



# Experience in Child Rights Mainstreaming in the Education System



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H.E. Minister of MoEYS viewing the exhibit at the National Workshop on "Experience in CRC Mainstreaming in the Education System"

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CRC and CSEC campaign in school

# 1- Introduction

In Cambodia, children aged below 18 make up of 52% of 14.5 million of the total population. To promote and protect the interests of children, who are vulnerable in our society, the Royal Government of Cambodia ratified UNCRC on October 15, 1992. This truly demonstrates firm commitment and strong willingness of the government to improve children's situation. So far, even with support and attention from the government and civil society, children issues still emerge everyday and child rights have not been fully respected. Moreover, many children have been abused in many different ways, for example, neglect from stakeholders, trafficking, sexual exploitation or child labor. Among these many reasons, lack of profound understanding of UNCRC among policy- makers, local authorities and the public is a main one. On the other hand, the implementation of the four major child rights: Right to survival, Right to development, Right to protection and Right to participation, is limited. Related to children's right to participate in Cambodian society, children are still seen as having few opportunities to express their voice and ideas inside and outside their family. Cambodian children are yet to receive support or encouragement to express their ideas and opinions on matters concerning their livelihood. Consequently, Cambodian children and youth are less confident to demonstrate their point of views, and usually consider their ideas as not well valued.

Realizing the above-mentioned issues, Child Rights Foundation (CRF) has initiated projects/ programs to meaningfully contribute to improve the dissemination of UNCRC and topics related to the welfare and security of children and youth by closely cooperating with the Youth Department



of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The organization has selected children and youth as target groups, and the organization strongly believes that an investment in them is the foundation to bring about development and prosperity to the country because in the future they will become fathers, mothers, good citizen and also leaders.

In accordance with UNCRC, a human rights instrument that firstly provides broad range of rights to children, CRF has established many different projects to promote and empower children and youth participation in promoting, advocating and monitoring the implementation of UNCRC in Cambodia. To implement these projects, “**Child and Youth Participation**” is perceived and used as a crosscutting strategy in planning, implementing and monitoring the project.

Based on experience from three-year implementation of the projects, CRF and the Youth Department have compiled up a number of useful experiences to be shared to teachers and officials of national and international NGOs working with children and youth. In order to effectively promote UNCRC, people can use the experience mentioned in the booklet by adapting it to real situation and contexts.



## 2- Why Mainstream the UNCRC in the Education System?

UNCRC is an international law or an agreement that clearly describes child rights to which children all over the world have access without any kind of discrimination or conditions.

Even up to present, UNCRC has been in practice for over 12 years; however, most of Cambodian children are still so vulnerable to trafficking, exploitation, abuses and many other kinds of threats to their rights and welfare. These factors show that the implementation of the convention is still limited, and the understanding about child rights is not broad. It is known that even children themselves, who are the right holders, do not know clearly about their own rights.

Up to now, there are no clear and specific mechanisms to disseminate child rights broadly. Therefore, the mainstreaming of UNCRC into the education system represents an effective means to make a large number of children understand and know about their rights and social issues and to help them use the right to participate and especially to improve the implementation of their rights and welfare.

Mainstreaming UNCRC in the education system is to be implemented based on the following significant factors:

- It is an obligation of the Royal Government of Cambodia, which ratified the convention, to properly implement it by fully using all of its potential to improve children welfare within its



jurisdiction. The government also has duties to seek all necessary measures to support and implement the convention in governmental institutions, civil society and other international agencies.

