

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT
ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT



**Beacon
Schools
Initiative**

27-30 November

2013

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1. Purpose of the Report

Through conducting the evaluation of the Beacon Schools Initiative (BSI), implemented by partner organisation Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE), Oaktree aimed to generate a better understanding of:

- 1) The priorities within the project for key stakeholders;
- 2) The key stakeholders' perceptions of progress, impact and significant change; and
- 3) The challenges and aspects of the project in most need of improvement.

The intended purpose of this evaluation report is for Oaktree, KAPE and school staff to better understand the experiences of the projects' primary stakeholders and to draw conclusions from this which will inform the transition to school management in a post-project environment, as well as future replications of the BSI model. The findings may also prove useful for promoting the project's strengths and achievements to both Oaktree and KAPE's supporters.

2. Executive Summary

Evaluation Approach

In November 2013, Oaktree sent a three-person team to evaluate the Beacon Schools Initiative in Kampong Cham, Cambodia. One day was spent at each of the BSI target schools. This visit was particularly significant in evaluating priorities, impacts and challenges during the project's third year of implementation, as well as providing a space for discussion of the potential extension of the partnership. This was Oaktree's third monitoring and evaluation visit of BSI, following trips in October 2011 and October 2012.

Findings

Overall the Beacon Schools Initiative has achieved remarkable success in improving both access to and the quality of education in the three target schools. Improvements to the physical school environments have contributed to a positive turnaround in the schools' reputations. Significant shifts in attitudes, confidence and levels of engagement have been fostered in students, teachers and parents, challenging traditional views of learning. Many poor families in Kampong Cham are more committed and are also in better positions to access education through the provision of scholarships and free schooling.

Outcomes have differed at each school as a result of their unique contexts. Sustaining the changes BSI aims to achieve seems to be most effective in contexts where dedicated school management has strong relations with teachers and parents, and with school communities which demonstrate openness to innovation and mixed socioeconomic backgrounds.

Recommendations

Many teachers and students demonstrate increased commitment to education and now place priority on gaining additional support to further build upon their knowledge and skills. Disparity remains in students' access to the new services and facilities introduced by the project which should be addressed and monitored. It is now crucial, as the project enters its final year, to build the schools' capacities for effective self-management. Future replications of the model should strategically take into consideration the lessons learnt from this initial and overall outstanding first trial of BSI which has succeeded in transforming these schools in many respects into 'beacons' of excellence.

3. Project Description

In partnership with Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE), Oaktree funds the lower secondary school aspect of the 'Beacon Schools Initiative' (BSI). This project commenced in January 2011 and is currently expected to finish in September 2014. Through this initiative, in the rural province of Kampong Cham, three public secondary schools have been transformed with the hope of becoming 'beacons' or examples of educational excellence for other schools in Cambodia to replicate. The focus of BSI is on improving both **access** to education and the **quality** of education. The key elements of the initiative are renovations of physical infrastructure and the school environment; instalment of state of the art ICT facilities; provision of scholarships; promotion of constructivist learning, teacher capacity building and a shift away from traditional rote learning; student engagement in life skills, subject clubs, career counselling and student councils; and the establishment of an Oversight Board.

This is all done through a model of **public-private partnership**, with KAPE working alongside the government, to promote systemic change within the public education sector. The aim of this model is to provide disadvantaged children of Kampong Cham with the opportunity to benefit from a standard of educational quality comparable with the private school system, in a way that is affordable, accessible and responsive to the needs of their community.

4. Methodology

The evaluation was conducted by Kim Ho (BSI Partnership Manager), Sara Gingold (GEI Partnership Manager) and Tory Norris (Cambodia Country Director), with assistance from an English-Khmer translator, Chan Leaphy Phuong, who was local to Kampong Cham and external to KAPE. The team gathered information and data through engagement with the project's key stakeholders: students, teachers, parents, School Directors, members of a Local School Management Committee (LSMC) and KAPE staff.

2013 is the first year in which Oaktree has incorporated a participatory approach into our evaluations, in addition to traditional techniques such as interviews and surveys. "Participatory Action Research" or "PAR" is being used more widely in the international development sector, aiming to enable community voices to be more directly heard and for them to feel a greater sense of connection to the project and recommendations for improvement.

Oaktree incorporated participatory activities into the evaluation of BSI to firstly connect with stakeholders in diverse modes of communication, particularly through visual representations given language and literacy barriers. Secondly, in an endeavour to share learnings with the project's stakeholders: avoiding taking away data for merely our own analysis, and instead allowing the participants to share and collectively reflect on the results.



The participatory activities used to evaluate BSI included students' drawings of most significant change to see the influence of school on their lives; and school mapping to view infrastructural changes through students' eyes. Oaktree has found that this methodology, incorporating both traditional and participatory techniques to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data, has been effective. However, the time in which we had to execute this was limited. Oaktree are keen to receive KAPE's feedback on this approach. For full details on the methodology used, please refer to: 'Oaktree BSI Evaluation 2013- Detailed Methodology' and 'Final Presentation'.

5. Results and Findings for Key Evaluation Questions

This section of the report aims to summarise the data collected from the project's key stakeholders and present their experiences, opinions and suggestions as true to their own words and own voices as possible. The evaluators' analysis and conclusions drawn from this will be outlined in the subsequent sections of the report.

5.1 QUESTION ONE: What are the priorities within the project for key stakeholders?

5.1.A SKUN HIGH SCHOOL

Students

In a 'Ranking and Evaluating' activity, 16 students at Skun High School (seven girls, nine boys), were given the opportunity to vote (three votes each) for the areas which they feel are most important to their learning and growth. The results:

1. Teachers who are engaging and interactive (14 votes)
2. Subject clubs (9 votes)
3. Computers and electronic tablets (7 votes)
4. Student council (7 votes)
5. Career counselling (4 votes)
6. Project work (4 votes)
7. Life skills (2 votes)
8. Excursions (1 vote)

The Skun students spoke very highly of their **teachers** with a significant number of positive comments, including, "Many teachers motivate me to come to learn even though my parents try to stop me from coming to school" and "Teachers in my school encourage me as well as other students to study and feel confident to express our ideas."

