

## SECTOR ASSESSMENT (SUMMARY): EDUCATION

### 1. Sector Performance, Problems, and Opportunities

1. **Key achievements.** Cambodia has come a long way in rebuilding its education system since the 1980s. The intensive efforts to improve access to education led to the achievement of goal 2 of the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals on universal access to primary education.<sup>1</sup> The net enrollment rate for primary education reached 97.8% (92.9% for female students) in school year (SY) 2017–2018 (beginning in November and ending in August) from a low of 78.0% in SY1997–1998. Gender disparity in enrollment is therefore no longer an issue at the primary level. High primary enrollment and completion rates have contributed to a higher lower secondary enrollment rate. Total gross enrollment for SY2016/17, including private school enrollment, was 63.0% for lower secondary education (63.4% female).<sup>2</sup> At the tertiary level, the number of higher education institutions has increased from 100 in SY 2012/13 to 121 currently, of which 48 are public, with about 250,000 students enrolled. The number of students pursuing a bachelor's degree has reached 174,142 (46% female), a significant increase from 75,986 (33% female) in SY 2005/06. This increase can be partly attributed to the government's financial support to disadvantaged youth, including through scholarships and stipends.

2. **Sector financing.** The budget of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) as a share of the total national budget increased from 15.5% in 2013 to 18.3% in 2016. However, subnational capacity constraints, especially at the school level, and inefficient processes in terms of budget formulation and execution resulted in total spending of only 94% of the MoEYS budget in 2016, down 0.3 percentage points from 2015 levels. The MoEYS introduced the full program budget (called the School Operating Budget) in 2015 to increase budget allocation to schools and allow them to flexibly respond to their needs and meet their targets. The School Operating Budgets are prepared based on the size of schools and student enrollment. Public expenditure on salaries and allowances reached 81% in 2017 because of the increase in teacher salaries starting in September 2013.

3. Despite its achievements, the education system has not kept up with the increased demand for a skilled workforce as a result of rapid economic growth and diversification. Skills gaps have widened.<sup>3</sup> Cambodia's education system still faces many binding constraints, including inequitable access to school; low quality and relevance; and weak institutional capacity to plan, deliver, and manage education services.

4. **Low access and internal efficiency.** Persistent performance gaps in upper secondary education (USE) constrain both the education sector and the economy's medium-term growth potential. In SY2016/17, only one of four upper secondary-aged youth (26.7% female) was enrolled at the upper secondary level. The high dropout rate of 18% (17% female) and the low completion rate of 21% (24% female) are worse in rural areas and relatively high in ethnic minority communities, and boys are dropping out at a rate almost 3 percentage points higher than girls.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF Cambodia. 2009. Millennium Development Goals. [https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/overview\\_13102.html](https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/overview_13102.html). (accessed June 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Government of Cambodia, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS). Education Management and Information System, SY2016/17; and Government of Cambodia, MoEYS. 2017. *Education Congress Report*. Phnom Penh. In the 1990s, the enrollment rate was 14% at the lower secondary level and 9% at the upper secondary level.

<sup>3</sup> Asian Development Bank (ADB) and International Labour Organization. 2015. *Cambodia: Addressing the Skills Gap. Employment Diagnostic Study*. Manila.

<sup>4</sup> Government of Cambodia, MoEYS; Department of Planning. 2017. Education Management Information System. Phnom Penh. Upper secondary dropout rate: 19.7% (male), 17.0% (female), and 19.7% (rural areas).

The promotion rate from grade 11 to 12 in SY2016/17 was 93.1% (94.2% female), while the grade 12 passing rate was only 62% (footnote2. Education and economic opportunities for the rural poor and those in remote areas, where indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities predominate, remain constrained. Research shows that many students leave upper secondary school with insufficient content, cognitive, trade, and workplace skills to meet expectations of employers.<sup>5</sup>

5. Low participation and high dropout rates at the upper secondary level are attributed to both demand- and supply-side constraints. On the demand side, the high opportunity cost of schooling is a disincentive to school attendance, especially for poor students. The economic pressures on household resources because of direct or indirect costs and foregone income affect the decision to either attend or drop out of school. Supply-side constraints include a shortage of qualified teachers—especially in rural and remote areas because of difficult teaching and living conditions—which discourages student attendance. Many upper secondary schools in rural provinces are either too far from home, overcrowded, or in a state of disrepair, or they lack water supply and sanitation; many communes do not have an upper secondary school facility.