- Among governmental institutions, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports is a very important agent to disseminate UNCRC to students both within the formal and informal education framework, as well as to parents and communities. Through schools, the government has a vast possibility to disseminate and implement the convention directly since children gather and spend most of their time in schools. This factor enables best the dissemination of information about the convention; moreover, the work process takes less time and money but the results are quite considerable.
- Teachers are second parents of children, and they also have special roles in educating them to be good citizens in the future. In addition to the subjects within the curriculum in schools, teachers can help raise awareness on child rights at all times to children both during and outside the teaching time. In one year, hundreds of children receive education from a teacher. Therefore, teachers are very important intermediaries to inform children of the UNCRC both inside and outside schools.
- Children are the owners of rights stated in UNCRC. Hence, it is important that children understand clearly their rights, benefits they are supposed to receive and other special protection that they are entitled to. At the same time, children must also know about their responsibilities they have toward themselves, families, schools and society as a whole because all rights are intertwined with responsibilities. In contrast, if children know only

their rights and have no responsibilities, many problems will emerge in society since children think about their benefits and neglect others'. Moreover, sometimes they might think that their rights are so powerful they can do anything without any condition being placed on them.

- It is a recommendation of the UNCRC Committee in the first report of Cambodia submitted to this body on December 18, 1997. The Committee requested that Cambodia, as a state party, strengthen its effort to disseminate provisions and principles of the convention to make sure the Cambodian society and children are well-informed about child rights. Special attention should also be given to the dissemination of this information to indigenous people both in remote and rural areas.

To make it short, the mainstreaming of UNCRC in the education system for children and youth is seen as a long process of work which guarantees sustainability. This is because schools are places that provide education for young people in society, and they are places where children spend most of their time regularly to gain knowledge, build capacity, develop mentally and spiritually, to learn morality and learn to become good and valuable citizens in the future.





Children National Conference on "Child Participation in CRC Monitoring"

## 3- How to Mainstream the UNCRC in Education System Work?

UNCRC mainstreaming in the education system program was initiated by CRF with an aim to raise awareness on rights and responsibilities of children and youth, to build up unity and mutual understanding among youth and children and to encourage them to do advocacy by themselves.

To achieve this aim, CRF signed a cooperation agreement with the Youth Department of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for a period of 3 years- from January 2002 to December 2004. Both parties are determined to properly implement all provisions mentioned in the agreement firmly.

With reference to the above accord, CRF plays a role to seek and manage the budget for implementing the program, help the counterpart receive resources and have better understanding on work-related topics through conducting trainings, workshops or some other activities, provide materials and documents related to the programs to involved stakeholders and cooperate with Youth Department to implement and monitor the program.

Youth Department, in turn, has a role to cooperate with CRF to implement the program, conduct liaison, provide officials for certain work and regularly monitor and assess the progress of the program etc. This program can be successful due to the efforts and cooperation from higher level to local level in implementing the major activities below:



## Productions of Training Materials and Capacity Building for Officials in Charge of Children and Youth Affairs

2002 was the beginning of the program. Due to lack of teaching materials on UNCRC, CRF and Youth Department jointly produced a training manual, titled “**Rights and Responsibilities of Children and Youth**”. This manual is an important tool to enable teachers in conducting their teaching to improve child rights in Cambodia.

The book contains topics such as child rights, responsibilities of children and youth, self-protection from trafficking and sexual exploitation, drug prevention, team work, peaceful problem solving, salutation in Cambodia, the statute and rules of children and youth councils, games and energizers and UNCRC with 54 articles. Firstly, 3000 of the manuals were printed, and secondly 15000 were also published with some changes made due to recommendations from a national workshop by the end of 2003.



After an official launch of the manuals by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, they were used to educate children and youth in primary and secondary schools in all provinces; moreover, in some communities the manuals were used through NGOs and the Children and Young People Movement for Child Rights, which includes members from 13 organizations/ children and youth clubs established by CRF.

To ensure effectiveness of the use of the manuals, CRF and Youth Department held a national workshop to disseminate and train teachers and officials in charge of children and youth from 24 provinces and cities throughout the country. The topics in the workshop were on the content of the manuals and child-centered teaching methodology. Other trainings, such as training on UNCRC and Child Participation, were also held for the above relevant officials to disseminate more information to officials in charge of children and youth work in provinces.

## Child Rights Dissemination at Primary and Secondary Level

In 2003-2004, CRF and the Youth Department decided to choose five schools: Kror Peur Har Primary School, Anuwat Primary School, Jaya Varman 7 High School, Tep Prantum High School and Preak Tadoung Secondary School in Kandal province as pilot schools.