The students' comments indicated that **subject clubs** were very popular as they provide opportunities for learning with and from friends, sharing knowledge, supporting one another, and building their understanding and confidence in subjects they feel weak in,

The importance of **computers and electronic tablets** was also ranked highly by students, who felt it aids their study. For example, one student stated that, "I try to manage my time to learn because nowadays, it is easy to get a job or study if you know how to use the computer." Two of the 14 students had not accessed a computer or electronic tablet before at Skun.

The students at Skun felt the **student council** encouraged all students to work together, learn about school updates, and participate in activities to improve the school such as keeping the environment clean.

Many students valued **career counselling**, saying they discuss their future aspirations with teachers and peers, which helps them to think in advance about their careers. However, four students had never heard of or received any career counselling.



Despite **life skills** not ranking as a high priority for these students, their comments suggest that life skills are in fact valued and useful in their everyday lives. Students enjoy learning how to grow vegetables and raise fish as they can cook what is grown, apply these skills at home, and make money. However, not all students currently access training.

Ten of the 16 students had participated in an **excursion** and greatly enjoyed the experience: "Once I went to visit a school then brought back and share with my friends and community some activities to improve my school." Students appreciate the chance to learn about the history of sites, meet new people and bring back ideas.

Teachers

The teachers at Skun explained that training and **career development** has had an immense impact on their teaching and that it is now the most important form of support for them moving forwards. Many teachers aspire to study at university to further their qualifications and advocated for additional training from KAPE to learn new teaching techniques which they can share with others, 'We would like KAPE's support because we are moving forward in our work and this is not the last step for us.' A number of the teachers wanted to see their students able to compete and converse with others across the region for **ASEAN Integration** in 2015. From the evaluators' view this suggests great success to date and a practical way that KAPE can continue to support teachers and influence ways of teaching at Skun moving forward.

5.1.B SAMDECH MAE SCHOOL

Students

At Samdech Mae School 15 students took part in the 'Ranking and Evaluating' activity (ten girls, five boys - no scholarship recipients, all student council members), with the following results:

1. Career counselling (9 votes)
2. Subject clubs (8 votes)
3. Project work (6 votes)
4. Life skills (5 votes)
5. Excursions (5 votes)
6. Engaging and interactive teachers (5 votes)
7. Scholarships (4 votes)
8. Student council (3 votes)

Career counselling was voted as the highest priority for students at Samdech Mae, although comments revealed that only one third of the students in the group had accessed it before.

Comments ranged from: 'I have discussed this many times with my teachers who advised me to choose the career based on my capacity', to 'I am not interested because I don't understand'. This demonstrates a real disparity in students' real experiences with career counselling, despite it being so important to them.

As in Skun, **subject clubs** were seen as very important and useful to the students of Samdech Mae, with all 15 students engaging in one or two subject clubs.

All the students had received **life skills** training from their teachers, although participation ranged from 'rarely' to 'every week'. Two of the 15 students referred to application of these skills: growing vegetables at home and raising chickens to 'earn money to support my study'.

It was great to see that two-thirds of the students in this group had been on an **excursion** to various places and spoke very positively about this. Students were excited, felt they learnt a lot and wanted to visit more places.

The importance of interactive **teachers** was not ranked highly by Samdech Mae students. However, all comments reflected positive experiences such as, 'Most of the teachers in this school are good, they try to explain lessons and convince drop out students to come back.'

The **student council** was ranked least important to the students, although their comments were predominantly positive such as, 'I am proud to be a member in the student council because I think it is a good model to be a good person in the society.'

Local School Management Committee (LSMC)

The primary priorities for the LSMC this year, as identified by three members of the committee, were implementing **infrastructural changes**, such as **extending the fence** around the school to prevent students from leaving during school hours. The LSMC described an issue in which students miss class, lack confidence to keep up, and thus continue to avoid class. The LSMC see greater security as a way to prevent this. Counter to this, some students are reportedly breaking parts of the fence, frustrated that they are not allowed to go outside.

The LSMC are focused on creating a good environment, beautiful garden, sports field and extending the library. The committee also constructed a new flagpole and installed concrete, however, this has put them into debt which they currently still hold.

The LSMC has just begun to focus on how to attract students to the school and think this should involve **greater interaction with the community**. The LSMC aims to increase parents' understanding that children can gain knowledge at school, such as life skills, which they can bring home and will assist them to get a good job in the future. While we asked the LSMC about deeper engagement with students, the members provided little information around this.

Parents

The parents of students at Samdech Mae School felt that a good school should have safety, strong commitment from the school Board, and good relationships between the School Director and teachers, as well as between the teachers.

The parents emphasised the importance of well-performing teachers, who pay full attention and treat all students equally. A major concern they held was around **teachers' salaries**, understanding that if salaries were higher teachers would have stronger commitment to teaching. They believe the amount teachers receive is disproportionate to the value of their work, resulting in teachers charging informal fees which the parents struggle to afford.

Parents believed education was important in order to be independent and get a **good job in the future**. They think children should learn to be confident and respect their elders, and that teachers should strive to use methodologies to transfer not only knowledge to students but also lessons on **morality** and social life. They believe life skills, for example, is very useful.

This group of parents advocated for more English and technology classes. They suggested that ongoing support from an NGO could be directed towards **encouraging students to pursue further education at university**, with one father stating that 'If an NGO supports us all my children and the other children will be outstanding students.'

5.1.C DEMONSTRATION SCHOOL

Students

At the Demonstration School 15 students took part in the 'Ranking and Evaluating' activity (eight girls, seven boys, three student council members, six scholarship recipients), with these results:

1. Scholarships (11 votes)
2. Subject clubs (10 votes)
3. Career counselling (6 votes)
4. Computers (6 votes)
5. Teachers (4 votes)
6. Excursions (4 votes)
7. Life skills (2 votes)
8. Project work (2 votes)
9. Student council (0 votes)

Students place a high priority on **scholarships** and supporting the poor. Nine of the 15 students were not on scholarships, yet understand their value. For example, 'Scholarship is very important for me because it provides chances for poor students to study; the scholarship includes bike, books, uniform, money and other materials so they will not drop out of school'.

The students spoke enthusiastically about **subject clubs** as second most important to them, 'strong students help the weak; they can learn and share what they know.' Students commented on a great range of opportunities: 'such as poetry and story writing' and learning about social events. However, six of the 15 students had never joined a subject club before.

