

FUNDED BY THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Independent Final Evaluation of **OPTIONS: Combating Child Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Through Education in Cambodia**

World Education

Cooperative Agreement Number: E-9-K-3-006 I



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CARE	Care International in Cambodia
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations Against Women
CEFAC	Commune Education for All Commission
CMDG	Cambodian Millennium Development Goal
CNCC	Cambodian National Council for Children
CPN	Child Protection Network
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSE	Commercial Sexual Exploitation
CSNCL	Civil Society Network Against Child Labor
CSW	Commercial Sex Work
DGEAG	District Girls' Education Animator Group
DOE	District Office of Education
EFA	Education for All (MOEYS 2003)
EI	Education Initiative
ESSP	Education Sector Support Plan
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GEWG	Girls' Education Working Group
HQ	Headquarters
ILAB	Bureau of International Labor Affairs
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International Nongovernmental Organization
IPEC	International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
KAPE	Kampuchean Action for Primary Education
KII	Key Informant Interview
LCSC	Local Cluster School Committee
LS	Life Skills
LSCEP	Life Skills Curriculum Enhancement Program (Prey Veng)
LSP	Life Skills Program
LSMC	Local Scholarship Management Committee
LSS	Lower Secondary School
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation

MBF	My Better Future
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MEF	Ministry of Economy and Finance
MOEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports
MOI	Ministry of Interior
MOLVT	Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training
MOSAVY	Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation (2004)
MOWA	Ministry of Women’s Affairs (2004)
NFE	Nonformal Education (Prey Veng and Banteay Mean Chey only)
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NSDP	National Strategic Development Plan
OCFT	Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking
O/S	Out of School
PAP	Priority Action Plan
PMP	Program Monitoring Plan
PMT	Program Management Team
POE	Provincial Office of Education
POSAVY	Provincial Office of Social Affairs, Vocation Training and Youth Rehabilitation
POWA	Provincial Office of Women’s Affairs
PRODOC	Project Document Proposal
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia
STS	Student Tracking System
TAF	The Asia Foundation
TOR	Terms of Reference
TST	Ten Seed Technique
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USDOL	United States Department of Labor
USS	Upper Secondary Schools
VCAO	Vulnerable Children Assistance Organization
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WE	World Education, Inc.
WFP	World Food Programme

LIST OF ILO CONVENTIONS

Convention 29	Forced Labor (1930)
Convention 105	Abolition of Forced Labor (1957)
Convention 138	Minimum Wage Convention (1970)
Convention 182	Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (1999)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a final evaluation of the United States Department of Labor (USDOL)-funded project OPTIONS: Combating Child Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation through Education. The main development goal of this innovative, four-year project was the reduction in the number of children trafficked or sexually/commercially exploited in Cambodia. The immediate development objective of OPTIONS was to ensure 13,500 vulnerable and exploited children were educated in programs relevant to their needs. This target was exceeded, and some 17,828 children, overwhelmingly girls, took part in OPTIONS educational programs.

The *goals of the evaluation process* were to—

1. Help individual organizations identify areas of good performance and areas where project implementation can be improved.
2. Assist the Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking (OCFT) to learn more about what is or is not working in terms of the overall conceptualization and design of the project within the broad OCFT technical cooperation program framework.
3. Assess the degree to which objectives relevant to the country-specific situation they address have been achieved.
4. Assess progress in terms of prevention/protection of trafficking victims and prosecution of traffickers/enhanced law enforcement capacity, if applicable.
5. Assess progress in terms of children's working and educational status (i.e., withdrawal and prevention from the worst forms of child labor; enrollment, retention, and completion of educational programs).

The *scope of the evaluation* includes a review and assessment of all activities carried out under the USDOL Cooperative Agreement with World Education, Inc. (WE) over the four-year lifespan of the project. The evaluation was tasked with examining the project as a whole to assess the progress of project outputs and activities toward reaching targets and objectives as outlined in the Cooperative Agreements and project documents. The evaluation was to consider all activities that have been implemented to date, addressing issues of project design, management and budget issues, project implementation, sustainability and impact, best practices and lessons learned, and recommendations for future project design. Over 240 people were interviewed, either individually or in small groups. All interviews were conducted in the Khmer language by the evaluator and in English with non-Khmer stakeholders. All translations are done by the evaluator. All photos in this report were taken by the evaluator, and Khmer language signs were translated by the evaluator.

The summary of *main findings and recommendations* is as follows, with the caveat that one-third of the project site locations were not assessed at close range (Banteay Meanchey) as per prearranged decision by USDOL and OPTIONS in view of fixed budget and time provisions.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that OPTIONS was a unique project that introduced quality education and innovative methods to be implemented by local counterparts that were supported by the Cambodian government, local communities, and students. OPTIONS has added value to government policy and programs, such as the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports (MOEYS), Education for All (EFA) policy and the Life Skills Program (LSP). For the LSP, for example, WE recognized an opportunity to help mainstream the life skills programs that had been developed under OPTIONS in the formal school system at the start of the 2006/07 school year. WE viewed this as a key sustainability strategy to ensure that educational quality obtained under OPTIONS could be continued by the Ministry of Education in its own programs.

OPTIONS enrollments in educational programs extended beyond targets representing a clear success of the project to attract participants. Some 15,749 students were enrolled in USDOL-supported educational programs by the end of the project's third year, representing 12,776 girls and 2,973 boys.¹ By Year 4, this number had increased to 17,828, exceeding by over 3,000 the original target. This number reflects children who, while in the program, were prevented from the worst forms of child labor. Retention and completion rates were on track throughout the program, as they were geared to overall rates obtained within the education system.

OPTIONS complexity makes for its unique beauty, but it is nonetheless viewed by Cambodian partners and some international agencies as a foreign gem of a project that shines alone and cannot be localized in its current complicated composition in the Cambodian environment. In other words, program and partnership complexity may well have stymied the sustainability of OPTIONS, because local organizations are reluctant to replicate the complex structures at local levels.

The management and administration was effective in monitoring the implementation of programs to check efficacy issues, yet efficiency could have been better if non-operational aspects of the program such as the policy arm had been dealt with more swiftly.

Without The Asia Foundation (TAF), the OPTIONS project did make policy achievements, such as the adoption by MOEYS to create a Life Skills Policy. OPTIONS disagrees with this assessment; the considerable expenditure of time, budget, and effort made to correct the problem without too much success is viewed as justifiable due to its partnership commitments and long-term relationship with TAF. Policy achievements were the result of national and local policy dialogues with the MOEYS that OPTIONS participated in to good advantage, particularly during the second half of the OPTIONS lifespan.

The basket of OPTIONS programs, including the LSP and My Better Future (MBF), were effectively designed to meet the learning needs of the educators and the students in upper primary and lower secondary and out-of-school youth within broad subject categories to build

¹ See OPTIONS Performance Report, 2003–2006: Section 111, B Aggregate Performance Report on USDOL ICLP Common Indicators—Direct Tracking, World Education, Inc., Reporting Period 8/20/03 (project start) to 8/31/06. It is anticipated by the evaluator that the final technical report of OPTIONS due in August 2007 will show a large drop in enrollments of OPTIONS students receiving scholarships and enrolled in other OPTIONS programs such as MBF, especially students in school who are not able to move up from lower to upper secondary school in Kampong Cham and Prey Veng.

self-awareness and self-empowerment. They could not permanently prevent the students from staying out of commercially exploitive industries because the USDOL grant was designed to improve access to education for children at risk to exploitation and not to create interventions in the area of livelihood improvement that address poverty dimensions of child labor. OPTIONS did well to address the poverty environment in Year 4 of the program when livelihood programs were piloted in Prey Veng.

It would be recommended to USDOL to factor in a poverty reduction element into the programs to prevent or withdraw children from commercial exploitation via livelihood/income-generation activities for the bulk of the beneficiaries in Cambodia and other countries.

The OPTIONS project design carries with it an assumption that government budgets and local communities do not have the funding wherewithal to administer the scholarships for girls or the MBF programs. However, the evaluation determined that possibilities for Cambodian government funding do exist through the MOEYS Priority Action Program (PAP) budgeting of the national government and through local community support via the wealthy residents of provinces in Kampong Cham and Prey Veng, whose ability to assist with local fundraising for beneficiaries were not exploited.

Hence, development goals of enrollment of children in educational programs to withdraw and/or prevent them from exploitive child labor were reached within the lifespan of the project, but cannot be sustained beyond it due to—

- High debt burdens of beneficiaries and their families who engage in child labor practices to make ends meet; OPTIONS students in grade 9 will largely drop out before completing grade 10, owing to poverty, even if OPTIONS continues in 2008. The EFA policy is geared to completion of grade 9, and OPTIONS programs are designed to help children stay in school to this level and not beyond.
- Education, not material support/anti-poverty, was intended to be the focus of the project, and OPTIONS did well to provide up to US\$2 million of food assistance to beneficiary families through monthly rice rations through partnership with the World Food Programme. When the project ends, this support will end with it. It would be useful to think what mechanisms could be built into the program to ensure that the support continues.
- Costs of running the individual programs that have not been picked up by the local authorities and committees, owing to the lack of handover planning by OPTIONS in its project design.

The vast majority of OPTIONS beneficiaries consulted during the assessment said that they did not want to quit school or the OPTIONS programs, but they would out of economic necessity leave their provinces for the capital of Phnom Penh (if female) or Thailand (if male) to become laborers. Under the Royal Government of Cambodia (RCG) definitions, children over the age of 15 can legally work. Thus, OPTIONS beneficiaries under the legal age are prevented from child labor when they are in the programs as beneficiaries, but only to the age of 15. The reality for the

child beneficiaries under 15 interviewed by the evaluator is that they must carry out agricultural labor on the farms of the more wealthy villagers in their areas, where they typically make a little over US\$1 per day, excluding food and travel expenses, for a full day of work. These earnings, they say, go straight to moneylenders or to buy subsistence rations for family members.

Main recommendations:

- Build responsibility into roles of national government ministry partners (MOEYS, Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training [MOLVT], Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation [MOSAVY], Ministry of Women’s Affairs [MOWA]) for the establishment of a coordinated advocacy strategy on EFA with a new goal of EFA up to grade 12, in order to demonstrate that EFA to grade 9 is not a sufficient target to preempt trafficking and commercial exploitation of children in Cambodia, nor to reduce poverty and achieve the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals (CMDGs) by 2015.
- Advocate with MOEYS to the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) for national budget commitments through PAP Chapter 12 to finance more scholarships and home stays and the basket of programs that pertain to EFA and reaching the CMDGs.
- Provide for inclusion of welfare and income-generation programs for all beneficiaries and reduce the targeted number of beneficiaries to those that can be lifted out of poverty in order to sustain OPTIONS to completion of grade 12. For example, a focus on vocational training can alleviate the poverty pressure when it is based on market demand for skills, and this could be built into the program if it continues.
- Coordinate with the MOLVT options for beneficiaries to enter technical colleges to learn trades and with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to monitor entrants of OPTIONS beneficiaries to the factories.
- Coordinate with MOLVT on entrance for girls in nontraditional job training, such as motorcycle repair and carpentry, to expand skills sets beyond industrial sewing and factory work that can be used in local areas, offset pull factors in migration, and reduce dangers of trafficking and commercial sex work.
- Reorient target of beneficiaries from grades 8 and 9 to grades 9 to 12.
- Maintain target beneficiaries in grades 5 and 6.
- OPTIONS has concentrated on girls because they are traditionally disadvantaged in educational attainment, but MOEYS statistics are showing a healthier sex ratio of enrollment and retention in primary school. Most stakeholders interviewed wanted OPTIONS to have a greater gender balance, and this was a recommendation at the evaluator’s presentation of draft findings in group work.