To make child rights promotion work smoothly, a counterpart was appointed by the Youth Department to coordinate all necessary work from Ministry level to local level. Moreover, CRF and the Youth Department established one **“Working Group on Rights and Responsibilities of Children and Youth”**, which composed of one official from the Youth Department, 3 officials from provincial education department and a deputy director of each school in charge of children and youth work. The working group had important duties to carry out: producing action plan to disseminate UNCRC in pilot schools, building capacity for core teachers on the use of the manual on **“Rights and Responsibilities of Children and Youth,”** spreading information on UNCRC to teachers and school management committees, building capacity for children and youth to become peer educators, monitoring, evaluating and improving child rights awareness raising with students.



“ With firm commitment for the best interest of the children, experiences in mainstreaming UNCRC into the education system is a very useful tool to pave the way to successful dissemination of child rights leading up to effective child participation,” assured Mr. Chim Samanh, Director of Youth Department of Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.



Launching Ceremony of the Training Manual

“ I think that mainstreaming UNCRC into education system is very important for these reasons. Firstly, it makes children aware of their rights and help them learn how to protect themselves from abuses. Secondly, it is a good opportunity for children to participate and use all their potential to help their friends and society,” noted Mrs. Kong Chanboshiba, Deputy Director of Department of Education, Youth and Sports in Kandal province.

In the meantime, the working group participated regularly with CRF and the Youth Department to discuss and find solutions for certain difficulties as well as provide recommendations to improve the implementation of the program- making to ensure the work is completed on time and achieve fruitful results. To enhance the dissemination and to make the work of the children and youth clubs go smoothly and effectively, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports issued an instruction numbered 514 **GyksNn** instructing Municipal/Provincial Department of Education, Youth and Sports to conduct CR training sessions by using the manuals on “Rights and Responsibilities of Children and Youth” in their local areas.

CRF, with support from the Youth Department, held a 3-day workshop in cooperation with Kandal Department of Education, Youth and Sports to build up the capacity of core teachers of each target school. The workshop was conducted with 10 participants from each school and officials from each of the education offices in all 11 districts of the province on the topic of effective use and the dissemination of the content of the training manual. In order to gain more active participation from teachers from all five target schools, training on UNCRC was organized for each of the schools whereby all teachers of the school participated.

In accordance with an instruction numbered 1212 **GyksNn** dated April 28, 2003 on the organization and appointment of children and youth club in high schools, secondary schools and primary schools and with support from the Youth Department and the Department of Education, Youth and Sports of Kandal province, Kror Peur Har Primary School, Anuwat Primary School, Jaya Varraman 7 High School, Tep Prantum High School, and Preak Tadoung Secondary School were the first to have established children and youth clubs in Cambodia. To start, the school management committee of each target school chose a team leader and a deputy team leader of classes in the school to be member of the clubs. This made it easy for them to disseminate more



information to other students in their classes. Members could join voluntarily. Then, members of the clubs voted to select club management committee which composed of 5 to 7 persons-candidates from the members of the clubs only. They had the responsibilities to manage and lead the



club, and other members were divided to certain small groups such as: Study group, Arts group, Sport group and awareness raising group etc.

After finalizing the membership of the group, each club had weekly learned the contents from the manual on the rights and responsibilities of children and youth. After that with the coordination and support from core teachers and CRF, they prepared lesson plans to teach all members of the club. Furthermore, teachers in each class integrated UNCRC concepts when they taught their lessons. There were also meetings of the five clubs which enabled children and youth to meet each other to show their talents and to exchange experiences as well as knowledge especially during International Children Day, camping and other programs.

In the five target schools, members of the children and youth clubs initiated new activities within their clubs such as: helping to teach weak students, reading books, house work, role plays related to topics mentioned in the manuals, activities carried out to help poor friends, teaching of child rights to member classmates when their teachers were absent and also conducting question-and-answer sessions on child rights during the national anthem event.