It appears **career counselling** is a service students rank highly, but which in reality only one of the students has had access to. Students' comments ranged from 'Even though I have never got counselled, I think it is very helpful for me to choose a suitable job' to 'I think that I would learn nothing from career counselling. It is useless.'

Life skills only received two votes from students, despite the majority of students feeling like: 'To learn how to raise the chicken, duck, pig is so helpful because I can earn some money to support my family'. Four of the students had never been involved in life skills.

The **student council** received zero votes at the Demonstration School, with the majority of comments reflecting limited or poor experiences with the student council such as: 'It is really good idea, but in my school they care only for their friends in the group not for all students. It is bad' and 'I think student council is not useful for me, I feel I get nothing from that.' This indicates that the benefits of the student council are not equally experienced amongst students and assessing the current structure may be useful.

Teachers

A group of 12 teachers at the Demonstration School were given the opportunity to vote (three votes each) for which areas of KAPE support they feel are most important. In particular this was used to consider what teachers would like their school to continue to invest in beyond the involvement of BSI. The results:

1. Teacher training (10 votes)
2. Performance-based pay (8 votes)
3. Career development (7 votes)
4. New teaching materials (6 votes)
5. Goal setting (4 votes)
6. Monthly curriculum meetings (1 vote)
7. Subject class (0 votes)

School Directors

The School Director and Deputy Director at the Demonstration School (who will henceforth be referred to as the 'school directors') are currently working to **build good relationships and support from the community** and increase confidence in the school. They believe that consolidating this relationship entails strengthening school discipline and ensuring teachers are adequately trained.

A key consideration for the school directors this year is possible **expansion of the school to year 10**. The school directors view the first priority in regards to this expansion as supporting **teachers' career development**, asking them to attend university in Phnom Penh to be qualified to teach their respective disciplines at year 10 level.

The second issue in their view is the **lack of classrooms**, as space is only currently adequate for students up to year 9 through sharing classrooms with the primary school. In order to create additional classes for year 10 the school directors must wait for permission from the Ministry.

The third challenge is the **lack of funding** to run the school. The school directors understand that the Ministry's policy states that basic education (grades 1 to 9) must be free, and 'next year from year ten the policy of the Ministry is to charge fees'. The school directors are not comfortable to charge fees, understanding that most students are from poor families.

5.2 QUESTION TWO: What are the key stakeholders' perceptions of progress, impact and significant change?

The following sections will be grouped thematically with reference to stakeholders' views.

5.2.A SKUN HIGH SCHOOL

Infrastructural & environmental changes

Many Skun **students** stated that they enjoy attending school because it is 'the best school' with good teachers, clean classrooms, science lab, large library, life skills farm, and the new infirmary. The students appreciate the new toilets, and the green garden for student relaxation, believing their school is now beautiful which attracts them to come every day.

The **School Director** is pleased with the renovations supported by KAPE with four subject classrooms for Khmer, Maths, Science and Sociology. The school plans to renovate the remaining classrooms, following KAPE's example. Thanks to the commitment of the School Director and the encouragement of KAPE, the school can have responsibility and ownership over this process to ensure future sustainability in management and funding.

Performance-based pay

The **teachers** we spoke to at Skun were very pleased to receive extra pay. One teacher had already made \$100 from running science experiments and was excited to receive KAPE's training on 'the easiest way to teach'. Teachers are now creating materials from things such as water bottles. Performance-based pay 'is a good system and it works'. The teachers see these extra activities as benefiting not only themselves, but also the school and the next generation.

Uniform

The **teachers** are very proud to wear their uniform, as it creates equality amongst the teachers and school directors. 'Before students can evaluate teachers and tell if they are from rich or poor families because of their clothes', but now all teachers feel more equal and professional.

Interactive learning

Teachers now feel far more confident in engaging students after receiving training in life skills, subject class and project work. One teacher said, 'Before KAPE my classes were simple and I didn't do any visual activities. After KAPE provided training I felt excited to see the experiments and now when I open the laboratory my students rush inside.' *Refer to section 1 of 'Image 1'.*

Use of computers and technology in teaching

The **teachers** sometimes use the three tablets provided by KAPE and are happy that there are programs for all subjects, except moral civics. 'Tablets attract more students because they can play and learn at the same time'. Oaktree witnessed many students using tablets together in the library in their free time. Teachers are unsure how to fix problems with the tablets, which suggests a need for training in maintaining the equipment. *Refer to section 2 of 'Image 1'.*

Career path development and goal setting

The **teachers** have become inspired to pursue study at university in their specialities, and to also build their IT and English skills. Teachers study actively and 'When we meet with NGOs this makes us want to be more active and have more goals'. *Refer to section 5 of 'Image 1'.*

Participation in school decision-making processes

Teachers feel that 'Since receiving KAPE's support we decided that we need to improve the school and want to be involved in the decision making'. The school director calls meetings with teachers when a decision needs to be made, indicating a high level of engagement and feelings of participation from the teachers. *Refer to section 6 of 'Image 1'.*

Community & parent engagement

Teachers feel they are more confident in engaging with parents, however, that this remains the area they have progressed in least. Teachers engage with parents through home visits or phone calls when students are experiencing problems. Teachers deliver reports to homes for a few students per class to show students' progress and seek parents' feedback, particularly for female students. As a result of teachers' home visits, some students have been able to return to school. Oaktree view this as a huge success. Many students, beyond the school's capacity, want to enrol at Skun and transfer from other schools despite living far away. On Sundays, students come for extra classes, one of which is free. *Refer to section 7 of 'Image 1'.*