I FINAL EVALUATION OVERVIEW

“I hear I listen, I see I remember: I do myself, I understand”

—*Painted signboard, school grounds,
OPTIONS partner lower secondary school
Batheay District, Kampong Cham Province*

1.1 OVERVIEW OF OPTIONS

“OPTIONS is first and foremost an education program”

—*Ingrid Martonova, OPTIONS project director*

OPTIONS is operational in three provinces in Cambodia, each with distinct implementing partners: Banteay Meanchey, along the Thai border, implemented by Care International in Cambodia (CARE) until 2006; Prey Veng, adjacent to the Vietnam border, implemented by WE; and Kampong Cham, the cultural and intellectual heartland of the country, located more centrally and also sharing a border with Vietnam, implemented by Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE). Each main implementing partner works with other partners in each location, both government and nongovernmental.

1.2 EVALUATION GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals of the evaluation process were to—

1. Help individual organizations identify areas of good performance and areas where project implementation can be improved.
2. Assist the OCFT to learn more about what is or is not working in terms of the overall conceptualization and design of the project within the broad OCFT technical cooperation program framework.
3. Assess the degree to which objectives relevant to the country-specific situation they address have been achieved.
4. Assess progress in terms of prevention/protection of trafficking victims and prosecution of traffickers/enhanced law enforcement capacity, if applicable.
5. Assess progress in terms of children’s working and educational status (i.e., withdrawal and prevention from the worst forms of child labor; enrollment, retention, and completion of educational programs).

The scope of the evaluation includes a review and assessment of all activities carried out under the USDOL Cooperative Agreement with WE over the four-year lifespan of the project. The evaluation was tasked with examining the project as a whole to assess the progress of project outputs and activities toward reaching targets and objectives as outlined in the Cooperative

Agreements and project documents. The evaluation was to consider all activities that have been implemented to date, addressing issues of project design, management and budget issues, project implementation, sustainability and impact, best practices and lessons learned, and recommendations for future project design. Over 240 people were interviewed, either individually or in small groups. All interviews were conducted in the Khmer language by the evaluator and in English with non-Khmer stakeholders. All translations are done by the evaluator. All photos in this report were taken by the evaluator and Khmer language signs were translated by the evaluator.

The thematic areas addressed in this evaluation are—

- **Project Design:** Identifying areas working well/not so well in view of overall project conceptualization and design.
- **Project Implementation:** Identifying areas of good performance and areas that can be improved, as well as assessing the extent to which project objectives have been achieved.
- **Project Development Objectives:** Assessing progress in prevention or protection of trafficking victims or vulnerable child/adult (and female) populations.
- **Partnership and Coordination:** Noting what challenges and opportunities arose in collaborating across organizations with different histories, expertise, and development approaches.
- **Management and Budget/Fiscal Planning:** Investigating whether programs were sufficiently financed and disbursements were timely and efficient.
- **Sustainability and Impact:** Assessing what steps were taken to promote sustainability and continuation of education strategies for combating child labor beyond the project life cycle.
- **Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Future Projects:** Deriving from the evaluator's own analysis of project management, design, and implementation, as well as from discussions and feedback from a range of participants, observers, project staff, project designers, U.S. and Cambodian government representatives, and civil society partners.

1.3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGIES

1.3.1 Methodology Design

The evaluation methodologies for OPTIONS were designed in consultation with USDOL and Macro and, to some extent, with OPTIONS project staff. This aimed to ensure that the evaluation covered the main program and thematic areas in a way that would provide most value to project implementers while still respecting the Terms of Reference (TOR) regarding evaluation goals provided by USDOL. The evaluation needed to weave through a rich fabric: OPTIONS is complex in its site coverage; there is a partnership with three implementing organizations and a host of subcontracted nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); collaboration occurs with up to four government ministries, from national through to provincial and district levels; and the program includes commune authorities, parents, teachers, and other community members. Not all the threads could be picked up and woven into the final analysis. To accomplish this would require a minimum of two members in the research team working in all four sites (three provinces and the capital).²

In respect of this being a final project evaluation, the evaluator was given a broad mandate to review and assess all activities implemented during the OPTIONS program lifespan from 2003 to 2007.

Comprehensive subsets of questions under each of the main headings described above were also devised and presented in the form of a methodology matrix submitted by the evaluator to USDOL, Macro, and OPTIONS before fieldwork commenced (see below). WE Headquarters (HQ) in Boston and OPTIONS staff provided useful suggestions on emerging themes and issues of importance from their perspective. These were incorporated as much as possible by the evaluator while addressing the specific areas as stated by USDOL.³

Overall, the fieldwork was intensive and productive, with a high level of quality information, sufficient to meet the objectives of a good majority of the evaluation areas defined within the USDOL TOR, and a fair share of the issue areas raised by OPTIONS staff themselves.

1.3.2 Identification of Stakeholders

USDOL, Macro, and the evaluator identified a broad range of stakeholders during the methodology design. As this is the final evaluation, it was important for the evaluator to meet with contemporary partners and stakeholders as well as those who had been involved with OPTIONS in the past or who had limited participation and wanted more, such as the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training (MOLVT). The evaluator was able to meet with almost all the individuals and representatives from government, NGOs (include international NGOs [INGOs]),

² A two-person evaluation team has been hired by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to evaluate the UNICEF-sponsored Ba Phnom District programs of OPTIONS in Prey Veng province. This team has a longer mandate than this final evaluation.

³ The methodology matrix in the annex contains detailed questions; OPTIONS project staff questions and thematic areas are profiled in the narrative report and attached in the annex.

core partners, and the U.S. Embassy, as well as a good range of the beneficiaries from the main OPTIONS programs during a nine-day period of fieldwork. In all, the evaluator met individually or in group or focus group format with 241 individuals during nine days, spread across the field sites of Phnom Penh, Kampong Cham, and Prey Veng provinces.

Direct observation of project activities was achieved for Life Skills (LS) and MBF, and meetings took place with many of the stakeholders involved in implementation of the formal and nonformal educational (NFE) programs of OPTIONS. Programs viewed by the evaluator in the two provinces included—

- Scholarship programs
- LS and Curriculum Enhancement
- Remedial classes for primary children in grades 1 to 3 with poor attendance
- Tutoring class
- Girls counseling
- Livelihood Development/Vocational Skills Training Out-of-School
- Livelihood Development Stage (Stage III) MBF

Stakeholders met in the provinces included scholarship beneficiaries (including a few boys); out-of-school (O/S) females in sewing classes for vocational training; child laborers in NFE at a brick factory; primary school students out and about for LS advocacy in their community market and on a national highway march; LS teachers at a primary school; LS teacher at a lower secondary school (LSS) (sole surviving classical dancer based in Kampong Cham); LSS students studying dance in LS and their female teacher (10 students); parents and community members of Commune Education for All Commission (CEFAC) (village chiefs, commune council members, retired school teachers, middleclass retired rice farmers, mothers—about 12 in all).

The full list of stakeholders met is provided below.⁴

⁴ See meeting list with dates and people individually interviewed in Annex A. See field site schedule for precise information on FGD participants and their responsibilities or participation in OPTIONS. The evaluator is grateful to provincial and national OPTIONS staff for preparing the field site schedules.

Table 1: Focus Group and Key Informants for Evaluation

Stakeholders met and interviewed individually/groups	N
WE Cambodia/Boston	2
OPTIONS staff national level	3
OPTIONS staff provincial level	12
OPTIONS key partners (KAPE, CARE)	3
KAPE staff Kampong Cham	7
OPTIONS staff Prey Veng	7
Subtotal	34
Government ministry national-level partners	9
Provincial level (KC and PV)	8
Subtotal	17
OPTIONS district level (KC and PV)	8
Commune Support Groups (CEPACs)	10
Subtotal	18
<i>Kampong Cham: eight FGDs conducted in three days</i>	
KC educators: primary and LSS teachers; NFE; LSP; CEFAC; GCs, LCSC; LSMC)	24
KC beneficiaries LS	9
Scholarship students (in two districts)	17
LS primary students (40 met; 10 students and three teachers interviewed informally)	
Remediation activity informal class interview	15
KAPE rep and VSO volunteer dinner meeting	2
Subtotal	67
<i>Prey Veng: nine FGDs conducted in two days</i>	
Prey Veng educators (Education Animator Group; Girls' Education Working Group; MBF; NFE Brick Factory Pilot with POSAVY; CEFAC)	32
Brick factory students O/S child laborers	15
Sewing students O/S females	12
Scholarship students Wat Svay Ath	8
Subtotal	67
U.S. Embassy	2
INGO Phnom Penh (UNICEF; ILO)	3
NGOs provinces (VCAO; Mith Samlanh)	3
Subtotal	8
Stakeholder group work facilitated by evaluator on prelim findings	30
Subtotal	30
Total number formally interviewed	241

1.3.3 Main Methods Employed

A standard approach was employed in the preparatory phases of the evaluation as listed below and as recommended by USDOL.

Literature Review and Document Audit

Project documents, cooperative agreements with USDOL, technical progress and status reports, project logframes and monitoring plans, project design workshop reports, work plans, management procedures, relevant studies, and research reports on subjects of child labor (e.g., trafficking, migration, poverty assessments, and RGC strategic policy plans on development).

Sources of OPTIONS project document information included—

- Project document application (PRODOC)
- Cooperative Agreements
- Solicitation of grant applications
- Management procedures and guidelines
- Progress reports
- Technical reports to USDOL
- Project management team reports
- Work plans and logframes
- Project files, memos, and overviews as appropriate.

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

An interview guide was put to use for different stakeholders on general and specific questions that reflected (1) the main areas of inquiry as defined in the TOR, and (2) the priority issue areas as discussed with USDOL, WE HQ, and OPTIONS in telephone briefings, which took place over the last week of May. The OPTIONS staff's detailed question list was referred to as appropriate in interviews conducted by the evaluator, but could not be comprehensively undertaken, owing to time constraints and thematic pulls of the USDOL TOR.⁵

⁵ See annex for list of OPTIONS-generated questions sent to the evaluator.

Individual/Group Interviews with OPTIONS Staff

A series of interviews and consultations took place with OPTIONS staff at the national level in Phnom Penh and in two of the three provincial sites (Kampong Cham and Prey Veng). Meetings with the OPTIONS project director, national coordinator, and education advisor took place at the beginning and end of the fieldwork, which provided a national perspective and context to the individual programs and implementers of the programs.

The OPTIONS national staff was focused, articulate, and analytical while demonstrating encyclopedic knowledge of their respective areas of OPTIONS expertise. The project director has been with OPTIONS since its inception, the national coordinator came on board early on in the first year, and the education advisor joined the project at the start of the third year. All three national staff members demonstrated a high degree of professionalism, mutual respect, and genuine solidarity in their attitudes both toward their work as a team and their respective components.