To make sure that the clubs continued to function well, members of the committee introduced the idea of a contribution box to collect contribution from charitable people, teachers and other students; to sell handicraft products produced by the members of the clubs and also to appoint a person to manage revenue and expenses as well as to make regular reports.

Children and youth clubs are a mechanism of the children and youth council that encourages and promotes child and youth participation in activities that serve the best interest of children in each school.

## Child Rights Education in Teacher Training College

To promote broad-based mainstreaming of UNCRC into the education system and guarantee the sustainability of this work, teachers have to be aware of this convention first. CRF has expanded its scope of the work by cooperating with Teacher Training Department as a first step to implement training activities for teachers in regional and provincial teacher training colleges in Kandal province to mainstream UNCRC. Later on, a number of trained teachers would be selected to be core teachers to train other teacher trainees at the beginning of the following academic year. At the same time, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports also provided an instruction for the academic calendar year 2004-2005 for regional and provincial teacher training colleges throughout the country concerning the teaching of UNCRC to teacher trainees in the second year on the first week of their academic year. This was to promote broad and effective dissemination of UNCRC.

Child rights were a subject in the curriculum of the teacher training colleges; however, there had not been specific documents for the teaching of this topic to teacher trainees. This made it difficult for the teachers to conduct research to find information from other sources for preparing their lesson plans.



In order to teach UNCRC to teacher trainees and in response to the lack of teaching materials, CRF in cooperation with the Teacher Training Department produced a teaching manual for teaching child rights for teachers to use in the regional and provincial teacher training centers throughout the country.

Through this program, we expect that when the teacher trainees start their teaching career in primary or secondary school, all of them will be equipped with vision and understanding about child rights in their minds and hearts. Experience gained from implementing this work in Kandal province will be effectively used in other provinces in Cambodia in the coming year.



## Child Rights Dissemination through Newsletters

Another means to spread information on child rights to students is done through the production and dissemination of Children and Youth Newsletters.

By cooperating with the Youth Department, CRF agreed to produce children and youth newsletters with an aim to additionally promote the dissemination of UNCRC and other child related laws and to provide opportunity for children to access to information that affected their lives. The newsletters also contain games related to child rights, child victims, struggles of good children, ideas and requests of children, work achievements of children and youth and many other articles: short stories, poems, songs and drawings.

The children and youth newsletters are produced quarterly and focus on major issues such as trafficking prevention, drug prevention, birth registration, children and health, child labor, children and education and children and AIDS etc. 35000 newsletters are printed for each issue and distributed to schools and provinces through the ministry. Moreover, they are also delivered to children in certain centers, communities through NGOs and children and youth networks.

CRF received a large number of requests for the newsletters from NGOs and many different schools. This is because they understood the importance and the use of this document in teaching children about their rights.

This work receives tremendous support from children and youth because it provides them opportunities both in and outside the framework of their academic time to share ideas and opinions and receive appropriate information especially those that concern with their well-being, The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports published instruction, for how to promote the dissemination and the use of the newsletters broadly in all schools.



## 4- Achievement and Change

Mainstreaming UNCRC in schools has brought about more opportunities for children and youth to learn about their values, rights, obligations and responsibilities toward their families, schools and society as a whole.

Children and youth in the five target schools, especially the children and youth clubs, learned more about child rights and became courageous and capable to continue to disseminate information on the rights and responsibilities of children to their peers. They knew that they especially had rights to receive care and attention from adults around them. Those children and youth had high-spirit of responsibilities and they could work well in team. They dared to share ideas, delegate work and solve problems peacefully. Moreover, they knew how to prevent themselves from trafficking or sexual exploitation, drugs and Aids. In the meantime, they had high morality, and they could help each other with difficulties. They also gained life skills through participating in club activities such as facilitating in an activity, establishing sports or arts team and other house work.

Furthermore, teachers also gained better understanding and were more interested in child rights. They knew how to conduct child-center teaching which provided more chances for children to express their ideas and opinions harmonized the relationship between teachers and students and avoided punishment which affected children mentally and physically. In addition the teachers also used this knowledge in their own families and home environment in order to help making a warm, friendly and mutually-understanding atmosphere among adults and children.