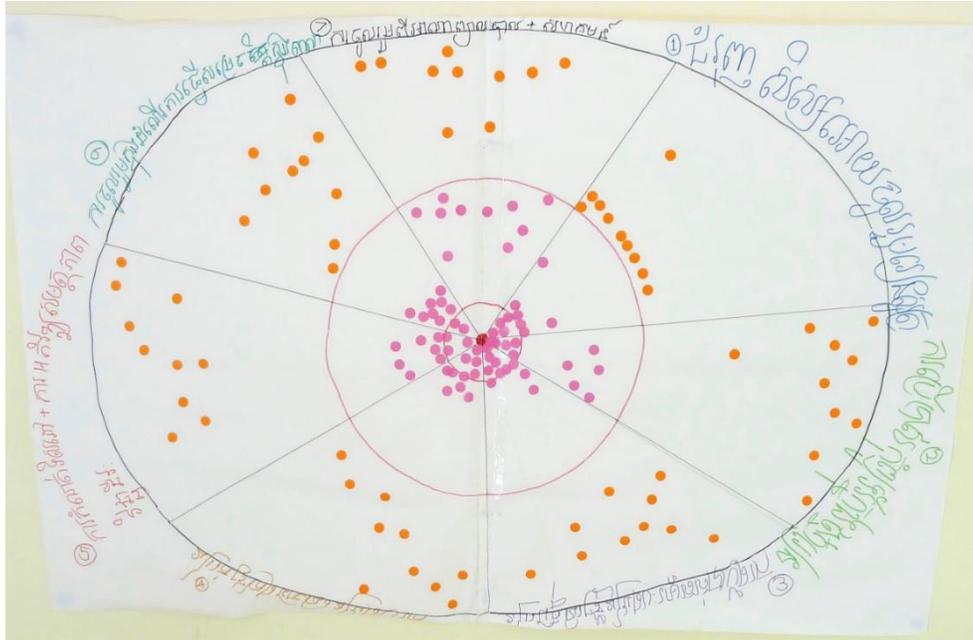


Image 1: Skun Teachers' Bullseye Activity: Teachers' self-assessment of the growth in their skills and confidence (orange=prior to KAPE's support, pink=currently)

- Section 1. Levels of student engagement and participation in their classes
- Section 2. Use of technology in teaching
- Section 3. Use of new teaching materials and subject classrooms
- Section 4. Teaching outside the classroom
- Section 5. Career path development and goal setting
- Section 6. Participation in school decision-making processes
- Section 7. Engagement with parents and the community

5.2.B SAMDECH MAE SCHOOL

Infrastructural & environmental changes

Some **students** at Samdech Mae School feel that a lot has improved about their school, particularly the environment. Previously the school was polluted with piles of waste which impacted on students' health. The students feel that the library is helpful to do research; the science lab allows them to see things, rather than simply reading; and the flag pole is very important for all students to come together and hear updates each morning.

The **LSMC** believed that funding from KAPE has been most important, as they often try to raise funds from parents but find this very difficult. The funding has enabled many changes in the school including the new building and good environment which the students keep clean.

Interactive learning

A good teacher was described by many students as one 'who always gives good advice', and many advocated for more study materials. This suggests scope for teachers to be supported in providing more advice and careers counselling. One **student** proudly explained that since

starting secondary school he has become actively involved in activities like group discussions and creating small study groups in his free time.

Scholarships

The **LSMC** state that the process of scholarship distribution has become more open involving KAPE and the LSMC, not only teachers. The poorest families among the poor are selected, and KAPE staff will observe homes again if there is any uncertainty around selection.

Parents value scholarships highly. Some children have told their parents they are interested in continuing their studies at university after graduating from high school and the parents advocated for greater support to achieve this.

Life skills

Some **students** expressed that school has helped them to 'be socialized and stay away from drug addiction and involvement with gangsters' and that 'I can solve problems from what I have learnt'.

Parents listed life skills as a priority. For example, one father has a daughter 'who knows how to raise chickens at home, fish and pig raising is also useful.' This suggests that life skills is a good way to encourage the value of school amongst the Samdech Mae parent community.

Improved teachers' attitudes

The **LSMC** explained that teachers have now become more 'regulated' and come to teach on time. Previously the teachers were divided based on loyalties to the former school director and a culture of individualism existed in which they did not share anything amongst each other. However, now they are beginning to form good relationships.

Parent engagement

The **LSMC** feel that parents have become more confident in teachers, many encouraging their children to finish school and to study at university in Phnom Penh. In one village, an LSMC member spoke of many families sending three of their four children to school, which showed a great emphasis towards education.

Good parent-teacher relationships

The **parents** at Samdech Mae School believed it was helpful having good relationships with their children's teachers. They appreciated that the school always informs them when their children are absent, or when outstanding students are awarded.

5.2.C DEMONSTRATION SCHOOL

Infrastructural & environmental changes

Students at the Demonstration School believe that the good environment, wash stations, and fans in each classroom make their school different from typical public schools, and are happy that the school now has modern materials, a new clean and tidy building equipped with new tables, chairs and windows.

The **School Directors** explained that after the near closure of the school in 2011, the school now has many services unavailable elsewhere and has been able to expand up to year 9 for the first time in history. 'Most public schools don't care about infrastructure, but this school is different because we have NGO support'.

Scholarships

A significant number of **students** expressed appreciation or pride in the Demonstration School for helping the poor and for providing scholarships and access to education for free.

Interactive learning and relevant skills

Students believe their school is exceptional because they have a computer lab where they can learn about the world; a science lab where they can 'be creative'; and a bio-garden where they can grow and share vegetables between all teachers and students. Students feel they gain important skills at school which can apply to real life and help them to be good citizens.

Both younger and older **teachers** felt more confident because they have had the chance to learn new teaching practices. For example, one older teacher visited Wat Bo and saw examples of student leadership and peer learning. This teacher now asks students to discuss topics in groups, write on posters and present to the class, 'Sometimes it is difficult to keep students quiet because they are so eager'. *Refer to section 1 of Image 2.*

Use of computers and technology in teaching

All **teachers** feel that KAPE's training was very helpful, however, many still lack confidence (as many programs are in English) and feel that further training would help. Some teachers play videos and instruct students to search for information, feeling that students find this easier than teachers. One teacher stated that, 'Learning without technology is like walking, and learning with technology is like driving a car. It can give teachers greater confidence and can help students to learn faster.' *Refer to section 2 of Image 2.*

Use of new teaching materials and subject classrooms

All 11 subjects have subject classrooms. **Teachers** feel that the materials can attract students and make class fun, and that KAPE's training has made them more confident and conscious of how to make their classes interesting. *Refer to section 3 of Image 2.*

Teaching outside the classroom

Teachers were positive about teaching in the school's beautiful environment and think students find it is easier to learn and remember through practice. Students have the chance to go outside to play sports; look for the insects they learn about in Biology; and spend two hours per week learning how to grow vegetables. *Refer to section 4 of Image 2.*

Participation in school decision-making processes

Teachers felt that decision making was inclusive and described a positive relationship with the School Director who often asks for their opinions even around small decisions. 'The school is so open, I feel confident to disagree with the director's ideas'. *Refer to section 6 of Image 2.*

Parent & community engagement

Teachers have gained confidence in engaging with parents as the School Director encourages and sometimes accompanies them on home visits. A teacher explained that at other schools teachers rarely visited students' homes and parents often asked teachers not to come again, while 'at this school there is good community engagement.' *Refer to section 7 of Image 2.*

School Directors reported that last year no parents from the nearby community sent their children to this school, however, students are now enrolling from in and around Kampong Cham centre. Previously parents rarely attended school meetings, while, 'now they all come'.