The project director was interviewed on all core subject areas of the evaluation, with attention given to project design, collaboration and partnership, management and budget issues, and sustainability and lessons learned. Additionally, the philosophies of WE and OPTIONS were discussed at some length.

The national coordinator was interviewed extensively about program development and implementation; partnership challenges and opportunities with the MOEYS and other ministry partners; and project history and adaptations of programs to changing circumstances and needs of beneficiaries and stakeholders over the lifespan of OPTIONS.

The evaluator interviewed the education advisor regarding the program's objectives and achievements over the course of the past two years and gained understanding of how OPTIONS had succeeded and where it can be strengthened should it be formulated into OPTIONS II, a second phase.

Details of the interviews are woven thematically into the results section of the report and analyzed with respect to the main objectives of the evaluation.

Consultations with Provincial-Level OPTIONS Staff

The evaluator met with the OPTIONS provincial field staff as a group in Kampong Cham and Prey Veng, and individually with some staff in each province. As Kampong Cham staff members accompanied the evaluator to the field sites, there was also time to discuss issues in some detail during the transit times to different districts and over shared meals. In Prey Veng, the evaluator was with the OPTIONS driver for the most part, and had less time to spend with OPTIONS provincial staff.

Individual Interviews/Discussions with Government and INGO Stakeholders

Interviews and consultative meetings were held with all the key government institutions and civil society organizations as required by USDOL and suggested by the OPTIONS project director, with the exception of the Ministry of Interior (MOI).⁶ The evaluator held meetings with the labor/economic and political officers of the U.S. Embassy; undersecretaries of state and department chiefs of MOEYS and the MOWA; deputy director general and deputy department chief of MOSAVY; and department chiefs of MOLVT. International organization staff included chief technical advisors and program directors from the ILO International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), TAF, and CARE. National NGOs included KAPE (Kampong Cham) and Mith Samlanh (Kampong Cham).

1.3.4 Methods for Evaluation with Beneficiaries and Program Partners

Methodologies used in conjunction with evaluation tools with stakeholders and beneficiaries were based on participatory approaches. These included key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus groups that took place with participants from government and civic project implementers and partners, student beneficiaries; teachers and parents, OPTIONS project staff, MBF beneficiaries, scholarship beneficiaries, and livelihood beneficiaries.

Key Informant Interview: The KII was used for one-on-one meetings with key stakeholders to explore specific areas of inquiry relevant to that stakeholder’s knowledge and experience of the program. Most of the KII were held at the national level.

Ten Seed Technique:⁷ The Ten Seed Technique (TST) is a useful tool for focus groups and was used intensively during the evaluation. It is valuable for assessing responses to a particular program and how the target community has been affected. The beneficiaries and the program partners (students, teachers, community members, parents) of OPTIONS were ideal participants for the focus groups.

The TST is a participatory tool used to focus a group’s attention on a single issue or set of issues related to the project evaluation subject areas. Ten dark seeds and a large blank sheet of paper were used by the facilitator (evaluator) to record in the form of a matrix—

1. Program components, such as those deemed critical to successful outcomes.

⁶ The MOI Anti-Trafficking Department Chief declined the OPTIONS request for a meeting with the evaluator and recommended that any such request, if pursued, would have to be put to the Minister of Interior in writing. MOI was the only ministry that did not readily welcome a meeting with the evaluator, and this may be indicative of sensitivity of the MOI’s Department Chief of Anti-Trafficking in light of controversial bungled raids and alleged misuse of funds and corruption fees, seen in the media and in gossip since 2005.

⁷ Developed by development practitioner Dr. Ravi Jayakaran (2002), who was consulted by the evaluator prior to use.

2. Environmental factors impinging on effectiveness of program design (positively/negatively).
3. Objectives achieved/yet to be achieved.

These were defined by the focus group participants, not prompted by the facilitator. A list was made for each area, and the participants then ranked items in order of importance through discussion and consensus. The 10 seeds represent ratios and participants use them to rank importance/relevance of particular issues, components, or objectives. The tool was adapted for different subjects and participants by ensuring the beneficiaries and stakeholders had input into the evaluation.

For example, when the evaluator met with community teachers of the Life Skills Program (LSP), the TST was used to explore first how they themselves understood the concept of LS and the OPTIONS objectives in teaching them. The group was then asked to discuss how well their programs had done in achieving the objectives. The group, guided by the facilitator, examined the data that had been produced by the group in the form of a matrix, with the list of objectives for LS in the left column and, in the right columns, areas where good achievements had been made and areas where they could be strengthened.

Stakeholders found the tool to be very useful in contributing to the overall assessment. The TST allows beneficiaries and implementers to produce and analyze a bigger picture of their project or their component than a standard focus group discussion (FGD) of questions and answers. The technique is valuable for focusing on issues/themes rather than on particular individuals, and works well among populations who may otherwise be shy or hesitant to speak publicly, such as the OPTIONS scholarship beneficiaries. The technique was used in both field site visits among OPTIONS provincial staff and one national-level staff member in Phnom Penh. District-level implementers from ministries to teachers and students requested the TST sheets be returned to them so that they could be referred to in future assessments and used for future exercises in analyzing or reviewing the progress of particular programs.⁸

1.4 FIELDWORK LOGISTICS

1.4.1 Fieldwork Site Selection

In Phnom Penh, consultations, interviews, and meetings took place between the evaluator and WE HQ and project staff, CARE Cambodia country director and project staff, UNICEF, ILO-IPEC, U.S. Embassy staff, and MOEYS, MOWA and MOLVT.

⁸ The TST was also used in the stakeholder briefing among three different groups as a way to collate and measure assessments of each area tasked by the group to discuss and provide recommendations for a future OPTIONS II. The evaluator will return the TST flipchart sheets to OPTIONS Phnom Penh with the date, district, and site location marked so that beneficiaries and implementers can have a partial record of their participation in the final evaluation.

OPTIONS is operational in Banteay Meanchey (implemented by CARE until 2006); Prey Veng, implemented by WE; and Kampong Cham, implemented by KAPE. Time and budget limitations meant that Banteay Meanchey was not selected as an evaluation site. Kampong Cham and Prey Veng were selected.

Five full days of provincial travel took place between June 21 and 26, including two districts in Kampong Cham (Ponyea Krek and Batheay) and two districts in Prey Veng province (Prey Veng and Mesang). Good roads and clement weather smoothed the travel in Kampong Cham. Prey Veng travel took longer because of poor roads, long distances between districts, and the onset of the monsoon rains. In hindsight, and given the special problems that beset the Banteay Meanchey site of OPTIONS (including issues of remoteness, dire poverty, transiting for migrants and traffickers), it would have been prudent to have extended the evaluation by five days to ensure a fair distribution of time, coverage, and analysis for all three site locations. This is particularly the case as Banteay Meanchey was not visited during the midterm evaluation of the OPTIONS program. This was discussed during the course of the evaluation, but funds limited extending the evaluation any further.

The district sites were determined in conjunction with the OPTIONS project leader and her staff and based on documentation provided to the evaluator on the scope and number of activities profiled in each district.

1.4.2 Fieldwork Logistics/Coordination with OPTIONS

Travel coordination was expertly arranged by WE offices in Phnom Penh. In a very few meetings, OPTIONS project staff were present to make introductions and to explain the context of programs. No OPTIONS staff members took part in the evaluator's meetings, interviews, and FGDs with stakeholders and beneficiaries in the provinces. Fieldwork proceeded smoothly, on schedule, and no constraints or problems were encountered.

During all stages of the evaluation process with OPTIONS, USDOL, and Macro, fairly regular electronic and telephone communication occurred on an as-needed basis. The evaluator shared the goals and intent of the evaluation in her meetings with the project director and staff members and in all meetings with stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Finally, the evaluator requested and received input and suggestions from the project director and the WE country director. The evaluator held a meeting with them during the write-up of the report to collect additional information and feedback on the process and a preliminary assessment of the evaluation. The evaluator held a follow-up conference call with the WE HQ vice president at the end of completion of the draft final evaluation report.

1.4.3 Evaluation Stakeholder Briefing—June 29, 2007

At the end of the OPTIONS nine days of fieldwork, the evaluator had one day to draft preliminary findings on key aspects of the evaluation in the form of a PowerPoint presentation and to design some group exercises that stemmed from the results. The evaluator also consulted OPTIONS staff on the context, structure, and participant list of the stakeholder briefing.

The stakeholder briefing was held on June 29 at the Racha Conference Room in Phnom Penh for a full day, with 40 participants. There was some discussion between the evaluator and OPTIONS national staff over participants, as originally no national-level stakeholders from ministries were to be invited. Because policy and advocacy is a national-level matter and because the provincial and district-level ministry staff expressed frustration to the evaluator at the lack of connectivity among government levels, the OPTIONS staff reevaluated the participant list and included national-level stakeholders as well.

The workshop was designed to present general findings of broad categories and some assessment on issues emerging from the provincial trips. It did not provide details of the program work, but rather focused on overall sustainability issues within the framework of MOEYS initiatives and the poverty profile of beneficiaries that led to conclusions of time-bounded impact for them within the project cycle. A half-day of workshop group work by participants from the national, provincial, and district levels was productive and focused, with good participation by all members and solid outputs in the form of targeted recommendations in specific areas (partnerships, sustainability, policy objectives for OPTIONS II). OPTIONS staff members were observer participants and the evaluator designed a session for them to think about OPTIONS II. Stakeholder outputs are included in the annex of the report and may be useful in the design of the next phase of the OPTIONS project, 2007–2011. The evaluator provided overview assessments on the high degree of quality in OPTIONS work and the enthusiastic reception of the programs by Cambodian counterparts and, in particular, the beneficiaries.

1.5 LAYOUT

This report is laid out as follows: An overview of the evaluation findings according to the components described in Section 1.2 is provided in Section II. These are analyzed in more detail in the following sections: Section 2.2 assesses program design and development objectives; Section 2.3 assesses partnership and coordination; Section 2.4 assesses project management and financial planning/budgeting; Section 2.5 assesses project design, implementation, and outputs; and Section 2.6 addresses sustainability and impacts. Section III then goes on to look at best practices and lessons learned, and Section IV offers some overall conclusions. Section V details recommendations according to the different components of the evaluation.

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II EVALUATION FINDINGS

OPTIONS is a unique and valuable project that has met its stated development goal within its timescale to reduce the number of vulnerable children, especially girls, at risk of human trafficking and commercial exploitation.

Indicators of success used in this evaluation include—

- Relevance of programs to special needs of vulnerable and exploited children.
- Outreach to sufficient numbers of children to make social impact.
- Partnership with relevant government and nongovernmental partners to build local awareness.
- Involvement and eventual ownership of the programs in local communities.
- Management, internal monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of programs over time.
- Realignment and redesign of programs because of the evaluation results from local communities through participation of stakeholders.

2.1 OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION FINDINGS

Below is a quick look at the evaluation results of the project as a whole. Information here was drawn from review of project documents, interview data from key informants, and focus groups from key stakeholders and partners, including OPTIONS national and provincial staff. Information was obtained by means of the participatory methodological tools as described in the previous section. Information below is given according to the following categories:

- **Program Design/Implementation Issues:** Was design relevant to the development needs and interventions required of child laborers and children in vulnerable circumstances in the site locations chosen by OPTIONS? Did the design support the four goals of the Child Labor Education Initiative (EI) of the USDOL?
- **Partnership and Coordination:** How well have OPTIONS program partners worked together in order to achieve development goals and to ensure beneficial and sustainable impacts of the project? What have been the major challenges and opportunities of implementing coordination with government partners?
- **Management and Budget Issues:** Was the project effectively managed to ensure efficient project implementation and balanced distribution of resources and funds according to preplanned budget categories?