To make it short, this program resulted in behavioral changes among children, youth and teachers-more attention had been taken to take care of and listen to children's ideas and opinions.



"Before when I taught, I usually asked my students to be quiet, I was the only one to ask questions. If my students could not answer, I would blame them or ordered them out of the classroom or punish them. After attending the training for core teachers and having studied deeply the meaning of teaching manual on "Rights and Responsibilities of Children and Youth," I truly realized that what I did was abuse their rights. I myself now change my attitude toward my family and students. This made me have happiness in my family and helped me become a good teacher with high satisfaction from my students," remarked Mr. Ly Yany, a teacher in Preak Ta Doung Secondary School.



"For me, participating in the club was very important. I learned about child rights, roles and responsibilities; moreover, I also had better understanding about drug, trafficking and sexual exploitation. The knowledge helped me avoid from these issues, and makes me brave enough to tackle difficulties. I thought that other members and students also gained the same benefits as me," noted Mr. Leng Nara, a student in Jaya Varman Seven.

## 5- Lesson Learned

Based on the implementation of this program in the five pilot schools, the following experiences and critical factors are considered to be the key successful achievements of the program:

- There were clear principles and guidelines from the ministry, good communication and cooperation from all levels and support from relevant stakeholders.
- There were regular training sessions on UNCRC and other relevant issues to core trainers to build up capacity, ability as well as methodology in disseminating information to teachers and students in their local areas. To ensure effectiveness of the work, the core teachers were selected from team leaders of technical teams and those teachers were highly committed for the work they did and the best interests of children.
- Special attention was placed on the training sessions on child rights to teacher trainees who would become teachers in the future. This served as a mechanism to guarantee the sustainability of the mainstreaming work of UNCRC into the education system.
- There were specific documents and proper lesson plans for the teaching of UNCRC which were important tools for teachers to continue to teach teacher trainees and children and youth clubs in schools.
- There was also appropriate timing to conduct the dissemination of UNCRC in certain lessons to be delivered to students, for example at the beginning of an academic year, International Children Day, International Youth Day and other experience-exchange programs, namely field visits and camping etc.