7. **Lack of qualified teachers.** The shortage of qualified teachers—including specialized USE subject teachers—impedes the improvement of USE outcomes. Despite notable preservice teacher training improvements, there are still gaps in USE teachers' content mastery and knowledge of effective pedagogy to improve student learning and interest. Incumbent teachers and teacher educators have limited professional development opportunities to upgrade their pedagogical content knowledge. Additionally, the teaching profession does not attract top graduates. Teacher deployment is a challenge, with fewer qualified teachers, especially women, in disadvantaged areas. The proportion of women teachers in USE remains low at 39% overall, with 43% in urban areas and 37% in rural areas, and 31% in secondary resource schools. Even fewer women teach physics, math, and information and communications technology (ICT).<sup>6</sup> The first Upper Secondary Education Sector Development Program (USESDP 1) supported a comprehensive teacher policy, which provides broad directions to reform teacher recruitment, training, and development.<sup>7</sup> However, concrete policy reforms to increase teachers' qualifications through continuous professional development, recognition of teacher's prior learning, and a well-defined teacher career pathway system that links professional development and experience to promotion have yet to be implemented.

8. **Low quality and relevance of standards, curriculum, and assessment.** Minimum service standards for basic inputs such as laboratories, workshops, and equipment are critical to teaching and learning specialized USE subjects. The absence of a clear policy on these standards exacerbates inequities in teaching and learning quality across Cambodia's upper secondary schools. Limitations in the use of innovative teaching strategies, organization of resources, and regular review of curriculum content and its alignment to the skills needs of students and the labor market hamper the full implementation of the K-12 curriculum. The absence of a learner assessment framework to measure student learning, identify least learned skills, and analyze underlying factors affecting poor learning outcomes precludes improvements in content and pedagogy. The USE system has no strong links to private sector partners that could improve labor market relevance. USE students have limited access to opportunities for experiential learning, career guidance, and additional learning resources because of their minimal engagement with

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<sup>5</sup> S. Madhur. 2014. Cambodia's Skill Gap: An Anatomy of Issues and Policy Options. *Cambodia Development Research Institute Working Paper Series*. No. 98. Phnom Penh: Cambodia Development Research Institute.

<sup>6</sup> Data for SY2016/17 from the MoEYS' Education Management Information System for grades 10–12, including USE levels, is included in the Social and Poverty Analysis (accessible from the list of linked documents in Appendix 2 of the report and recommendation of the President).

<sup>7</sup> ADB. [Cambodia: Upper Secondary Education Sector Development Program](#).

industry and local businesses. The MoEYS recognizes the need to use ICT in teaching and learning. However, the government has yet to prepare a clear implementation plan to inform related investment and training.

9. **Weak institutional capacity to plan, deliver, and manage education services.** Poor capacity of upper secondary school managers to provide instructional support to teachers and regularly assess and give feedback on their performance impedes the potential for student learning and achievement. The limited engagement of school directors hampers the preparation, implementation, and tracking of school improvement plans. Limited monitoring of plan implementation precludes the efficient use and allocation of resources. Inadequate budget for USE results in a lack of critical resources for upgrading students' proficiency in specialized USE subjects. In general, schools have limited capacity to effectively mainstream gender in education. A clear human resource development plan that improves secondary school teachers' qualifications can also improve resource allocation and management accountability.

## 2. Government's Sector Strategy

10. **National development plans.** The government places a high priority on education and skills development as part of Cambodia's Rectangular Strategy for Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency (Phase III); the National Strategic Development Plan, 2014–2018; and the Industrial Development Policy, 2015–2025. The government particularly prioritizes the development of human resources to promote competitiveness in an increasingly open regional labor market. It hopes to achieve this by (i) training skilled and productive labor to meet market demand and increase the value added of commodities and services; (ii) strengthening education institutions and developing regulatory frameworks; (iii) promoting scientific research, technology development, and innovation; and (iv) encouraging private sector engagement in the development of the education sector.<sup>8</sup>

11. **Education sector strategies.** The MoEYS Education Strategic Plan, 2014–2018 aims to realize the government's vision of a knowledge-based society. The MoEYS, with support from its development partners, is in the process of formulating a 2030 education vision to serve as the overall guiding framework for policy direction and investment in education. It will also start preparing the Education Strategic Plan, 2019–2023. The government's national development plans, the education strategic plans, and the 2030 education vision serve as the policy frameworks and road maps for engagement with the government on education in the medium to long term. These will also underpin the preparation of the medium-term budget or investment plan of the government in education, including in USE from 2019.