- **Sustainability and Impact:** What steps have been taken so far to promote sustainability and continuation of education strategies for combating child labor beyond the life of the project? Have there been commitments by other partners to continue the activities of OPTIONS, especially at the local level?

2.1.1 OPTIONS Program Design

Strengths:

- The program was clearly defined and, in 2004, OPTIONS changed its strategic focus from commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) to commercial exploitation in response to the Cambodian context.
- Program design and development goals were consistent with the MOEYS EFA and Education Sector Support Program (ESSP) as well as RGC's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and CMDGs, which are monitored and tracked through reporting on the RGC's National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) (2006–2010).
- The program responded to the four goals of the USDOL EI.
- Development goals were partially achievable for target beneficiaries within a timebound project framework; however, most beneficiaries, especially in LSS, are child laborers in commercially exploitive sectors inside and outside of their districts during and in between OPTIONS program participation.

Areas for improvement:

- The OPTIONS PRODOC did not build into the design sufficient sustainability mechanisms to ensure that the work continues beyond the lifespan of WE funding. OPTIONS did try to address the issue in its activity plans, but it would be good to have a master plan to guide such initiatives.
- OPTIONS PRODOC on policy/advocacy was not linked to the international human rights legal framework and RGC legal obligations to implement international conventions it has ratified, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and ILO Conventions (138, 29, and 105). Cambodia ratified ILO Convention 182 on March 14, 2006.
- OPTIONS PRODOC does not include references to the RGC's legal framework and international standards and commitments to ILO Conventions 138, 182, 29, and 105, all ratified by RGC, nor does it include mention of the CRC, also ratified by RGC, thereby weakening the OPTIONS policy arm and advocacy focus with government partners. These conventions require reporting by nation state members: Cambodia is far behind on its reporting on all conventions with the exception of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW), but is aware of the requirement to do so.

- OPTIONS PRODOC and reporting documents do not refer to existing policy positions of RGC that respond to the worst forms of child labor or basic education beyond the MOEYS EFA, thereby weakening the policy arm and limiting policy instruments to one ministry; the EFA itself is linked to the NSDP and its predecessor and to the MDGs and CMDG.

2.1.2 Partnership and Coordination

Strengths:

- OPTIONS embraced a unique partnership model of working with “competitors” based on the philosophy that the richness of aggregate experiences would benefit local communities, and different partners would show unique imprints in their respective areas. The model was based on the expectation that each of three partners would raise additional financial and human resources to build up programming components over the project lifespan.
- Partners KAPE, CARE, and WE were encouraged to evolve their own bundle of programs specific to the needs of each provincial site (and further still the needs of each district) with the strategic view that each partner site could be a laboratory out of which successful experiments in educational programs and projects could be shared and possibly exported or imported across partner operations. Much energy was invested in finding other funds; KAPE, TAF, and WE were successful in this endeavor, whereas CARE had other challenges that were not sufficiently overcome to enable definitive progress of OPTIONS programming before it pulled out in Year 3.
- UNICEF reported “great” collaboration with OPTIONS in its role as funder of some US\$600,000 to OPTIONS and as a partner to the MOSAVY, managing child protection networks (CPNs) in the provinces; OPTIONS also partnered with MOSAVY.
- CEFAC committees composed of village chiefs, commune councilors, school directors, and community volunteers have been working with OPTIONS in Year 4. This is a good example of how OPTIONS supports capacity development for community leaders, whose mandate is to lobby for/support education programs for vulnerable children in their community. OPTIONS provincial staff noted that the CEFACs are particularly effective if school directors are motivated and provide leadership.
- Policy forums fed into by OPTIONS had good outcomes, as indicated by the adoption of some of the OPTIONS approaches within the MOEYS LS policy.
- OPTIONS introduced new ways of working for civil servants, educators, and community members that were embraced and practiced, albeit with mentoring and support from WE, KAPE, and CARE. A sustained presence by the three core partners in Cambodia since the early 1990s was a key factor leading to partnerships based on mutual trust and learning.

Areas for improvement:

- Partnership challenges with TAF and CARE were recognized relatively late in the project and not effectively addressed. Interventions to keep TAF on board were generous and time consuming, but not productive in meeting the policy objectives of OPTIONS.
- CEFACs with weak school directors are less successful in coordinating their work and getting results.
- National-level government partners MOEYS, MOWA, and MOSAVY are unsure of how their advisory duties are designed to impact the program functions; working group members all request more specific duties and functions and greater scope for input.
- District and provincial ministry partners have good coordination up to provincial level, but encounter obstacles when feeding back and reporting to national level. This is not due to the OPTIONS project, but there was a request made via the evaluator to OPTIONS to help build capacity for this.
- Quarterly technical reports prepared by Cambodian government counterparts at district and provincial levels should be sent to national counterparts with timebound responses required. Again, this is not the responsibility of OPTIONS, but rather a request made by stakeholders during the evaluation and at the stakeholders briefing for OPTIONS to assist in the process as appropriate.

2.1.3 Management and Budget Issues

Strengths:

- Budget disbursements were made on time and according to predetermined categories; budget and fiscal planning was comprehensive and rational; budget reports were on time and consistent across donor funding cycles.
- Management was highly effective in almost all areas, with the exception of the policy/advocacy component.
- An upgraded budgeting system introduced by WE HQ to the country office in midstream of the project represented learning growth for the finance team and helped manage reporting across different funding streams (USDOL, UNICEF, McKnight Foundation).

Areas for improvement:

- Management can be more strategic in its evaluation of project components or partners that are not performing by dropping them earlier instead of retaining nonproductive and inefficient project components.
- The project director should spend more time with beneficiaries in provinces and less time on Program Management Teams (PMTs) and on interventions with core national partners

and implementing agencies in order to evaluate the impacts and understandings of programs from the beneficiaries' points of view. This is because field experience by project directors is an excellent method of seeing firsthand the strengths and weakness of the project design from a macro view that is not always visible to mid-level managers.

2.1.4 Project Design, Implementation, and Outputs

Strengths:

- A total of 15,749 children were prevented from the worst forms of labor through OPTIONS direct educational interventions, exceeding the target (12,776 girls and 2,973 boys).⁹
- Retention rates of children in educational programs were high overall and met expectations. As OPTIONS notes, "Completion rate, as defined by the USDOL common indicator framework, is the percentage of a particular cohort that has completed an entire education program (such as primary education). If the program aims to provide educational support to beneficiaries from cohort 1 (beneficiaries who are enrolled in the first year of the program) over a four-year period, it is expected that completion rates will be very low in the first, second and third year, as the program hopes to retain most of the students until the final year."¹⁰
- Appropriate partnerships were established with MOSAVY and UNICEF to monitor the CPN networks and identify the children most at risk and vulnerable to trafficking and commercial exploitation in OPTIONS site areas.
- Prey Veng is a laboratory for research and development.

Areas for improvement:

- Percentage rates of children completing educational programs as a result of USDOL-funded projects decreased from 77% in Year 1 to 16% in Year 3 among a total cohort of 4,620.¹¹

⁹ This figure is derived from the OPTIONS 2003–2006 Performance record, Section 111, B, Aggregate Performance Report on DOL ICLP Common Indicators: Direct Tracking, World Education, Inc. (Cambodia Field Office), reporting period from project start date of 8/20/03 to 8/31/06. The last technical report is being assembled and not available for this evaluation.

¹⁰ OPTIONS comments on first draft.

¹¹ Ibid. According to OPTIONS statistics compiled for this report, 737 out of 4,620 students enrolled in OPTIONS programs completed the program cycle by Year 3 of OPTIONS, suggesting that sustainability was a serious challenge and the programs were too difficult for the students to complete and continue to the next stage. While enrollment statistics are impressive, with some 15,749 students engaged in OPTIONS program by the end of Year 3 of the project, overall statistics indicate that the ability of OPTIONS to sustain these figures over its lifespan has not been possible.

- The percentage of targeted beneficiaries who moved from primary school to LSS was not tracked in technical reports, as OPTIONS reported the statistic “obsolete” when it handed over primary scholarship beneficiaries to government scholarship programs in Year 2.
- Completion rates of formal and vocational training programs for post-grade nine students are unknown for the current school year, as indicators are not shown for midcycles in the latest technical reports to USDOL.
- LS educators are not necessarily gender responsive, in that students associate themselves by class into male and female cohorts, owing to social conditioning. This is reinforced by community and state teachers, whose gender views unconsciously cross-reference stereotyped sex roles with presumed learning preferences of each sex.¹²
- Materials have taken a very long time to be produced in tandem with innovative program developments, such as LS manuals or research and marketing methods used by female beneficiaries, in their districts on livelihood possibilities.

2.1.5 Sustainability and Impacts

Strengths:

- OPTIONS was successful in gaining the Ministry’s support of the first stage of the NFE program (basic literacy).
- MOEYS, with OPTIONS partnership, agreed to provide secondary school scholarships for beneficiaries.
- OPTIONS approaches in its LS program were mainstreamed by the MOEYS.

Areas for improvement:

- Dissemination of OPTIONS achievements by way of roundtable presentations to strategically chosen RGC poverty reduction working groups and to high-level donor forums may have contributed assisted the program be well known and garnered support for the program beyond the Ministry of Education.

The challenge for OPTIONS at the close of its project cycle is sustainability of programs and participation of beneficiaries in those programs. OPTIONS has achieved significant success in these areas. However, external environmental factors of poverty and indebtedness of beneficiaries, which is beyond the reach of the OPTIONS program, are a difficult constraint for educators. USDOL may wish to build in more vocational training opportunities or livelihood

¹² For instance, girls want to learn bicycle repair because bikes break down and girls cannot get to school. Teachers think they do not because girls do not like to “dirty their hands”: Boys want to learn sewing, but are laughed out of the room by girls and teachers upon entrance. Boys want to get jobs in garment factories and view it as discrimination that mostly girls are hired for these jobs.

education in such programs to ensure that beneficiaries are able to enjoy the benefits of educational interventions beyond the lifespan of a particular project such as OPTIONS.

2.2 PROGRAM DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

OPTIONS program design dovetails well with its development goals. The OPTIONS development goals are simple and clear: preventing children, especially girls, from falling into exploitive child labor by developing educational programs that will assist them to stay in school. These included—

- The very effective school feeding programs with the assistance of World Food Programme (WFP).
- Cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs at provincial levels to raise awareness of the problems of identifying at-risk children.
- Tabulating statistics on children who had been trafficked or withdrawn from trafficking that could benefit from OPTIONS.
- Livelihood training in selected sites.
- Research mapping by girls and women to identify work opportunities in their own communities.