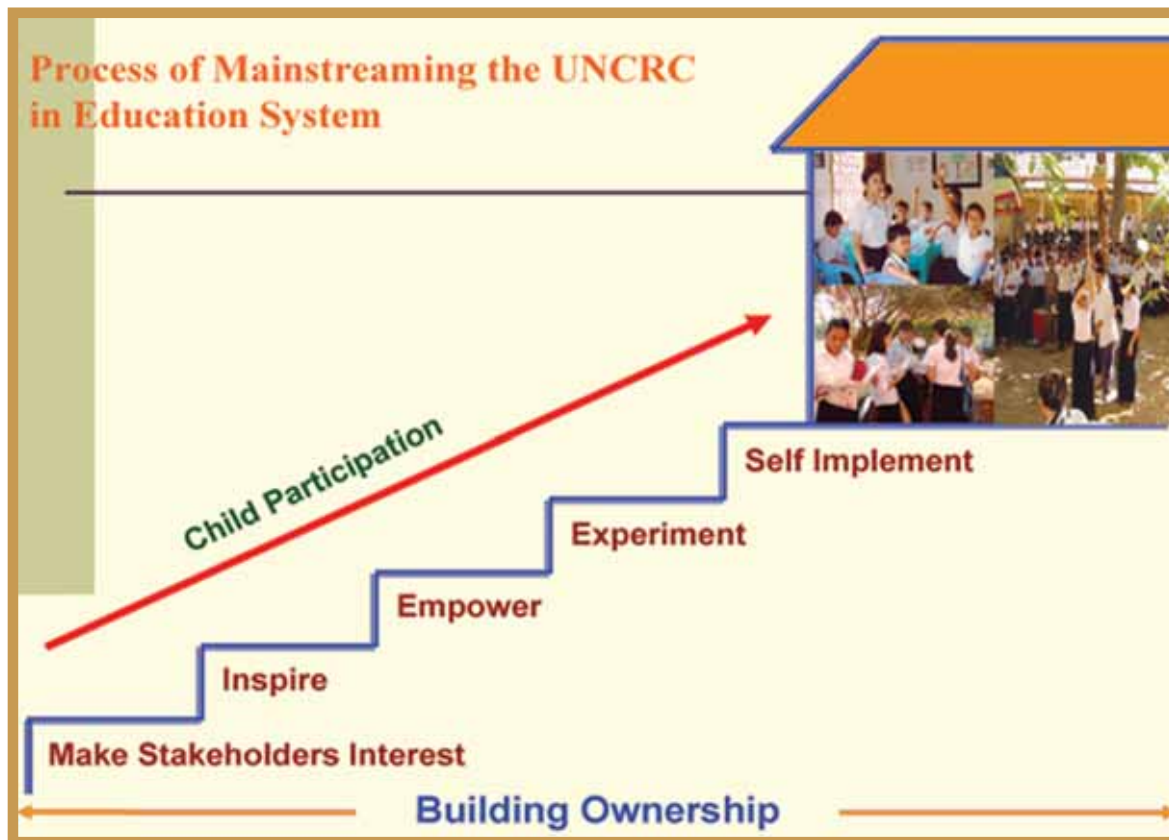
- There was support and encouragement from school management committees in providing the location for establishing children and youth clubs and appropriate time from the club to meet to do certain activities. There were also certain activities done to catch the attention of parents, authorities and communities through information dissemination and gatherings such as meeting of parents, participation in certain children's events in schools and communities.
- Opportunities were provided for children and youth to participate in the club's activities with encouragement and support from the school management committee and adults. This helped children and youth learn new pieces of knowledge and experience and use their potential to build up their self-confidence. It was to note that child participation should be done at a level that was suitable for the situation, capacity and age of children-avoiding interrupting their study time and forcing or placing too much work on children members of the club.
- There were effectiveness and efficiency in the use of existing resources. However, to sustain the program, external resources were also sought, for example contribution from charitable people, communities and NGOs.
- Regular monitoring and evaluation were carried out to find out good and weak points, obstacles and solutions to improve the program in the future.



“Based on the experience I have learnt from Kandal province I think that, with the resources available in Prey Veng province, I will start a club in one school first. I believe that the work to raise awareness on child rights will be implemented more broadly to children and youth,” said Mr. Khiev Chum, deputy director of Department of Education, Youth and Sports, Prey Veng province



In principle, the implementation of the UNCRC mainstreaming into education system has been done through the following steps:



### 1. Make stakeholders interested

We have to make an introduction and a presentation of the program and its significance to relevant officials to attract their attention. At this point, we have to make it clear to them why the program should exist and that it really responds to actual needs. Furthermore, we have to mention that it is a responsibility of our organization/institution to carry out this work.

## **2. Inspire**

We have to make relevant officials see clearly the issues and the needs to address them through presenting actual situations, current data, experiences and more importantly the importance of participation from individuals and from the whole organization/institution to support and implement this program.

## **3. Empower**

After having learned clearly how important the program is to exist, planning for activities to conduct capacity-building for officials should be done to produce enough qualified human resources to successfully implement the program.

## **4. Experiment**

There should be provisions for support and opportunities to relevant stakeholders to experiment their new knowledge, skills and methodologies that they have gained in practice with children and other relevant actors in their local areas. In this stage, mechanisms should be readily established to support, monitor and evaluate activities and child participation, for example within children and youth clubs.

## **5. Self-implement**

Based on the above experience, concerned officials have their own capacity to make plans to implement the program, to monitor and to evaluate the work implemented as well as seek other source of revenues to continue to implement the program in a sustainable manner.

To make this work go smoothly and effectively, the concept of ownership should be taken into account. It is necessary to enable children to participate meaningfully and also to ensure the quality of participation in all stages of the implementation from the beginning until goal accomplishment.



Working Group Meeting

**We need opportunities and meaningful participation to develop ourselves as good resources for our country.**



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