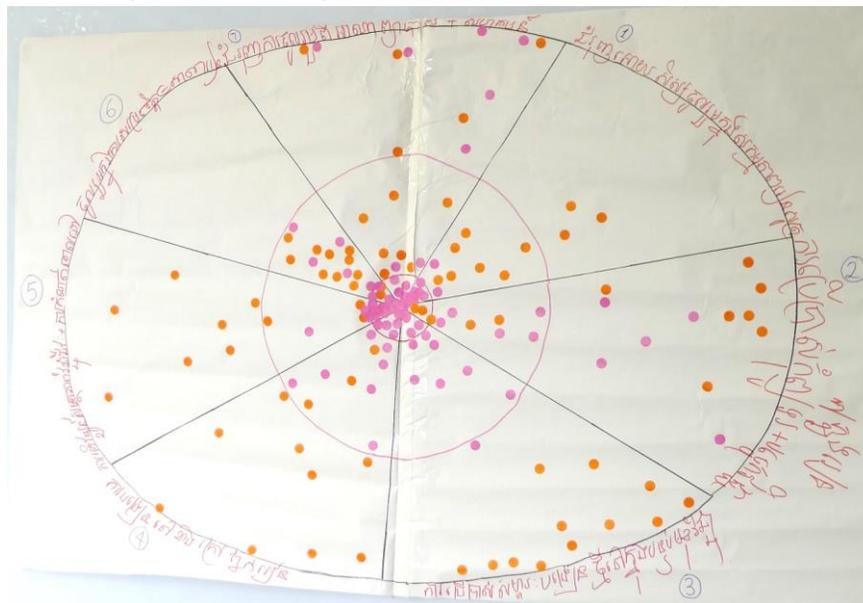


Image 2 Demonstration School Teachers' Bullseye Activity

Becoming a model school

The **School Directors** were proud that representatives from 24 provinces visited the Demonstration School and remarked that it was impossible to have a school like this in their province. Many visitors believe the school should be a model for others to follow, but that this is unrealistic given that all public schools' run on the government's 'priority budget'.

5.3 QUESTION THREE: What are the challenges and aspects of the project in most need of improvement?

5.3.A SKUN HIGH SCHOOL

Poor infrastructure

Students at Skun commented on the fact that it is so hot in the classrooms, that rain leaks through the rooves and some classes do not have enough tables for students. Some students feel that the food-stalls are not clean. Many students believe the school should repair the old buildings, equip each classroom with a fan and create a concrete road around the school yard.

The **School Director** demonstrated great commitment to completing the renovations of the old buildings which remain darker, hotter and less conducive to learning.

Bullying and negative influences

The **School Director** of Skun is conscious of children experiencing isolation and discrimination, referring to the impacts this can have on behaviour even into adulthood. Therefore, the school places a strong emphasis on attempting to curb discrimination and bullying.

Many **students** say the biggest challenges at school are bribery, gangsters and students who fight inside the school. Therefore, many students believe that a good school should have strict regulations and emphasised that all students should follow the school's rules.

Truancy/poor student-teacher relations

A few **students** stated that some teachers 'are very mean' and do not allow students to enter the class when they are late, with others saying they dislike some teachers and thus skip class.

Role of teachers

Teachers feel their income is low and that it's difficult to manage the mixed abilities of students in the classroom, ranging from basic level English, to not knowing their ABCs. Teachers face challenges with parents who believe that teachers have the sole role to teach so do not engage with teachers, even when students experience problems.

Income generation

The **School Director** has successfully introduced the sale of water to students and recycling of bottles to cover the costs of internet. However, at this stage other income generating activities have had limited success, with the bio-garden utilised purely to train students in agricultural skills and the soil known to be of poor quality. Further work will need to be done to explore income options for the school beyond the lifespan of the BSI project.

5.3.B SAMDECH MAE SCHOOL

Long distance to school

Students explained that they become tired riding such long distances to school and are worried about dangers along the way home which can often be dark and quiet.

Poor infrastructure and location

Almost all **students** commented on the fact that classrooms are dark and the restrooms are dirty. Therefore, from Oaktree's perspective there is a vital opportunity to move students from these older darker classrooms into the unutilised computer lab. The students also stated that they dislike the rubber tree plantation behind their school because there are many mosquitoes.

Bullying & gangsters

Students say one of the biggest challenges are 'trouble makers' and gangsters in the school. The **LSMC** think school regulations must be strengthened to stop students from missing class, and their focus is to reinforce the school's fence to address this issue.

Parents are also concerned about bullies and gangsters in the school, mostly in grade 10-12, and feel that the actions of teachers and the School Director have not led to any change. Oaktree is concerned this may impact on parents' willingness to send their children to school.

Teachers with bad attitudes

Some **students** reported that certain teachers have bad attitudes and don't treat students like human beings. 'Most of the teachers are mean and raise their voice when students say or answer wrong,' they use offensive words and violence against students. Many students also say they are not permitted to attend classes when they are late.

The **LSMC** feel there is a need to change the behaviour of teachers in communicating with the community: they are not friendly to parents and blame students. Teachers are also needed who are good with computers, because they don't currently know how to use them.

Parents are concerned by the poor relations between the School Director and teachers, and between teachers, causing serious divisions and compromising a positive school atmosphere.

Informal fees

Parents explained that some teachers charge students fees for extra classes or for good marks in assessments and will not pay attention to students who do not pay. One parent remarked that 'We have to pay \$5 for each class, so how about for 10 subjects?' Another parent said that despite working for 18 years, he has been unable to save due to all of these fees. Informal fees seem to be an ongoing issue despite BSI discouraging this.