The design of OPTIONS makes partnership and coordination a more than full-time job for the one grantee. The project is implemented by multiple core partner agencies (WE, KAPE, and CARE), each in separate geographic locations (Kampong Cham, Prey Veng, and Banteay Meanchey, respectively), with four government ministry partners (MOEYS, MOLVT, MOSAVY, and MOWA) and their subnational offices at provincial and district levels. There is involvement of commune councils, which, unlike ministries at subnational level, are administratively autonomous and responsible to the MOI. Subcontracted NGOs are hired by core partners to implement OPTIONS programs in Banteay Meanchey: Domnok Tuk, Vulnerable Children Assistance Organization (VCAO), and Ponleur Khmer. Relationships also need to be maintained with international agencies, such as UNICEF and ILO-IPEC, to name but two.

Does OPTIONS need to be so complex to reach its targets and development goals? This question was the specter hanging over much of the evaluation, and the matter is discussed in much detail in later sections of the report.

OPTIONS program design was, however, of significant relevance to RGC programs to combat child labor and provide EFA. Targeting education through grade 9 was realistic and matched the MOEYS EFA policy and the CMDGs. In the words of the Undersecretary of State for Education, Nath Bunroeun:

“OPTIONS is a good fit with the national policy and the project provides a ‘second chance,’ a good opportunity for girls to get basic education to grade 9. OPTIONS is complementary to the EFA 2003–2015, and our National Education Plan and it also responds to the ESSP.”

However, it should be noted that it was not the main objective of OPTIONS to work with children over the legal age of work, which is 15 years old. The program was premised on a view that most trafficking victims have little formal schooling. The program was designed to reach children at risk of dropping out in primary school and supporting their participation in school to grade 9.

According to MOSAVY, OPTIONS has produced good results to show how to keep girls in school, and there is a recommendation to focus now on boys and on ethnic minorities to ensure their participation in the education system.

“Now it seems that boys are less than girls and those boys are being left behind. In the CLSCs composed of teachers, school principals, parents and elders we have witnessed that OPTIONS programs have been successful in keeping the girls in school and also making the transition from upper primary to lower secondary. We can see that the World Food Program food assistance was a significant factor in this success. But what we need to keep these girls in the district is OPTIONS support or government budget support for dormitories, and also financial support for the girls’ families, otherwise they cannot stay in schools. MoSAVY works with UNICEF and others to identify and find assistance for children in dangerous circumstances, especially boys and girls from 10 to 17 years old. The commune council has a little budget for this but we need to put more government budget into this. And MoSAVY would like to see OPTIONS for ethnic minorities because these children do not know Khmer and our ministry has a hard time to help them in school. They need to learn in their language and girls and boys need assistance to stay in school in the regions where minorities are prevalent.”¹³

2.2.1 President’s Education Initiative

In respect of whether the OPTIONS program design supports the EI goals of the USDOL it is useful to review the four goals:

1. Raise awareness of the importance of education for all children and mobilize a wide array of actors to improve and expand education infrastructures.
2. Strengthen formal and transitional education systems that encourage working children and those at risk of working to attend school.
3. Strengthen national institutions and policies on education and child labor.
4. Ensure the long-term sustainability of these efforts.

¹³ Ibid.

The OPTIONS program design addressed fairly well the first goal with regards to raising awareness on the importance of education at local levels. It was greatly assisted in this task by the government's own commitment backed up by policy and implementation plans through its own EFA initiative.

Concerning the second goal, OPTIONS strengthened existing systems by working within the schools, its directors, teachers, students, and wider community mechanisms attached to the EFA of MOEYS, and this is laudable. It also created new systems through the MBF program to encourage children at risk and working children to attend the community schools and vocational training. The classroom teaching in programs such as the Brick Factory is an excellent and successful example of this.

The last two goals were also addressed by OPTIONS, although they may have been more robust if partnership challenges with TAF as the policy arm of OPTIONS had been overcome much earlier. These challenges are detailed elsewhere. OPTIONS did reach collaborate efforts with other partners of the Civil Society Network Against Child Labor (CSNCL). This was done in collaboration with ILO-IPEC in a time-limited way due to the constraints of staffing of the OPTIONS national team.

The long-term sustainability of the efforts is yet to be achieved. However, it is the evaluator's view that, should this program continue into a second phase, there are good possibilities to design strategies to sustain the achievements due to the highly positive reception of initiatives at both national and local levels within Cambodia.

2.2.2 Measurement of Withdrawal and Prevention Indicators

OPTIONS faced a challenge in developing a monitoring and tracking system to statistically measure the total numbers of girls and boys who were prevented or withdrawn from trafficking and CSE. Challenges can be grouped into four main areas:

- OPTIONS staff capacity to create systematic statistical gathering systems with partners at commune, district, and provincial levels.
- Converting hand-written notes to electronic files in areas where electricity is irregular or too expensive to use.
- Time commitment required to collect and verify the statistical data across a complex range of incomparable programs.
- Updating and reporting mechanisms for long-term, short-term, and repeat dropouts.

In the end, it is not possible for the evaluation to know the degree of accuracy of results measurements beyond the statistics recorded in the technical reports. To do so would require a lengthy paper audit cross-checked against the paper trail of program beneficiary statistics recorded by the local-level OPTIONS implementers.

As far as can be determined, the OPTIONS indicators do not record statistics of children, either male or female, who could be classified as having been withdrawn from trafficking. The *raison d'être* of OPTIONS was prevention of children, especially girls, from being lured into national, regional, and international trafficking rings and, by association, into CSE.

USDOL technical assistance in the design and monitoring of beneficiaries using common indicators was a challenge for staff to learn to use, particularly at the provincial level. Although, at the national level there is a view that the cost of the input was warranted. OPTIONS comments on the draft report on this issue suggest that there is a wish for continued implementation in future projects according. While OPTIONS greatly appreciated having USDOL invest the time and resources into developing the Student Tracking System (STS), its complexity and time consumption proved to be a great challenge in terms of transferring over into the Cambodian working environment. As the project director commented, “The data collection was much more complex than at first thought. Tracking children over time in rural Cambodia is difficult because of factors such as name changes and the fact that people are on the move and do not stay in one place. So there is a new recognition that monitoring needs to account for this complexity.”¹⁴ However, the STS system was in the end viewed by OPTIONS as worth the effort to learn. In the view of the OPTIONS director, the “OPTIONS team has come a long way with the use of the STS, and worked with it to make it a useful and accurate tracking tool.”¹⁵

Evaluation systems were developed by the OPTIONS project director and her key national staff; these systems took the form of national workshops to examine the program’s outputs in relation to inputs. These were debated and presented in annual workshops of stakeholders that OPTIONS convened. Many stakeholders told the evaluator that these meetings were valuable and appreciated, as they were an opportunity to take stock of the program’s achievements and identify bottlenecks.

2.2.3 Measurement of Educational Quality Improvement

The measurement of educational quality improvement is documented weakly in OPTIONS, which is a shame as the teachers, school directors, and MOEYS national-level decisionmakers have spoken so highly of the OPTIONS approach. In order to document this well, a baseline study of the educational quality in the three sites may have assisted to identify the quality areas that OPTIONS wanted to target and then monitor these over time. However, the evaluator did not have enough time to examine this very important indicator of success in any depth.

Anecdotal evidence picked up during the interviews and fieldwork suggests that OPTIONS is viewed as improving educational quality through the approach of student-centered teaching and community involvement in curriculum design. The reason for this is that OPTIONS had no baseline data on numbers of at-risk, trafficked girls and boys in OPTIONS sites. Moreover, as identified early on in the technical reporting, OPTIONS staff faced a challenge in statistically attributing the numbers of withdrawn children from CSE (or commercial exploitation more

¹⁴ Ingrid Martonova, OPTIONS project director, World Education, June 20, 2007.

¹⁵ OPTIONS comments on first draft.

generally) as the local authorities and staff from the Ministry of Social Affairs did not have verifiable documentation.

OPTIONS 1st Technical Report: September 2003 to February 2004 summarized this problem of identifying numbers of at-risk, prevented, or withdrawn children from CSE.

“[R]eferrals of children who have been trafficked and/or exploited are considerably below original expectations. Such children must exist in considerable numbers but it has been difficult to identify them through existing networks.

Identification of at-risk children by government networks is often inaccurate or wrong. Follow-up of cases referred by the government network has found many problems in the description of the situation of many children.” (p. 18)

OPTIONS Second Technical Report states the following: “OPTIONS would like guidance from USDOL on what additional information should be provided in the narrative assessment of the development objective. Without valid data on the level of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children, the only verifiable claim towards the achievement of the objective is through successes in the individual outputs, which are described below.”

In one of the last technical reports of OPTIONS that the evaluator had access to (dated September 2006 to February 2007), the difficulty in knowing the backgrounds of the referrals to the program made by the government agencies is described:

“While it is difficult to understand clearly the histories of the children who were referred to OPTIONS by the government social system, or by social service NGOs, given the paucity of reliable record keeping, and the low level of skill among government social workers and social service providers, OPTIONS continues to try to improve its knowledge about the histories of the referred children.” (p. 22)

OPTIONS reported a total of 499-plus children identified as exploited or in need of special protection that became OPTIONS beneficiaries during the reporting period of September 2006 to February 2007. Most of the referrals came from the provincial departments of Social Affairs from Prey Veng and Kampong Cham. Overall, however, it is not clear to the evaluator from the technical reports how many of the overall total numbers of OPTIONS beneficiaries are former street children, trafficking victims, child laborers, and so forth. It would be a Herculean task to attempt this as the baseline data is not available.

The program is still in its infancy in terms of measuring this kind of impact. Access to education and better-quality educational offerings can be effective strategies to combat exploitive child labor, in combination with vocational skills and measures to help the poorest of the poor escape high debt loads. The majority of the OPTIONS beneficiaries are the poorest of the poor and come from families whose grinding poverty (and therefore risk of exploitive labor practices) will not be alleviated by participating in the OPTIONS programs. A poverty and labor practice study of some 20% of beneficiaries may be a useful endeavor to track the impact of how the children have been prevented or withdrawn after they leave the program.

2.2.4 Advocacy/Policy

The OPTIONS project was challenged by the inability of the TAF partner tasked with implementing a policy framework and an advocacy campaign to push it over the lifespan of the project. In its fourth year, these challenges have begun to be addressed.

The KAPE staff identified the LSP as a key policy success, as it was adopted by the MOEYS not only in its curriculum, but as official policy at the highest level.¹⁶ The KAPE staff also identified policy as one of the factors necessary for the project's overall success to demonstrate knowledge of the link between government policy, advocacy, and overall results achieved on preventing girls and boys from commercial exploitation through skills training and programs to assist with school retentions.¹⁷

2.3 PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION

The OPTIONS project has invested an enormous amount of management and administrative effort and its own project human resources in partnership and coordination at five levels:

1. Core program partners with administrative and management instruments of PMT meetings; Program Monitoring Plan (PMP) reports; and the USDOL-supported STS systems for monitoring of student beneficiaries and evaluation purposes.
2. Government ministries from national to district levels with coordination via national advisory working groups composed of secretary of state and undersecretary of state.
3. Commune councils: CEFACS, Local Cluster School Committees (LCSCs).
4. INGOs and NGOs, national and local levels.
5. OPTIONS internal staff among three project sites.

There are a number of challenges and opportunities for WE lying in the area of partnership and coordination.

¹⁶ KAPE OPTIONS project director Ma Chan Sopheap demonstrated a very clear understanding in particular and her strategic thinking and good networking with relevant government partners at provincial level have been highly effective in attracting and keeping the support of the government for OPTIONS.