12. To address the lack of qualified teachers, the MoEYS launched a comprehensive teacher policy to attract competent teachers into the teaching profession; ensure the quality of pre- and in-service teacher training as well as professional development; and ensure the necessary conditions for teachers to effectively perform their functions. The MoEYS developed the Policy Framework for Teacher Career Pathways, which serves as the guiding document for teacher development, to operationalize this policy. The government will be allocating budgetary resources

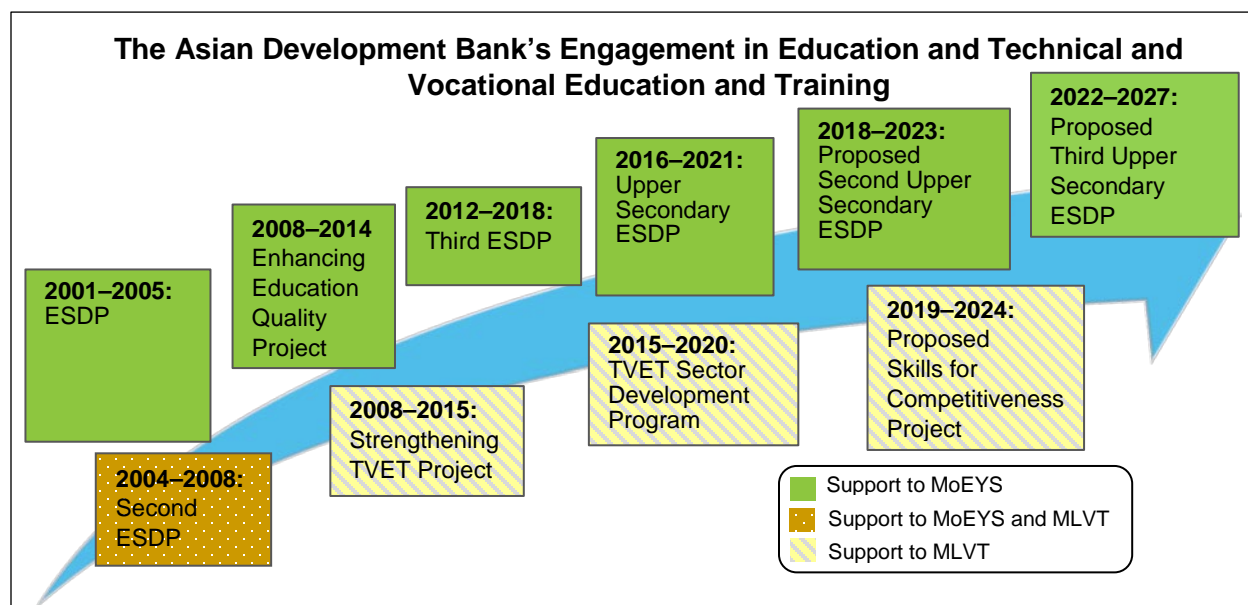
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<sup>8</sup> The Industrial Development Policy's priority industry sectors include (i) new industry or manufacturing ventures in consumer products; machinery assembly; equipment and automotive assembly; and natural resource processing; (ii) small and medium-sized enterprises in all sectors, but especially drug and medical equipment production, construction materials, packaging equipment, and furniture manufacturing; (iii) agro-industrial production; (iv) support industries for the agriculture, tourism, and textile sectors; and (v) industries of future strategic importance, including information technology and telecommunications, energy, heavy industry, handicrafts, and green technology.

to implement the action plan, and development partners have committed their support for its implementation. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is integrating elements of the action plan into its programs, projects, technical assistance, and policy support initiatives in education.

### 3. ADB Sector Experience and Assistance Program

13. As one of the lead development partners in education, ADB has supported education and skills development in Cambodia through sector development programs, investment loans, technical assistance grants, policy and advisory support, and knowledge products (Figure 1).



