaching of the subsequent members. Day three, four, five and six followed the same patterns with the exceptions of film screening and guest speakers.

Guest Speakers

The Battambang training employed three key guest speakers who presented related topics ranging from psychological effect to the definition of genocide, ten-steps of genocide and the development of the ECCC.

Dr. Eng Kokthay, DC-Cam's Deputy Director: Dr. Eng presented the ten stages of genocide developed by Professor Gregory Stanton. These stages include classification, symbolization, discrimination, dehumanization, organization, polarization, preparation, persecution, extermination and denial. To explain each step, Dr. Eng provided several examples of the cases of genocide happening in Rwanda, South Africa, Central Africa, the Holocaust, etc. For instance, Dr. Eng explained that in the dehumanization process, the perpetrators usually equate the victims to inhuman things such as worms or diseases. On that note, the KR identified their victims as "enemies" who were subjected to all kinds of inhuman acts such as forced labor and execution. Eventually, the perpetrators always deny that they had committed any crimes and that the killing of the people was a result of the enemy's trick or other sabotages.

At the end of the presentation, participants were given the floor to ask questions, the first of which was why the US did not intervene in time to stop the KR genocide. Dr. Eng gave the answer by explaining state sovereignty and the complexity within the decision-making process of the UN Security Council. Neither the UN nor US could take military action against the KR without approval from the five members of the UN Security Council. China, which supported the KR since pre-1975 period would have used its veto power had there been any resolution calling for military intervention in Cambodia. Secondly, Dr. Eng stated that the KR sealed off the country from the world. There had been insufficient information for the international community to intervene. Moreover, the US would be reluctant to return back to Indochina where the US had just withdrawn its forces a few years earlier. The other interesting questions were: What are the differences between genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes? Does the UN have any measures to prevent genocide? Dr. Eng provided the legal definitions of the three international crimes. At the same time, he also gave the definition of the word "genocide" from the social perspective since the Cambodian people have used this term orally since 1979. With regard to the genocide prevention mechanism, Dr. Eng explained that the UN plays an important role in this process and that all states that are signatories to the Genocide Convention are bound to refrain from practicing genocide and other serious crimes.

Dr. Kar Sunbaunat, Cambodian's leading psychiatrist: Dr. Kar talked about the mental health issue associated with the experiences during the KR. He explained that to be qualified as a person with good health, a person needs to possess four elements: physical health, mental health, social health and spiritual health. The Cambodian people who came through the KR period did not have these health elements. They were forced to work and had insufficient nutrition which severely undermined their physical and mental health. The lack

of nutrition does not allow the body to develop properly, and malnutrition contributes to trauma development. In addition, they were not allowed to express freedom of social interactions and freedom of religious belief, which destroyed their social and spiritual health. In this regard, a number of people have developed mental illness over time. The disaster during the KR regime happened continuously and in multiple times. People constantly lived in fear. With these traumatic experiences, the Cambodian people are sensitive to wars and gun sounds. For example, the armed conflict with Thailand stirred fear among the people who live in the border areas. The old people can hardly bear the movies with shooting sounds.

Dr. Kar emphasized that the people with traumas lose their self-confidence and the ability to perform regular duties. They lose energy and get sick easily. Dr. Kar explained that the frequent performance of traditional coin treatment is one of the results of traumatic effects.

Tarik Abdulhak, ECCC's senior international prosecutor: Mr. Abdulhak made a presentation on the overall structure of the ECCC, the complexities of the investigation and the cases the court has been undertaking. He explained that the structure of the court includes the pre-trial chamber, the trial chamber and the Supreme Court chamber. In addition, there are office of co-prosecutors, office of investigating judges, the defense section, and civil party section. Case 001 involved only one accused, Duch, Chief of the KR's Office S-21. Duch was sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of crimes against humanity and other national crimes. Case 002 concerns four defendants including Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary and Ieng Thirith. Ieng Sary died in 2013 while his wife Ieng Thirith was found unfit to stand trial. Therefore, only Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan are facing the charges. In addition, Mr. Abdulhak described the investigation processes, which involve the examination of documents, witnesses, experts, and civil parties. He emphasized the role of DC-Cam's works in articulating the establishment of the court.