¹⁷ Focus Group Discussion, KAPE staff, Kampong Cham, June 22, 2007 with five female and two male staff members.

2.3.1 OPTIONS and INGO Partnerships

UNICEF provides funding support, some US\$600,000 over the past four years, and collaborates with WE on OPTIONS in Prey Veng province through their common partner MOSAVY. OPTIONS and UNICEF education teams cooperate through their counterpart of the provincial office of education, with UNICEF focusing on the Child Friendly School programs operational in six provinces (one of which is Prey Veng).¹⁸ OPTIONS wishes to add that it collaborates with the “UNICEF/Child Protection at the provincial local level, and collaborates closely with provincial counterparts in the Ministry of Social Affairs. We also collaborate jointly with the Provincial Office of Education, and with UNICEF’s education program staff at the provincial level. Our strong linkage, however, is with the UNICEF Child Protection section, as that is the section that manages UNICEF’s support to OPTIONS.”¹⁹ According to UNICEF,

“We have great collaboration with OPTIONS, and our experience is that World Education is very professional and has good management. But it is a hugely complicated project, with so many acronyms to keep track of with so many processes and committees, and this makes it hard to follow and understand.”

According to the project director, the expressed concern is not sufficiently known, particularly since UNICEF and OPTIONS agreed on an implementation strategy at the local level. It may be prudent for OPTIONS to follow this up.²⁰ The evaluator was not able to talk to UNICEF program staff at the district level to have a better sense of the partnership and collaboration issues at first hand. However, national UNICEF staff reported an overlap in functions between the two organizations in working with MOSAVY in identifying vulnerable children and children in dangerous circumstances.

ILO-IPEC is another organization that OPTIONS began to collaborate with in efforts to address at national level the challenges of combating child labor and removing children from commercial exploitation. The national senior program officer of ILO-IPEC gave a solid overview of the programs and their relationship to OPTIONS. ILO-IPEC’s target is to withdraw 16,000 children from dangerous labor conditions and to assist in the provision of income-generation opportunities for 3,000 families. ILO-IPEC is in seven provinces: Sihanoukville, Kampot, Kep, Phnom Penh, Kampong Cham, Siem Reap, and Banteay Meanchey. It concentrates in sectors where there is density in child labor practices, such as fisheries, rubber plantations, brick factories, and child porters.

The ILO-IPEC connection to OPTIONS is through its mobilization of stakeholders, of which OPTIONS is one in a newly established CSNCL.²¹ The network is composed of journalists, Buddhist nuns and monks, students, youth, trade unions, and artists, among others.

¹⁸ The other five provinces UNICEF works in are Siem Reap, Kampong Speu, Stung Treng, Kampong Thom, and Oddar Meanchey. Interview with Leslie Millar, Chief of Child Protection, UNICEF, Phnom Penh, June 7, 2007.

¹⁹ OPTIONS comments on draft report.

²⁰ OPTIONS comment on draft report.

²¹ Established on June 12, 2006 according to Ouk Sisovann, ILO Senior National Programme Officer.

The OPTIONS project director spoke positively about the network and its aims, although OPTIONS staff did indicate time constraints as a factor in the overall staff input into this collaborative effort. The project leader believes “that OPTIONS staff has dedicated a significant amount of time and effort into the development and strengthening of the CSNCL, and has demonstrated strong presence/leadership for World Education/OPTIONS on the CSNCL executive committee.”²²

2.3.2 Government Partnerships: MOEYS, MOSAVY, MOWA, and MOLVT

All government ministries interviewed at national, provincial, and district levels reported good working relationships with OPTIONS program staff. The least productive relationships are those at national level, as reported by both OPTIONS and ministry staff, owing to the nature of the roles of OPTIONS as the reporter of programs and the ministry working group staff as receivers of the report information. MOLVT has not been a participant at national level, although not for the lack of trying, according to two key MOLVT informants.

The OPTIONS project has worked most closely at all levels with MOEYS and more at district levels with MOSAVY, with weaker links to MOWA and MOLVT.

MOWA participated in the ministry working group advisory council, but passively and without clear understanding of how it could do so more actively. MOWA staff from the Department of Education assigned to the OPTIONS project was overcommitted to other work, and the department chief sustained a long illness that accounted for her absence from work. The MOWA Undersecretary of State spoke highly of OPTIONS, however, and viewed it as compatible with MOWA’s mandate to advance the position of girls and women in Cambodian society. The MOWA Undersecretary of State also viewed OPTIONS as directly supportive of MOWA’s recent assignment by the Prime Minister to head up the National Anti-Trafficking Task Force led by MOWA Secretary of State You Ay and led by national coordinator Undersecretary of State San Arun (OPTIONS MOWA counterpart).

MOLVT, established in 2005 during the government’s third mandate, was not a main government partner of OPTIONS at central level. A series of meetings between OPTIONS and MOLVT’s then director of the Department of Child Labor were held at the beginning of 2006, according to OPTIONS. While some provincial- and district-level ministry officials collaborated with OPTIONS programs, such as the MBF, and the identification of most vulnerable children and their families at local levels, national-level decisionmakers within MOLVT felt slighted that OPTIONS project management did not hear out their ideas for participation in 2005 and again in 2006. Additionally, the Ministry’s conceptual plans for partnership via the provincial technical schools for OPTIONS beneficiaries in LSS were met with “a wall of silence.”²³ The MOLVT Department of Child Labor was created in 2005, and its chief and vice-chief met with the OPTIONS project management to discuss the MOLVT’s ideas for involvement with the project

²² At the time of the evaluation the time constraint was stated but in the comments on the draft there is a request for correction of this view. See OPTIONS comments on draft report.

²³ Interview with MOLVT Child Labor Department chief and vice-chief, Phnom Penh, June 19, 2007.

through its technical vocational schools—300 in all, spread across the country, and with a target age group of 14 to 17 years old.

“We met the project director and national coordinator of OPTIONS in 2005 and then again in 2006 to ask that OPTIONS present their program to our minister and we wanted then to be involved to assist the beneficiaries of the OPTIONS program get technical skills following grade 9 because so many of these kids drop out of school and have no skills to make a decent wage. Our ministry has 300 schools spread out across the country, they are operational and are getting investments to make them function now, and we have them in Prey Veng, Kampong Cham and Banteay Meanchey, so we wanted OPTIONS students to be aware of what we could offer and help design entries for them into the technical schools to in programs like carpentry, car and motorcycle repair, industrial sewing, electronics and so on. We thought this would be very good so prevent child labor and to link up with MOEYS and MOSAVY to coordinate the government’s response and commitments to end child labor. Our idea was to target the age group 14–17 years old and we could assist with finding funding for their studies. There are over 300,000 new entrants each year into the job market and our young people in this country do not have skills. The problem of child labor and commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking will persist unless we develop skills for our young people so that they can find jobs that pay living wages.

We want OPTIONS to succeed but we don’t understand why the OPTIONS project director never responded to us. We never heard back why she did not like our ideas. If we had known why then we would not feel slighted but because we never heard why it is quite awkward.

OPTIONS did the program independently and it cannot succeed, it cannot be sustained, if it does this. The Ministry of Labor wants OPTIONS to have discussions with our ministry and with the other ministries involved to discuss the implementation of OPTIONS and the decision-making process on this. OPTIONS cannot succeed to do it alone. Trade unions, employers, the private sector and civil society must be involved.”

According to OPTIONS, these issues could be the result of some miscommunication, especially as the Ministry had been included in a series of consultations held the end of 2006. The above alleged proposal is unknown to OPTIONS. It appears that there is a need for OPTIONS and MOLVT to attempt to solve this miscommunication, as both partners wish to have good collaboration and work together in the future.²⁴

²⁴ The evaluator did not have time to discuss this with the OPTIONS management team, but notes the response made to the draft report and the series of meetings that were held with good results from the OPTIONS point of view. See OPTIONS response to draft report.

MOSAVY had good relations with OPTIONS throughout its tenure and spoke positively about the results.

“We saw that the children were developing and had courage to speak. The parents were asked also their views on OPTIONS, and in the beginning of the project they were not so involved and did not think so much about their children’s education. But after they saw their children speaking with confidence and in public meetings too, they saw the value of education and supported OPTIONS.”²⁵

MOEYS officials at district level, who are closest to the OPTIONS programs in terms of interface with beneficiaries and community partners, expressed great frustration at not being heard by their superiors at provincial, and especially national, levels. They view this communication bottleneck as part of the overall bureaucratic burden of government. They also see it as owing to the absence of a standardized reporting mechanism, such as a technical report matrix on OPTIONS programs, linking indicators and targets to MOEYS’ own EFA targets and building up statistical datasets that MOEYS’ central level can use in measuring its progress in reaching EFA targets. These EFA targets are linked to the CMDGs for 2015 and the NSDP section on education. This is not a matter that the evaluator is suggesting that OPTIONS should fix, but rather a contextual factor that affects the project.

The commune, district, and provincial officials have good relationships with the OPTIONS provincial staff as far as the evaluator could determine for Prey Veng and Kampong Cham. The OPTIONS project directors in Prey Veng and Kampong Cham are well known to the government partners and there is agreement that OPTIONS programs and goals are worthy of government consideration, support, and eventual adoption. The OPTIONS office in Prey Veng is located far enough from the provincial town to make face-to-face communications difficult; provincial officials questioned why the office had to be in Neak Luong instead of the provincial town.

Kampong Cham OPTIONS staff has regular and well-established relations with provincial, district, and commune partners. The distance to the districts, however, is a burden on project officers and a time management consideration for achieving efficiency and effectiveness in reaching project goals and targets.

The district- and commune-level partners have the greatest interface with the programs from the planning, implementation, and monitoring aspects. This dovetails with their mandate to look after children at risk, cooperating especially with MOSAVY, Mith Samlanh in Kampong Cham, and UNICEF in Prey Veng.

District- and commune-level partners would like to cooperate with OPTIONS to establish a brief, quarterly technical report with a built-in response mechanism so that lower levels of the ministry are aware that their reports have been read and that the report results have been included in the overall EMIS system for the MOEYS. The linkages among the commune, district, and provincial levels were much weaker than we thought, and so as the project evolved, we recognized this and developed mechanisms to strengthen the weakest links.”²⁶

²⁵ Keo Borentr, Deputy Secretary General, MOSAVY, June 19, 2007.

²⁶ Interview with Chan Solin, June 20, 2007.

The task is not easy, however: OPTIONS human resources are limited, the programs they develop and manage are complex and wide ranging, and the geographical coverage is widespread within each province, with several hours travel time to get from provincial towns to furthest districts.

2.4 PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND FINANCIAL PLANNING/BUDGETING

The OPTIONS project has been quite well managed and administered over its four years, with regular and substantive reporting on its operations, detailed planning for its financial operations, and its good record of budgeting with transparent records and accountability.

USDOL funds have been well spent and accounted for according to the finance records that were released and viewed by the evaluator. Other audits of OPTIONS programs funded by USDOL have been conducted during the project lifespan, and no major areas of concern have been identified.