Poor community

The **LSMC** experience difficulty in raising support from parents due to poverty in the community. When asked to contribute money to build new infrastructure, parents say they do not have enough to share. Parents feel that if they have no money their voice is powerless, this suggests more needs to be done for parents to feel more welcomed and valued in the school.

Parents listed the challenges their families face, including: poverty, illiteracy and lack of education, large families (unable to support them all to stay in school), low income (for instance, a family may have five members with only one earning an income), and lack of opportunity.

Parents unsure of how to engage

Parents at Samdech Mae say some parents lack patience for the time it takes to complete high school and therefore discourage their children. Parents also feel unsure of how to engage actively in their children's education and uncomfortable speaking to a teacher in charge if their children experience problems or struggle in some subjects.

5.3.C DEMONSTRATION SCHOOL

Long distance to school

Many **students** mentioned the challenges they face travelling long distances to school, made difficult by the lack of safety, poor road conditions, flooding and broken bicycles. Furthermore, many students cannot afford lunch nor are able to travel the long distances home in time and 'the teachers don't let me in if I come late'. Oaktree thus looks forward to seeing how this is addressed by the establishment of the school canteen in the coming months.

Students with bad attitude

Some **students** are challenged by their peers who do not follow the school regulations, and by the 'bad attitude from the children council members'.

Mixed student population

When asked about challenges, the **School Director** described the mixed student population, coming from various locations and backgrounds and with mixed abilities. Thus the School Director is keen to base student selection on creating uniform levels of learning.

Limited scholarships

The **School Directors** state that scholarship applications far outweigh the limited number the school can offer. A few scholarship students from extremely poor families have dropped out, as even this support does not suffice. The Demonstration School provides only one kind of scholarship, unlike other schools which offer three, including extra support for students who are exceptionally poor. A common challenge experienced by **students** is managing their time between school and housework. This may contribute to the drop-outs that have occurred.

School management and funding post-KAPE

The **School Directors** are concerned about the project drawing to a close. 'It will be very difficult without support because there is no money to run the school.' For example, sometimes teachers have to bring teaching materials from home, give students money for bicycle repairs and the librarian usually pays for the lunch of poor students.

The School Directors and teachers have considered recycling water bottles and selling bracelets made by students, however both these ideas will be limited in generating income. The School Director wishes to open a canteen in the school using vegetables from the bio-garden, but people steal the vegetables making this venture less profitable than it could be. The school will need intensive support over the coming months to ensure that income can be sustainably generated before KAPE's support ceases.

6. Results and Findings for Key Project Goals

6.1 Goal One: Access to Education

Student selection and enrolment

The reputation of each of the three schools has been noticeably transformed, so much so that the schools now attract more students than they can take. With this reality comes a need for a student selection process, and there seem to be differing perspectives amongst stakeholders on how this can best be managed. At the Demonstration School student enrolments will be based on performance in an academic written test, selecting all mid-level students, which may compromise equality. KAPE expressed alternative ideas of student selection, which suggests that greater clarity and communication around this is necessary.

The potential expansion of the Demonstration School to year 10 and beyond will have a significant impact on access to education for students who hope to complete high school. This decision will be vital to some current year 9 students who will be unable to afford to move to other schools and thus face drop-out at the end of this school year. This rests greatly on the school's ability to find the extra space, resources and capacity of staff to take on this expansion.

Scholarships

Parents and students brought up scholarships as an important and valued form of support enabling poor families to access education. Demonstration School students ranked scholarships as the first priority for their growth. The LSMC at Samdech Mae feel that the scholarship selection process has become more transparent. Some teachers and students, however, expressed concern that scholarships were insufficient for extremely poor students.

Student retention

In the face of poverty, it is commendable that the schools have been able to achieve such a significant reduction in drop-out rates since the project started. While some stakeholders we met with did mention cases of student drop-out, overall it did not appear to be a widespread issue. All the parents we met seemed committed and supportive of their children staying in school.

School Directors and teachers outlined three key challenges as to why drop-out rates remain higher than the project target: poverty, migration, and students' embarrassment that they can't keep up in classes or that their peers know about their family problems. The project is doing the best it can to tackle the first factor (through life skills training, scholarships and reducing the costs of education) and the second factor is beyond the project's control. There may be space to further consider ways of addressing the third issue.

The parents we met with stated that they encouraged both their sons and daughters to complete school. However, KAPE's data suggests that the percentage of girls dropping out has remained constant or even increased at the schools. Thus we hope that KAPE continues to encourage more parents to value girls' education like the parents we met.

Informal fees

Parents expressed concern about paying \$5 per subject for extra classes, especially when students cannot pass without this. Free classes for poorer students do not seem to be in place yet across the schools but would help immensely in ensuring access for poorer families.

Missing class

Many students, at all three schools, state that they are not allowed into class when they are late. The LSMC at Samdech Mae School also described a cyclical issue with children skipping class due to a lack of confidence. The LSMC are primarily focused on constructing a fence to keep children in the school grounds. This seems to have caused tension with some students, and may suggest a need to further understand the root causes of students' truancy and ways to help students feel more comfortable and warmly welcomed at school.

Long distance to school

Many stakeholders mentioned students travelling long distances to school, complicated by broken bicycles, poor road conditions, lack of security and having to miss lunch. Ensuring that lunch is available at school is important for students' retention and concentration in class.

Toilets

Students feel the renovations of the toilets at school are important, yet some remain unclean, as they can now stay at school for a full day, rather than traveling home to use the bathroom.

6.2 Goal Two: Quality Education

Creating positive learning spaces

Oaktree are very impressed by the renovated classrooms at each school which are far more conducive to creative learning than classrooms were previously. The state of the art science laboratories and the libraries at all three schools were outstanding and it appears that students love to use this space in their spare time.

Practical learning

It is evident that students enjoy practical learning opportunities and acquiring skills they can apply to real life such as science experiments, life skills and excursions. Reflections from one student: 'Learning new things is more fun and easier for me when I can learn and practice'.

Confidence and interaction

We are immensely impressed by the growth in students' confidence and engagement. Despite different challenges at each school, most students were bright and confident to openly express their ideas and opinions during our evaluation activities. At the Demonstration School particularly, we witnessed students actively interacting in classes, writing on the board or speaking in front of the class, demonstrating a clear shift away from traditional rote learning.

