


Remarks
By
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Chair of Education Sector Working Group (ESWG)
UNESCO Representative in Cambodia
At the
Annual Congress on Education, Youth and Sport

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Institute of Technology of Cambodia


*Your Excellency Academician **Dr. SOK An**, Honorable Deputy Prime Minister*
*Your Excellency **Dr. Hang Choun Naron**, Minister of Education, Youth and Sport*
Excellencies Secretaries of State, Lok Chumteav, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, ESWG
Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor and privilege for me to represent the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) at this 2015 Annual Education Congress.

I would like to express ESWG's sincere appreciation to the Royal Government of Cambodia, the leadership of Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and the Education Congress Secretariat for the commitment and dedication in organizing this congress. We also acknowledge the active engagement of all the technical departments of MoEYS, and all the Provincial Offices of Education, Youth and Sport for organizing Provincial Education Congresses as a build up to this national congress. And we want to thank all partners of the Education Sector for their extraordinary support and contribution.

Please allow me to begin my remarks by congratulating Ms. Neang Phalla, the Cambodian Teacher for blind children, for being the Top 10 nominee for the Global Teacher Prize. Ms. Phalla is a Champion and inspiration for Teachers in Cambodia and around the world. Thank you Ms. Phalla for raising the profile of all Cambodian Teachers!

2015 is a landmark year. We will see two global movements: Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals, coming to conclusion. We will also see the beginning of two new commitments: ASEAN Economic Community and the Sustainable Development Goals. Both are going to impact the next 15 years of development efforts nationally, regionally and globally.

The score-card on both MDGs and EFA for Cambodia is very positive. With regards to Education for All, Cambodia stands to achieve all the Goals. We are confident that the National Literacy Campaign 2015 launched by the Samdech Techo Prime Minister on 2nd March, will enable Cambodia to meet the adult literacy goals this year. Also, Cambodia will have further opportunities to contribute to the formulation of Education related post-2015 education agenda and Global Framework for Action at the UNESCO World Education Forum (WEF) in Incheon, Republic of Korea, together with the world leaders in education in May 2015.

Every year the National Education Congress promotes dialogue on the progress achieved in the education sector and on strategic interventions for quality and equity of education. This Congress is one of the key national forums for Cambodia to review achievements and challenges, particularly where we stand in terms of annual targets of the Education Strategic Plan 2014 – 2018 as well as on issues of national, regional and international educational interests for Cambodia.

Your Excellency Deputy Prime Minister, Excellency Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to share with you some reflections based on the open and constructive dialogue we have had during the past year noting some of the highlights of progress made and areas that need further attention and efforts:

- First, the Education Strategic Plan (ESP, 2014 – 18) was officially launched in March 2014. The ESP was developed by the Ministry and engaged national and sub-national level stakeholders and partners; this process demonstrated the Ministry's enhanced capacity in educational planning. We congratulate all the Sub-Sector Leaderships for taking the lead, building ownership and being accountable for joint activities to respond to the overall and sub-sector planning approach.
- Second, the ESWG congratulates the Ministry to have undertaken some in-depth education reforms. Amongst them, ESWG wishes to highlight the successful implementation of the Grade 12 Examination Administration Reform in 2014. This reform has already revived the focus on quality of education, and sends a clear message to students, parents and teachers that there are no short-cuts to teaching and learning, and that corruption cannot be a part of assessment. We need to build on the lessons learnt from last year to improve the quality of curriculum, learning materials, quality assessment tool and enhance support to students in core subjects through allocation of sufficient number of qualified and trained teachers and learning materials.
- Other major reforms which will bring positive outcomes in the coming years are: launch of the National Action Plan on Early Childhood Care and Development and its implementation mechanisms, the continued increase of the National Budget for Education in 2014 and 2015 accompanied by public financial management reforms resulting in changes in the mode salary payments, increased school operating budget, clearer budgeting and budget execution, launching of the Ministry Financial Management Information System, approval of the increase of Teachers' salaries and functional and hardship allowances, scholarships, the adoption of the Higher Education Vision 2030, the approval of Teacher Policy Action Plan (TPAP), establishment of the Education Research Council (ERC) and establishment of the National Youth Council.
- Third, the ESWG congratulates the Ministry for the successful launch of the national literacy campaign, presided over by the Prime Minister on 02 March 2015. This Campaign aims to make 92,125 Cambodian adults, majority women literate, enabling Cambodia to achieve the Education for All – Adult Literacy Goal of 84.4% by the end of 2015. Launching the Campaign and calculating the numbers was the easy part. Now the

task at hand is to ensure that these classes run as planned. As advised by Samdech Prime Minister, entire Cambodian society, government, civil society, development partners and the private sector including the Garment industry needs to support this campaign to ensure that Cambodia meets these goals.