However, the OPTIONS budget, according to the project director, is “difficult to manage, because there are so many donors and each has its funding cycle requiring reporting and accounting.”²⁷ With one finance officer and one administration officer assigned at national level to manage close to US\$4 million spread across five different fund sources, three geographical locations, and subcontracted implementers, the question of efficiency requires consideration.²⁸

While there has been much turnover of USDOL project officers assigned to OPTIONS (approximately one new USDOL staff assigned every five months), there has been little disruption to the project. USDOL officers have been supportive of the project, but not advocates, as they were not able to view the project close-up and in country. There has been feedback on reports sent by OPTIONS to USDOL, and USDOL has been responsive to issues raised by OPTIONS staff.²⁹

Partnership and coordination appear to take up much of the management and administrative work of OPTIONS project director by default owing to the web-like complexity of the project design. This is explained in more detail below.

²⁷ Ibid. The main donors are USDOL, UNICEF, McKnight Foundation. In addition, both KAPE and CARE put funds towards the cost of their respective programs.

²⁸ Ingrid Martonova stated that “It is truly difficult to make it all work” but that this is the reality of such programs requiring funds from different sources and not unlike the world of many INGOs working in Cambodia, a comment the evaluator agrees with.

²⁹ Interview with Ingrid Martonova, June 20, 2007.

2.5 PROJECT DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION, AND OUTPUTS

OPTIONS has established a basket of programs similar in name, but different in shape, design, and implementation across the three project sites, to accord with the specialties and experiences of CARE, KAPE, and WE.³⁰ The development philosophy underpinning this choice of implementation design is that local communities themselves understand their needs and should therefore be provided with opportunities to develop generic programs with their own community stamp on them, thereby establishing the project's mechanism for local ownership and involvement and perhaps even sustainability.³¹ As one interviewee responded, "Local life skills address the local needs and wants."³²

The programs have been designed carefully to present a series of options for youth both in and out of school, enrolled in both upper primary and lower secondary grades, to become self-aware, whole human beings, with knowledge of their social and economic environment and the pitfalls that lead to the growing phenomenon of human trafficking, commercial sex work (CSW), and child labor in their home areas, in Cambodia, and beyond their national borders.

With such knowledge (and the bundle of OPTIONS programs that youth are exposed to over the four-year life cycle of the project), it is expected, but not sufficiently demonstrated, that they will have the means to (1) prevent themselves from falling into traffickers' traps; (2) avoid the dangers of CSW; and (3) overcome the pattern of indebted labor that typifies the lives of the poorest of the poor in Cambodia.³³ These children will do agricultural labor, and for meager amounts of cash, but are not considered child laborers if they are over 15 years old.

These project objectives are understood well by OPTIONS provincial staff and by the Cambodian government and community partners from national to district levels.

2.5.1 Scholarships

Scholarships are provided to at risk girls in primary school level in Prey Veng, Kampong Cham and Banteay Mean Chey and in LSS and upper secondary school (USS) level in Kampong Cham. The scholarship program is regarded well by the beneficiaries in both provinces visited by the evaluator and is tailored to provide in-kind material assistance. According to the beneficiaries interviewed, these include two uniforms per year, books and pens, a bicycle (but no repair kit, which is sorely needed), and 15 kilograms of rice per month from WFP (WFP beneficiaries in grades 4 to 6, per WFP regulations/guidelines).

³⁰ After CARE ended in Banteay Meanchey in 2006, two local NGOs carried on with OPTIONS: Domnok Tuk and Ponleu Khmer. The evaluator was unable to interview these NGO members about their programs.

³¹ These points came out in interviews with David Kahler, Ingrid Martonova, Mark Kowalski, Sue Gollifer, Chan Solin, Ma Chan Sopheap, and community and state educators in Kampong Cham and Prey Veng.

³² Interview with Chan Solin, National Project Coordinator, June 20, 2007, Phnom Penh.

³³ Deductions are drawn from the OPTIONS project document submitted for funding to USDOL in 2003; interviews with national and provincial OPTIONS staff.

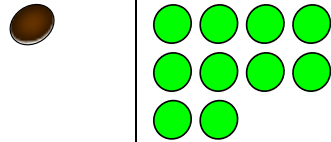
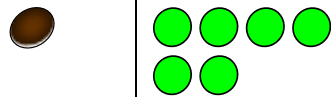
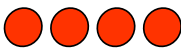
Criteria for scholarships have been established with inputs from the commune and district officials from MOSAVY, and with some input from UNICEF in Prey Veng. While there was some slippage of criteria not strictly observed, the teachers and local authorities demonstrate a good knowledge of monitoring and the need to ensure that the beneficiaries are those most at risk. Slippage refers to when some children who did not meet the criteria were listed as potential beneficiaries according to the teachers and local authorities. The children themselves are also gatekeepers to some extent, as they all know each other well, and can give very precise information about each other's personal history and reasons for being a scholarship recipient.

WFP rations are considered by teachers and students to be lifesavers in the scholarship package; without this, they say the program would likely fail. This factor again speaks to the dire subsistence needs that are not being met by the families of the students because of deep poverty.



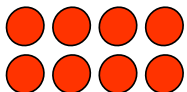

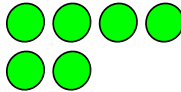
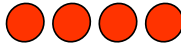

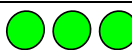
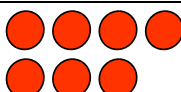

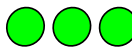
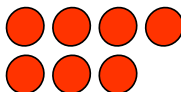
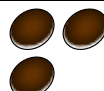

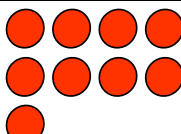

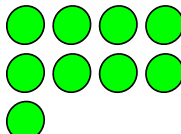

In Prey Veng, which is considerably poorer than some parts of Kampong Cham, the WFP was allegedly not providing school breakfasts to teachers and students in the school visited by the evaluator; OPTIONS notes that these breakfasts are not provided in Prey Veng and Banteay Meanchey. In the Ponhea Krek district of Kampong Cham, which also has a high poverty rate of some 50% of residents in OPTIONS districts, there is a much valued meal ration at the schools. Teachers at Ponhea Krek said that without the one meal a day all the children receive, regardless of participation in OPTIONS, no teachers or students would come to school.³⁴ In Prey Veng, teachers and students requested food rations for all students regardless of OPTIONS programs. It is strongly urged that OPTIONS management staff make field trips to speak with groups of teachers themselves to see the spread of this sentiment, as the evaluator could not. As poverty appears to be deepening, however, there is some likelihood that the rice ration at school will become a very important component of the OPTIONS material support to teachers and student beneficiaries.

2.5.2 Needs of Beneficiaries to Stay in OPTIONS

Table 2: Perception of Needs Fulfilled Versus Unfulfilled

What do beneficiaries need to stay in OPTIONS programs?	Ratio of needs fulfilled	Ratio of needs yet to be fulfilled	Notes/explanations by teachers to evaluator
Food		none	Students have total dependence on food for their participation. No food means no kids and only a few teachers.
Proper school			Buildings that are not falling apart; no electricity.

³⁴ FGD, Tropeng Phlong Primary School, June 22, 2007 (11 males, 2 females).

What do beneficiaries need to stay in OPTIONS programs?	Ratio of needs fulfilled	Ratio of needs yet to be fulfilled	Notes/explanations by teachers to evaluator	
Scholarships				Students get US\$22 equivalent in materials needed for study, but only 20% of needy students are covered.
Parental support				Many parents believe there is a need for school, but still need kids to do labor to make cash.
Life skills				Only grades 5 and 6 study Life Skills. "They chose those grades for us; we don't know why; all students want to study this."
School materials				MOEYS provides some for us, but we must buy most of our materials from market.
Financial support for teachers				Our salaries are late, paid every 52 days if lucky; we make US\$32 a month, new teachers get US\$15. We cannot remain teaching.
Government policy support				MOEYS EFA is good and we believe in this; but if we don't get decent salary then the policy will fail because teachers will quit.

Note: Teachers think of all the needs of OPTIONS students (represented here in brown). They then prioritize these (left-hand column). Each need is subdivided to show the ratio of fulfillment/yet to be fulfilled (represented here in green and red respectively). Teachers do this through discussion and consensus. Results on a flipchart matrix were converted to this model.

As can be seen from the focus group discussion results with teachers, as tabled above, the scholarship program is greatly valued and the teachers themselves identify it as a key component of OPTIONS' success in attracting students to its programs. It is not, however, sufficient to keep them in the programs. OPTIONS notes that, in the above chart, the amount of US\$22 is not accurate; it is information coming from the focus group, however. OPTIONS notes that "Scholarship support varies by grade, with about US\$10 annually at primary level, and upwards of US\$60 annually at secondary level."³⁵





³⁵ OPTIONS comments on draft report.

Scholarships have contributed to girls and some boys staying in school and completing grades to lower secondary. However, there is a great concern that the poverty trap will foil the program, as almost all the beneficiaries the evaluator spoke to said they would have to quit the program. The focus group discussions were tearful and emotional as this point was related. Indeed, it can be seen from the teachers' point of view that, unless their salaries are adjusted to cost of living, the EFA initiative, of which OPTIONS is a part, will fail. They cannot afford to teach without subsidies.

At first, the evaluator did not understand why the beneficiaries in grade 9 (and who had just completed exams to move on to grade 10) said they would quit the program, regardless of whether the OPTIONS scholarships would continue. It was not until the FGD was completed using the TST and poverty profile that it became clear that indebtedness and extreme vulnerability (seriously ill parents or orphans, combined with the prospect of a move some 30 km away to the USS) were the main reasons that these girls and a few boys said they would have to resort to child labor and quit school.

In the following FGD TST, scholarship beneficiaries were asked social economic questions. The result was a socioeconomic map of Ponhea Krek. Ten seeds represent everyone in the total population of the district. Students were asked to ratio the seeds according to four social economic classes. The seeds were set in categories within three minutes with consensus.

Table 3: Perceptions of Social Economic Classes in Ponhea Krek

Social economic class ratio		House type	Employment	Land owning/usage		Savings after expenses
Wealthy		Villa, luxury wood	Plantation owner/boss Customs chief Police	50% own 100ha 20% own 5-20ha 30% own 10-15ha	Hire laborers, the poor and poorest of the poor, to work on their land	About 60% of earnings is saved; used to buy land of poor and dispossessed
Middle class		Tiled wooden house	Vegetable/fruit vendor; motorcycle taxi driver	1-3ha	Hire workers for their land and self-hire out to class above	Enough to buy a motorcycle and to buy a little land
Poor		Thatch house strong materials	Agricultural laborers	0.5 to 1ha	Work on own land; nuts, cashews, potatoes, rice	No savings; land holdings not enough for family subsistence; debt growing
Poorest of the poor		Thatch house cheap materials	Plantation serfs; grass gatherers; land attendants	Zero	No land to work on	In chronic debt for lifetime

All the OPTIONS beneficiaries interviewed put themselves in the last category of the poorest of the poor. Their families all had land 10 years ago. This was sold, bit by bit, in distress sales owing to health crises. This scenario of land dispossession of the poor to pay for health care is

not new in Cambodia, and the rate of landlessness is growing steadily. These students knew that, in their district, the wealthy classes benefited from their poverty, as they had cash to buy the land from the poor, and would use that cash to employ the poor to work the land and make it productive through rubber, cashew, potatoes, or rice. Ponhea Krek is well known for its fecundity, and the landscape is rich with fruit and rubber plantations.

