



Update report

Primary school in Saysa Morn - Banteay Meanchey Province, Cambodia

This report is about the development of the primary school in Saysa Morn since the last inspection visit of our field worker Yem Khlok from Child's Dream Cambodia, Siem Rep.

Informationen

- The construction of the concrete building with four fully equipped classrooms and three toilets was completed on 13 June 2018.
- 29 November 2018, the new primary school officially opened its doors for the first time.
- The running costs of the school are borne by the district government.
- The school is aimed at children attending pre-school and primary school levels 1 to 6.
- Classes are held Monday to Friday, in the morning from 07:00 - 11:00 and in the afternoon, from 13:00 - 17:00.
- The pupils live within a radius of approx. 3 kilometres from the school. The way to school is either on foot or the parents drive the children to and from school by motorbike.
- Although the school fees are waived, the parents are still required to pay for the uniforms themselves.
- We have used donations totalling USD 52,650 for the school construction project in a meaningful and sustainable way.

School Administration and Pupils

- The school staff consists of a headmaster and seven teachers, including four women.
- At the time of the school's opening, the number of pupils was 182 (82 girls and 100 boys).
- Currently, 154 pupils (67 girls and 87 boys) are registered at Saysa Morn Primary School. The reduced number of pupils can be attributed to a declining birth rate and increased regional emigration.
- Furthermore, since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, more school drop-outs have been observed. A main cause of increased school dropouts is seen in the general lack of prospects of the Cambodian rural population and the resulting poverty. Due to their remote location, the inhabitants of Saysa Morn are forced to rely on agricultural self-sufficiency for their survival. The geographical proximity to the Thai border is another reason for the high number of school dropouts. Many families migrate to Thailand in the hope of better living conditions, where Cambodian migrants mostly find work in agriculture or construction.

Successful cooperation

In our penultimate report, we documented the inadequate waste management and cleanliness of Saysa Morn Primary School. In efficient cooperation with the education department of the Saysa district administration and the school management of the primary school, this problem was effortlessly and finally successfully eliminated. The school management succeeded in reducing the waste in and around the school building significantly and sustainably. After our intervention and the good cooperation with the responsible persons, the primary school Saysa Morn appears today as a generally well-kept and clean educational institution.

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on school operations

In Cambodia, the academic year for primary schools usually runs from November to the end of August of the following year. Due to the fluctuations regarding the nationwide spread of COVID-19, the start of the first semester was shifted to the month of January. The primary school students of Saysa Morn thus started the spring semester on 11 January 2021. On 20 March 2021, the Royal Government of Cambodia again decided to close all public and private educational institutions in the country as a repeated preventive measure against the spread of COVID-19. The government-imposed school closures paralysed classes in Cambodia's estimated 13,482 schools, affecting a total of 3.2 million students. Together with development partners, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) is making the necessary arrangements to provide continuous distance learning for students. However, due to inadequate infrastructural development, especially of schools in more rural regions of Cambodia, such as in the case of the primary school in Saysa Morn, this offer can only be taken up to a limited extent.

Major problems

- Too weak or no internet connection, in the family households as well as in the primary school itself.
- Lack of money for computers, laptops, smartphones or for the necessary software for online lessons.
- Lack of know-how on the part of parents to use the programs or apps as intended.

Primary school solution approach in Saysa Morn

A new hybrid learning plan has been introduced, where instead of distance learning, teachers teach their students in small groups in the classroom. Classes are held daily, alternating in four shifts. The teachers give the students homework, which they have to solve until the next meeting. At the next meeting, the homework is discussed, any resulting questions are clarified and schoolwork is assigned again. In this way, the risk of contagion is kept low and all children have the opportunity to participate in the lessons because the lessons are kept short. It is planned to maintain this form of teaching until the time of reopening. Particularly economically disadvantaged pupils, who lack the necessary digital resources for distance learning, benefit from this offer, while the better-off part of the student body follows the distance learning from home.

Pandemic-related school-leaving

Zahlreiche Arbeitnehmer haben aufgrund der Covid-19 Krise ihre Stelle verloren. Aus Arbeitslosigkeit folgt in der Regel Einkommensverlust und so können sich immer weniger Familien, die direkten wie indirekten Kosten des Schulbesuchs ihrer Kinder leisten. Studien ergaben, dass das Risiko die Schule abzugeben, bei Schülern aus Haushalten mit gültiger ID-Poor-Card um 4 % höher liegt (19 %), als bei Schülern aus Haushalten ohne ID-Poor-Card mit einem Risiko von 15 %. Während die meisten Kinder während die Schulen geschlossen haben vom Fernunterricht von zu Hause aus profitieren, sind Kinder aus ärmeren Familien gezwungen diese Zeit zu nutzen, um zum Broterwerb ihrer Familien beizutragen. Diese Kinder sind weder in der Lage dem Fernunterricht zu folgen, noch können sie die Hausaufgaben im Rahmen der Lerngruppen erledigen und werden daher künftig Gefahr laufen mit dem Lehrplan nicht mehr Schritt halten zu können. Sofern sich die Wirtschaft nicht schneller als erwartet von der Pandemie erholen wird, ist daher zu befürchten, dass die fortschreitende Verarmung der Familien schulpflichtiger Kinder längerfristig zu einem ernstzunehmenden Problem nachfolgender Generationen wird. (Unicef and Save the Children-Cambodia COVID-19 Joint Education Needs Assessment, March 2021)

A look into the future

As the reopening of the educational facilities is still not foreseeable, concrete future plans regarding the primary school in Saysa Morn have been put on hold for the time being. In addition to the Covid-19 pandemic, seasonal flooding also regularly causes the school to close. The time off from school is therefore being used to complete the already planned 50-metre-long school fence and to fill the school grounds with an estimated 450 truckloads of earth. Both serve the purpose of making the school accessible during the rainy season. However, the greening of the school grounds, which is also planned, can only take place when regular school activities are resumed. The cultivation of green areas requires continuous maintenance, which is currently impossible due to the absence of most of the school staff because of the pandemic.

Photographs



Front view of Primary School in Saysia Morn



The deceleration of school operations provides space for the implementation of planned building projects and the maintenance of the school grounds



Teachers face the challenges of the pandemic and adapt their teaching to the new situation



Especially for poorer children from remote villages, social contact with classmates is invaluable

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you very much for your support and trust. Together we have been and continue to be able to make a significant impact on the lives of many children.

Thank you very much!

Chiang Mai, 30. June 2021

Child's Dream Cambodia



Marc T. Jenni
Founder & Managing Director Operations



Daniel M. Siegfried
Founder & Managing Director Programmes