- Fourth, we support the efforts of the Ministry to establish internal and external quality assurance (EQA) in Higher Education. We are confident that this year will mark the start of the institutional accreditation process as well as implementation of the reform recommendations as outlined in the Higher Education Reform 2015-2018 paper. The reform needs to address the challenges that university graduates do not have the right skills, students are being enrolled in oversupplied fields of study, there are a limited number of internationally accepted research publications, and under-spending in higher education.
- Fifth, we appreciate and support the ministry's efforts in curriculum review as one of the top priorities. The curriculum is at the center of the education system. The curriculum reform should focus on development of knowledge and critical thinking skills, as well as life skills including technical and vocational skills, and the improvement of maths and sciences teaching in general to contribute to the achievement of the national vision and the newly approved industrial development policy. ESWG acknowledges that this process is not simple or easy. It requires a clear roadmap including comprehensive review and re-design. It needs to engage all stakeholders including the private sector to have a curriculum that is relevant and that can be supported by a range of learning options. We believe that better coordination in this field among different authorities and stakeholders is essential. The increasing collaboration efforts between the MoEYS and the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training to address the gaps of technical and vocational skills for youth in schools and out of schools are very encouraging. Joint elaboration and implementation of the Cambodia Qualification Framework (CQF) is an excellent opportunity to improve the relevance of education and to promote technical and vocational skills among the students, particularly at the secondary level, so that the graduates have the skills necessary for the world of work.
- Sixth, we congratulate His Excellency Minister and his MoEYS Team for developing and approving an ambitious Teacher Policy Action Plan, which aims to establish a new vision for the teaching profession in Cambodia, to improve education quality at all school levels, and to raise the status of the teachers both financially and socially. The shortage of qualified and trained teachers, teacher absenteeism, and loss of teaching hours remains critical challenges in education. We also note that the number of primary school teachers in the country is reducing rather than increasing. This trend needs to be reversed. Without qualified, trained, supported, committed and motivated teachers, no reform will succeed in improving the quality of learning. Only by making teaching profession attractive, will we be able to attract qualified and motivated people to the teaching profession – this includes salaries, personal and professional incentives and security. We note the ongoing efforts and also understand the challenges. As noted by the UNESCO Director-General, Madam Irina Bokova, *“Teachers have the future of this generation in their hands. No education system is better than its teachers”*; without addressing the teacher issues, quality education will remain a mirage.

- As we speak, both MoEYS and ESWG are currently conducting the annual joint-sector review exercise. As part of this review the joint teams are reviewing the performance of each sub-sector, including joint field visits to observe status in the ground. The ESWG is pleased to see impact of reforms and concrete progress at the school levels. At the same time, this review also notes that despite significant efforts, some of the indicators such as completion rates in primary and secondary, drop-outs, particularly at the secondary level are not progressing as much as they should. The ESWG recommends an in-depth analysis of the issues and identify concrete actions to speed-up progress during the coming year.
- In addition, ESWG wishes to congratulate the Government for the development of the National Strategy for Food Security and Nutrition 2014-2018 which constitutes an indispensable prerequisite to accompany the efforts made in the field of Education. As we all know “empty-stomach is not conducive for learning”, the school breakfast program needs to be continued

Your Excellency Deputy Prime Minister, Excellency Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to share with you a story. This is a story of a country, where all children despite their origins and disabilities are enrolled and learning in school, at the right age, at the right levels. There is minimum or non-existent repetition or drop-out. Upper secondary completion and graduation is almost 100%; teaching is a highly respected and attractive profession. The graduates from this system are highly sought after nationally, regionally and internationally. This country is an example of peace and harmony, an example of sustainable development with a preserved heritage, flourishing arts and quality crafts, a well-managed tourism, a productive agriculture, competitive technological and creative industries as well as entrepreneurial opportunities flourishing.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen – this is a story of upper middle-income Cambodia 2030. And this story will be possible only if we commit and invest now to transform the education system by addressing the gaps of school quality inputs such as the shortage of teachers in rural schools and surplus teachers in urban schools, shortage of textbooks, libraries and learning and reading materials, and labs for teaching science and information technology. We need to ensure that there are capable and adequate school staffs in the provinces and districts to be able to use these school quality inputs properly.

Your Excellency Deputy Prime Minister, Excellency Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am confident that the active, open and constructive discussions during these 3 days will inspire all of us to think innovatively about the changes needed at every level of education. Together with the ESWG colleagues, I am looking forward to active participation by all in the group discussions resulting in concrete and achievable steps for the next year.

On behalf of the ESWG I would like to once again express our sincere appreciation and thanks to you, Your Excellency Deputy Prime Minister, for your support to the human capital development needed for the inclusive and sustainable development of Cambodia. We thank Excellency Minister and his Senior Leadership Team of the Ministry, Technical Departments and Institutions and the Provincial Offices of Education for their partnership and dialogue. The ESWG takes this opportunity to reiterate our continued support to the Royal Government of Cambodia and to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport under the committed and inspiring leadership of His Excellency Minister, **Dr. Hang Chuon Naron**.

My best wishes for very engaging discussions and a successful congress.

Thank You.