Moreover, Mr. Abdulhak touched upon the legal definition of genocide and provided several examples of the cases of genocide. For specific example with reference to the Cambodian case, Mr. Abdulhak stated that the killings of ethnic Cham and Vietnamese are identified by the court as cases of genocide in Cambodia while the killing of Cambodians falls into the category of crimes against humanity. In this sense, Mr. Abdulhak explained to the participants that the fact that the killing of Cambodians is not genocide does not mean that this killing is less severe than the killing of Cham and Vietnamese. Genocide and crimes against humanity are equally serious.

At the end, Mr. Abdulhak gave the floor to the participants to ask questions some which are the following:

1. What advantages has the ECCC brought to Cambodia?
2. Will the ECCC continue its work on case 003 and 004 since the national and international sides do not have consensus on these cases?
3. Who decide on case 003 and 004?
4. Is the ECCC really a hybrid court since there are more Cambodian judges?
5. What are the reasons behind the slow process of the court?
6. What do you think about the Cambodian court system?

Film Screening

On January 28, two documentary films were screened for the participants. They are *Cambodian Children in 1979* and *Behind the Wall of S-21*. The first film screening aimed at drawing the participants' attention toward the legacies of the KR genocide, which left tens of thousands of children orphans and homeless. The film not only shows the effects of the KR atrocities on young children but also the destruction of a nation as a whole with the views of Tuol Sleng prison and the empty capital city of Phnom Penh. The second film features the

stories of three survivors of S-21: Bou Meng, Chum Mey and Him Huy. This film is part of the teaching method in the guidebook. Participants were required to utilize documentary films as materials to support their teaching in addition to the uses of photos and textbook. DC-Cam's trainer Long Dany led the introduction and discussions of the films.

4. BOOK DISTRIBUTION

In addition to the training itself on January 30, 2014, the training team took advantage of their presence in Battambang to conduct a book distribution ceremony at Preah Monivong High School. The ceremony was presided over by His Excellency Im Koch, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Education and education officials in Battambang. Over three thousand students attended the ceremony. Each student received one copy of the book *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)*.

The book distribution is an activity within the scope of the Genocide Education Project. Since its first publication in 2007, DC-Cam and the Ministry of Education have distributed over 500,000 copies of the book to approximately 1,700 secondary schools across the country.

5. IMPACTS AND CHALLENGES

The training provided instruction on KR history and teaching methods to ninety-five participants. In addition, the participants not only received new teaching materials but also were exposed to different historical and legal perspectives through guest speakers' presentations. They had a chance to do teaching practices and interact with their peers to figure out the best practices in applying the knowledge they gained from the training at their respective schools.

The training also galvanized additional interest and awareness of the importance of genocide education among the education officials in Battambang province. Ngy Set, Head of Battambang Office of Education voiced total support for the genocide education initiative. He claimed that the younger generation will find the atrocities which happened during the KR as more and more irrelevant because of the attention brought by this training. He expressed gratitude to DC-Cam for making the training possible and accessible to the teachers in his province. He also requested that DC-Cam hold more genocide education training in Battambang and other provinces so that teachers and students throughout the country are able to comprehensively grasp different aspects of the KR regime. Likewise, two participants from Banteay Meanchey province (Tes Synath and Sor Sokim) said that they sacrificed their private teaching for the sake of the training. Both are born after KR and have little knowledge about the regime. They expressed enthusiasm as the training provided detailed accounts of the KR history and how to teach this controversial period.

However, the training was not immune from challenges. The conflict between the methods introduced by the Ministry of Education and the methods in the guidebook remains confusing. The Ministry introduced five steps in the overall teaching: (1) classroom administration, (2) recalling previous lesson, (3) actual teaching, (4) summary and (5) homework. In contrast, DC-Cam's guidebook provides flexibility for step 2, 3 and 4. In some cases, the methods in the guidebook instruct teachers to start the lesson with step 3, bypassing step 2. In general, the teachers appeared to adhere to the Ministry's five steps, seemingly undermining the flexibility of the methods in the guidebook.

Training Team

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