Commitment of teachers

We were inspired by the clear dedication of some teachers who teach on weekends, conduct home visits, and are committed to further growth. There was a strong appreciation for the training and new subject-specific materials provided by KAPE. Teachers appeared highly skilled and assertive, for example an English teacher confidently responded to all our questions in proficient English. There is a common feeling amongst teachers that they only significantly lack confidence in IT integration and parent engagement.

Challenges for teachers

While many teachers appear to be greatly committed, stakeholders commented on ongoing issues with certain teachers' behaviour. Particularly at Samdech Mae, divisions amongst teachers are compromising positive learning, with teachers reportedly 'lacking motivation, using offensive language and violence and discouraging students from thinking outside the box'. Stakeholders said that teachers were asked to teach subjects outside their field (at Samdech Mae and Skun) and faced difficulty managing vastly different abilities in classes.

Access to services is varied

Students report very varied levels of access to the new services and facilities at their schools, such as life skills and career counselling, from very frequent access to none at all. The computers at Samdech Mae are yet to be restored following the theft, while stakeholders seem to believe they will be replaced soon.

6.3 Goal Three: Attitudinal Change

Students' attitudinal change

Students appear to hold a strong belief that **school is important for their future**, think their parents feel the same way and are now excited to pursue further studies.

Some students clearly understand school as important for learning beyond the requirements of exams, and feel it is enjoyable and important to learn skills **relevant to their everyday lives**. For example, they wish to acquire 'knowledge to solve various problems in life' and learn lessons around morality and equality, 'to help myself and society'. It is clear that some students appreciate **interactive and analytical learning**, are confident to speak critically and seemed to think deeply about the questions we posed.

Parents' attitudinal change

All stakeholders reported an outstanding attitudinal change in parents who have an **increased understanding of the value of education** from being encouraged to consider its long-term benefits. Parents observe that people in their generation work hard and earn little money, and realise the advantage of staying in school. A student explained that 'My parents are very supportive of me coming to school because they regret about their past (less education) that's why they inspire me to learn.'

Teachers and parents stated that thanks to home visits and the visible improvements to the school environment, parents' attention has been captured and attitudes have changed. Parents now have greater confidence in educational quality and have thus become **more open to being involved in the school**. Parents at Samdech Mae suggested that they would be happy to contribute time and resources to support further school improvements and seemed to think their view was representative of the wider community.

The fact that parents are most concerned about teachers' low salaries compromising the quality of teaching, is a strong reflection of how parents value the role of teachers. The parents we met with, however, still see their own role in their children's education as **purely supporting and encouraging** them to attend school, while teachers are responsible for imparting wisdom.

Teachers' attitudinal change

It was inspiring to see the attitudinal change in teachers, particularly of both younger and older teachers which was not anticipated. One teacher explained that they used to consider teaching merely as a job, whereas now they are excited and motivated to teach and learn more beyond what is required. Since receiving KAPE training, the teachers we met want to integrate more modern and interactive methods into their teaching and many have a clear desire to set future goals for themselves.

6.4 Goal Four: Sustainability

Community engagement

By all accounts, the project has been effective in helping to build community engagement, particularly at Skun and the Demonstration School where this seems to be led by strong school management which will be important after the project concludes. While positive attitudes towards the schools have been built, actual contributions from the community remain limited due to poverty, witnessing higher levels of success where income levels in the community are mixed. Building upon the good reputations of the schools will be a continuing process.

It is important to note that the Demonstration School has recently found it difficult to get support from other organisations because the school has already (and very visibly) received so much support from KAPE, and to consider whether this will be an ongoing challenge.

Income generation

At Skun it is impressive to see that the infirmary space is kept open for students to use internet, and that this is partly made possible by the income from recycling and water sales. Aside from this, the income generating activities trialled at the three schools to date have had limited success (such as vegetable, chicken and fish raising) and school management seem to lack ideas and confidence in this area. All schools appear uncomfortable to introduce school fees due to Ministry policies and the poverty levels of families. BSI has set aside \$4,000 for income generation this year. Intensive work with the schools will now be required to ensure that sustaining the schools and the changes introduced by the project remains economically viable.

Security issues

Theft appears to be an issue with produce stolen from the bio-gardens, and at Samdech Mae in particular security problems seem to be significant, with locks visible everywhere. The schools' capacities to manage the security of their school grounds will influence whether or not many of the changes supported by KAPE can be sustained into the future. There seems to be uncertainty around how the schools will become self-sufficient in school management and funding, and maintain such high standards when KAPE ceases funding.

6.5 Goal Five: Broader Influence

External interest

KAPE has done an amazing job garnering external interest in the BSI model, as evidenced by a visit from the Asian Development Bank and with both the Center for Education Innovations and the Australian Council For International Development promoting the project as a successful case study.

Replicating the model

In reality, the three schools illustrate three distinct outcomes in trialing the BSI model. Samdech Mae presents an example of the challenges that may be faced attempting to replicate a model of innovation in schools struggling with basic level issues and with a homogenously poor rural community. As suggested by KAPE staff, a program such as the Improved Basic Education in Cambodia Project (IBEC) may be more effective for schools in this context.

On the other the Demonstration School has received extensive funding and KAPE have had the unique opportunity of supporting the school's growth essentially from the ground up. Many of the stakeholders we met with noted that the standards of quality in the education and infrastructure at this school would not be possible to establish and sustain in different contexts/provinces without immense NGO support.

Lastly, Skun High School appears to be a terrific example of how the BSI model can have an immense impact by supporting significant changes (but not complete transformation) of a pre-existing school, with a community population with mixed socioeconomic levels. Particularly when this is led by a school director who demonstrates strong commitment and vision to excellence and inclusion.

These reflections highlight the vast importance of the school selection process, taking into consideration history, location, the make up of the community, and the current school staff's capacities and commitment. Given these learnings and that the model appears to work effectively in a community with mixed socioeconomic backgrounds, it will be fascinating to consider what results may look like in replicating the model in Phnom Penh.

7. Partnership Status

Four years on, the partnership between KAPE and Oaktree remains strong. Many significant events have taken place in the past year, including both Vann and Kim commencing in their roles, and Vann's visit to Melbourne for Oaktree's 10 Year Anniversary in October. Our Generation's Challenge volunteers participated in KAPE's holiday program in July and there is an upcoming visit to gather Live Below the Line communications material. We greatly appreciate KAPE's hospitality and the openness, support and respect between staff. Oaktree is very pleased with KAPE's timely and honest communication, delivery of reports with outstanding levels of detail and data, as well as regular updates. We are keen to hear KAPE's perspective on the partnership and any areas which can be improved.