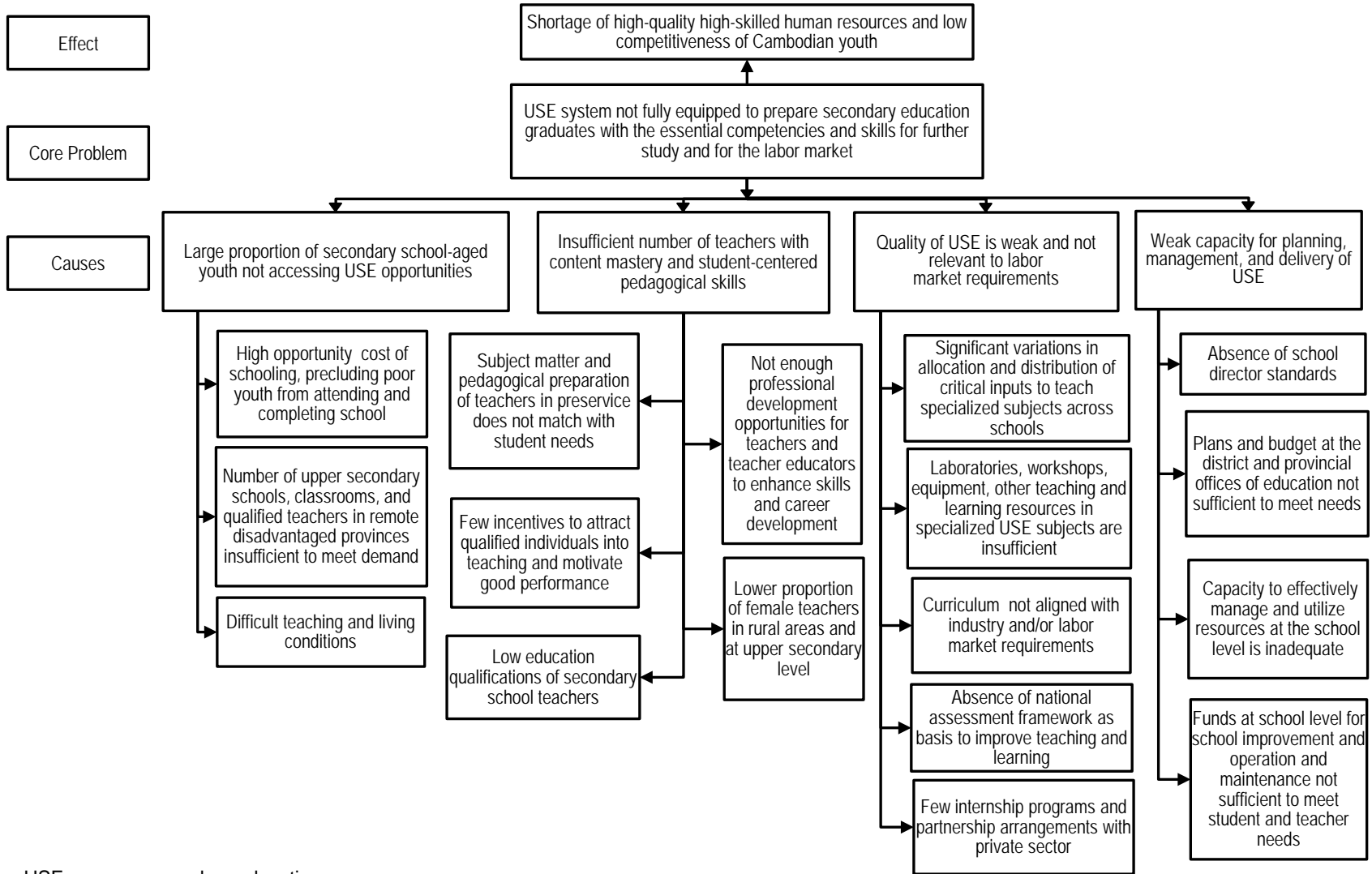
ESDP = Education Sector Development Program; MLVT = Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training; MOEYS = Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport; TVET = technical and vocational education and training.

Source: Asian Development Bank.

14. Aligned with the government priority to address USE, ADB approved USESDP 1 in September 2016. USESDP 1 supported policies to improve access, and provided support to key reforms to improve quality, relevance, and management capacity, including the development of the comprehensive teacher policy and curriculum framework for general and technical education, and the strengthening of science, technology, engineering, and math education. It also supported the updating of the Education Strategic Plan, 2014–2018. USESDP 1 activities included providing scholarships for students, teacher housing units, and a hardship allowance; constructing upper secondary classrooms; providing textbooks and teachers' guides; delivering teacher training on career guidance; providing a school improvement fund; and delivering professional development for teachers and teacher educators in science, math, and ICT.

15. Lessons from previous engagement showed that the reforms will take time to implement and show their development impact. ADB's USE engagement involves strategically sequenced support in the medium to long term to establish the reforms and enable them to show results. To enhance the impact on learning outcomes, the reforms on quality, relevance, and management capacity need to be immediately followed by reforms under USESDP 2. A third phase of support for USE in 2022 will address the remaining gaps to further improve learning outcomes and students' employability. Indicative areas will include reforms to enhance adaptation to the skills and knowledge needed in the 21st century. These reforms will include innovations and enhanced linkages with technical and vocational education and training and higher education.

**Problem Tree for Education**



USE = upper secondary education.  
 Source: Asian Development Bank.