Both organisations are keen to further explore the possibilities of extending Oaktree's support for BSI for an additional year to focus on ways of sustaining the changes in the schools post-KAPE's engagement. It was agreed that this would be shaped by the external evaluation findings and a project extension proposal produced by KAPE.

8. Key Strengths

Innovation

The Beacon Schools Initiative genuinely exemplifies how innovation can transform schools. Through creating greener, more open and comfortable school environments the schools now attract more students than they can take, with students travelling from afar and transferring from other schools. The project's promotion of constructivist learning and student engagement in classes has enabled a significant shift away from traditional rote learning and challenged what Cambodians typically view as a good student-teacher relationship. Changing ideas around teaching practices are evident with one student remarking that 'I think a good school should have good teachers and good students, who are respectful to each other.' Furthermore, peer learning is successfully being fostered through highly popular subject clubs and group work. State of the art ICT and science facilities as well as life skills training are allowing students to engage in practical learning and connect lessons to real life application.

Emphasis on attitudinal change

BSI has helped to realise profound attitudinal change in students, parents and teachers in the ways they view and value education. All stakeholders reported an outstanding shift in the attitudes of parents who now think more about the long-term benefits of education, reflecting on the different standards of living between their peers who did and did not receive schooling. Students commonly feel that their parents want them to receive better education and better jobs than they have, "because they think that I would be better than them if I get well education." It is remarkable that the parents we met with at Samdech Mae School suggest that they would direct any further support from an NGO towards encouraging their children to pursue further education at university. The project promotes long-term planning, critical analysis and collaborative work which has influenced attitudes of teachers as well as students, many of whom are now consciously working towards future goals and continual betterment of themselves and their society.

Comprehensive initiative

Through consideration of the foundations necessary for creating a school of educational excellence, BSI is a truly comprehensive initiative which aims to transform physical, social, cultural and economic conditions that influence educational outcomes.

Providing educational opportunities for the poor

The BSI schools have been able to successfully provide poor families across Kampong Cham (although perhaps not the poorest) with scholarships and the opportunity to benefit from high standards of educational quality for free. An older student noted that 'I enjoy coming to school because I have never learnt in the school like this before. Studying here make me understand about the value of learning, myself; moreover, my teachers and friends always encourage me never look down; even though I am the oldest and poorest one in the class.'

9. Areas for Improvement

Income generation and sustainability

It is clear that more needs to be done in order to generate the income that will be required to manage the schools once the project's assured funding ceases. There is great uncertainty around how schools will transition into long term self-sufficiency whilst current operations are so heavily supported by KAPE. At this stage of the project, it is vital to consider questions such as how effective initiatives introduced by KAPE such as scholarships, performance-based pay, and teacher career development will be sustained by the schools post-KAPE's engagement. While KAPE can currently help to repair equipment such as the tablets at Skun, it is worth asking what a sustainable option in the future may be and whether further training in maintaining equipment and materials is necessary.

Three years is certainly a short time-frame to hope for the schools to be significantly transformed and possess the capacity to maintain these changes. Therefore, Oaktree are open to further discussing an extension of our support of BSI to focus on creating the foundations for sustaining the incredible progress the project has achieved to date.

10. Recommendations

Upon reflection of the evaluation's key findings, Oaktree wishes to present the following recommendations to KAPE:

ACCESS

- KAPE's advocacy for girls' education is encouraging and appears to have had an impact on some parents. We hope that KAPE continues to promote the importance of girls' education, given that dropout rates for girls decreased only marginally at Skun, remained constant at Samdech Mae, and increased at the Demonstration School.
- The computer lab at Samdech Mae remains empty despite uncertainty as to when and whether the computers will be replaced. This could be reopened for student use in the meantime. It is also important to set realistic expectations with the school community who currently believe computers will soon be replaced by KAPE.
- KAPE and the school may like to discuss whether prohibiting students from attending class when they arrive late is fair or the best course of action, especially considering that many students travel long distances to school. This issue should be addressed at all three schools in order to ensure the school remains a welcoming environment and students are no longer forced to miss out on classes.
- Oaktree considers it important to assess the disparities in students' access to services and facilities such as career counselling and life skills, and encourage more equal

student access over time. It will be particularly important to measure the success of this by asking students themselves about their perspectives and experiences.

QUALITY

- KAPE and the schools may like to consider ways of engaging students who are struggling in particular subject areas and are avoiding class due to embarrassment.
- It may be useful for teachers to receive further training in techniques to manage classes with students of mixed abilities, such as empowering more confident students to take a lead in teaching and assisting the weaker students.
- KAPE may wish to look into the current structure of the Demonstration School student council to ensure opportunities and benefits are shared amongst all students.
- Oaktree feel it is important to follow up on teachers using violence and offensive language towards students at Skun High School and Samdech Mae School.

ATTITUDINAL CHANGE

- Oaktree feels it is important to support greater parent-teacher engagement by encouraging both parties to feel comfortable, confident and aware of clear avenues to approach one another, particularly when concerns need to be discussed.

SUSTAINABILITY

- Oaktree encourages a strong focus on sustainability and income generation for the remainder of the project, particularly if KAPE apply for an extension of the partnership.
- There may be a need for clarification and greater communication between parties regarding the student selection processes at the Demonstration School.
- It will be important to set clear expectations with the Demonstration School's community regarding year 10 and beyond, as students are currently uncertain as to whether they will be able to attend school next year.
- Future replications of the BSI model should place strong focus from the outset on establishing sustainable income generation activities for long-term economic viability.

BROADER INFLUENCE

- Oaktree hopes the external evaluation of BSI can build upon the key findings and data from Oaktree's evaluation and KAPE's own monitoring and evaluation, with a focus on informing future replications of the BSI model.

11. Annexes

For further information, please refer to the attached annexes:

- **Annex 1.** Oaktree BSI Evaluation 2013 – Detailed Methodology
- **Annex 2.** Oaktree BSI Evaluation 2013 – Final Presentation

For any questions regarding this report, the evaluation data or documentation, please contact Kim Ho, Cambodia Partnership Manager, at k.ho@oaktree.org.