The debt of the poor and the poorest of the poor is what is not so widely studied or computed into the poverty data.³⁶ The World Bank poverty line of US\$1 per day does not account for those who are in chronic debt and whose meager earnings go to pay the moneylenders and loan sharks.

The OPTIONS beneficiaries in this focus group, and in others in Kampong Cham and Prey Veng, explained that they had to earn cash for daily subsistence of their families. Dire straits made the burden of labor something they had to take up.

After the TST matrix was filled in and analyzed by the group, participants opened up and told their personal stories to the evaluator, explaining their situations:

“This is why I cannot go to grade 10. I have a grandmother who is 82 years old. She works on the rubber plantations for a bit of money, but she is too old now. We are only two of us. How can I travel 30 km to go to upper secondary school and leave her behind? I would worry sick about her and not be able to study. So I will drop out and become a child laborer.”

—17-year-old female

“I have only my father, and his head was beaten by the Khmer Rouge so he is sickly all the time and cannot work. I want to study, but we are hungry. I cannot leave my village to go so far away to attend grade 10. If my family could be supported, then I could do it. Can KAPE support my family?”

—17-year-old female

“My father has urged me to stay in school, and while he is the poorest of the poor, I have other brothers and sisters younger than me who can be child laborers, so they can find money while I continue my school. But I feel badly for them. Please can KAPE help us next year?”

—16-year-old male

In short, the scholarship program deserves top marks for addressing the needs of the most impoverished boys and girls by providing them with food rations for their families and paying for material needs, such as school uniforms, shoes, books, and pens. OPTIONS should advocate

³⁶ An important study called *Moving Out of Poverty*, funded by the World Bank and implemented by CDRI, will release results in November 2007 (Larry Strange, CDRI Director, personal communication). It would be worthwhile for OPTIONS to study this research to see how its programs can be adjusted as necessary with the new data.

with its partners in local areas to find local funding from the wealthy members of the communities to finance it and should also lobby the government to finance scholarships through commune council budget funds and PAP funds of central government, for which MOEYS is a good candidate.

2.5.3 Life Skills for In- and Out-of-School Youth: Concept, Design, and Practice

The LS concept is premised on the notion that “how people learn is as important as what people learn.” This is the pedagogical pillar underpinning the design of the LSP.³⁷ LSP design is premised on the belief that the learning process should be student-centered to be effective. The learning process in concert with the curriculum should ideally prepare children with the intellectual wherewithal to think through socially relevant issues, such as environmental protection, domestic violence, or human trafficking; develop rational views on the issue based on facts and evidence and analysis; and make informed decisions on how best to respond when personally confronted. Informed and educated youth can be positive role models for their peers and have a positive influence on their immediate family members and wider social community.³⁸

The LSP is designed with the development objective of increasing “the relevance and quality of education offered in primary and lower secondary schools, which would lead to strengthening children’s resilience to various forms of exploitation.”³⁹ The program is implemented by means of extracurricular study for upper secondary students and for O/S youth in Kampong Cham and Prey Veng provinces, and for upper primary students in school in provincial sites.

The LS curriculum is developed locally by teachers to fit with demands of the students and local economic and social contexts. In one district of Kampong Cham, the LS curriculum featured seven subjects, including vocational training; industrial sewing using push pedal machines for all females; bicycle repair for all boys; vegetable growing; music; dance; and information courses on domestic violence, environment, and human trafficking.

In Cheung Chhnuk Secondary School, Batheay District of Kampong Cham, the evaluator met with six LS community teachers (two women and four men). A FGD using the TST technique was held to examine the teachers’ understanding of the meaning of Life Skills, and how much had been achieved according to the various categories they had created. This FGD was their own assessment of how much they had achieved, according to how they defined the goals of LS.

The first question to the group of teachers was, “What is the meaning of Life Skills?” This drew blank faces for some minutes while the question was tossed around by the group. The evaluator then asked how the group of teachers would give meaning to the term, how they would define it. This prompted much more discussion on what Life Skills as a concept means to them. After

³⁷ Interview with Chan Solin, National Project Coordinator, June 20, 2007, World Education office, Phnom Penh.

³⁸ Interviews with Life Skills community teachers in Cheung Chhnuk Secondary School, Batheay District Kampong Cham, June 21, 2007 and provincial ministry counterparts (MOWA, MOEYS, MOLVT and MOSAVY) in Prey Veng, June 25, 2007.

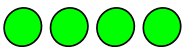
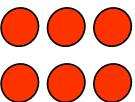
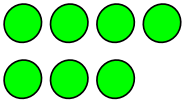

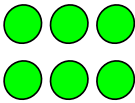
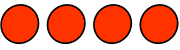

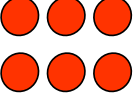
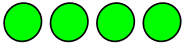
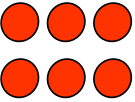
³⁹ Quote from OPTIONS response to draft report.

some 20 minutes, they identified eight core areas that were attributes of the LSP as a whole, and what the curriculum strives to achieve for its student beneficiaries.

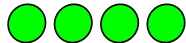
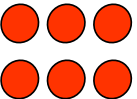
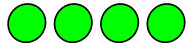
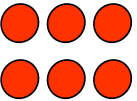
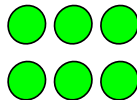

What is interesting is that the teachers at first did not understand the abstract conceptual dimensions of LS, but felt more comfortable sticking to concrete measurable attributes, such as employment earnings. However, after some time, several group members brought up attributes such as “hope” and “human self-worth,” and the group agreed by consensus to keep those attributes. Each attribute was assessed according to what they thought had been achieved through the LS curriculum and what had yet to be achieved. Below is their list of attributes in chronological order, as expressed through the TST.⁴⁰

2.5.4 Life Skills Attributes and Achievement of Results According to Teachers

Table 4: Perception of Achievement of Life Skills

Life Skills attributes	How much has been achieved to date?	How much has yet to be achieved?	Explanations by teachers to evaluator
Students having hope for the future			Hopelessness is a drag on motivation and fueled by poverty; alcohol and drug abuse
Individuals have self-worth and valued by others			Poorest of the poor are scorned and rejected by wealthy and powerful members of community
Able to find earnings			Without earnings, potential the students would not be interested in Life Skills
Learning skills to make earnings			Vocational skills such as industrial sewing to get work at garment factories or to sell vegetables; students often drop out so hard to retain them
Easily able to find paid employment			Having the soft skills to present yourself to prospective employers; students don't yet have ability to get decent employment

⁴⁰ Transcribed to computer from flipchart paper by the evaluator.

Life Skills attributes	How much has been achieved to date?	How much has yet to be achieved?	Explanations by teachers to evaluator
Able to look after own health			Knowing about reproductive and sexual health to avoid HIV/AIDS, STDS, and unwanted pregnancies; students and their parents are much more aware of health issues and able to look after themselves
Reduction of poverty			With all of the above the poverty rates of individuals could decrease; very poor district and not likely to change quickly
Elimination of domestic violence			L/S and other media programs and awareness have had a preventative effect; men changing behaviors

Note: Cheung Chhnuk Secondary School Life Skills FGD TST with six teachers.

The community-based educators of LSPs noted the following difficulties:⁴¹

- Payment for teaching does not cover their own transport costs to the schools; teachers are paid R4,000 per hour, and this is not sufficient and they are out of pocket; they request US\$10 per month to continue LS, out of which US\$5 will be spent on materials needed for the classes.
- No curricular materials are provided, so lessons plans and lesson experiences can be written down and used from year to year or cohort to cohort. Paper, pens, and photocopy access are requested.
- Monitoring of students in LS for those who stop coming or who drop out is difficult, because they must ask the parents about their children's participation, and this effort requires extra time on their part. This was not part of the original plan and also factors into payment for their expenses.
- It is hard to find community teachers, because participating districts are full of very poor people and the pool of adults with time to volunteer is marginal.

After this exercise, the evaluator asked the group to provide information about the main LS classes they taught (excluding the arts, as the arts teacher was interviewed in a KII earlier in the day).

⁴¹ June 21, 2007, FGD in Cheung Chhnuk Secondary School, Batheay district, Kampong Cham with six community educators in LSP teaching sewing, bicycle repair, arts, gardening, domestic violence, environment, information, and music to lower secondary students.

Table 5: Students Enrolled in Life Skills Classes

Activities designed to fulfill Life Skills	Total number of girls = 139	Total number of boys = 281	Notes/explanations from teachers on gender aspects
Industrial sewing class	36	0	Two boys joined but were laughed out of the class
Cooking class	46	0	Not culturally appropriate for boys to learn
Bicycle repair	0	105	Girls do not want to "get their hands dirty"
Fish raising	31	26	Both sexes learn because of fast earning potential
Vegetable growing	25	50	Double the number of boys because watering vegetables requires physical strength, long distances to fields

When, later that day, the evaluator held a FGD with the student beneficiaries of OPTIONS in the same area, the gender dimensions of the LS classes was raised. The question was posed, “Do girls want to learn bicycle repair?” All the girls in a group of more than 10 members nodded their heads rapidly. “Why? The teachers said that girls did not want to get their hands dirty and that this was traditionally a male skill to learn,” the evaluator said. “No, we really want to learn because our bikes break down all the time. We don’t know how to fix them. We want to have bike repair kits and be taught how to use them.” The evaluator suggested the girls may want to find one of their own who knows about bike repair and arrange a class themselves and also ask the teachers if they could join the boys in the LS bike repair class.

As for cooking, the teachers said that “men are not allowed in the kitchen,” yet when later asked if female family members would not enjoy having male help preparing food, they all agreed this was a good thing, especially now that “both husband and wife must work, and same with the kids, so it is not fair the wife must do everything—shop, cook, work, clean and care for the kids.”

It is recommended that the gender aspects of community teaching in the LSP be addressed by OPTIONS with both teachers and students, so that opportunities are presented to both boys and girls in all classes, regardless of giggles and heckling by students.

According to dance arts professor, teacher of Khmer classical and folk dance in Pa-av Primary School Life Skills “Awareness Raising” program, in Batheay district of Kampong Cham, the costs provided by OPTIONS do not cover his expenses, although he is dedicated to the program:

“It takes me two hours to get here on motorcycle taxi from Kampong Cham town, where I live and work, and I come to help the female arts teacher in the school and work with seven girls and seven boys. It costs me more than what I am paid, and now my health is affected, because this is a long way to go (four hours) but I still am committed to coming, because I am the last teacher of dance here in Kampong Cham. I am 47 years old and I am formally trained. I think this dance gives the students focus and discipline in their lives, it gives them a chance to use their bodies for exercise that they don’t otherwise get

at school, especially the girls, and it also preserves our ancient cultural traditions in the arts because the Khmer dance is thousands of years old.”⁴²

2.5.5 Life Skills Learning: Views of Boys and Girls

“I like this program because I can learn about what is good for protecting our environment and also teach the older people about it. My parents really support me in this program and feel proud of me for showing my new knowledge in the community.”

*—Primary school boy, grade 5, Pa-av Primary School,
Batheay District Kampong Cham*

“I like this program a lot because issues like pollution affect our school and make it look bad. But now we clean up our schoolyard with our teachers and we all take responsibility for it. It is much cleaner now than before and I am proud of this new clean look.”

*—Primary school girl, grade 6, Pa-av Primary School,
Batheay District Kampong Cham*

“Before I was shy to hold a megaphone and speak publicly, but now we have a lot of experience going on marches down the national road to the market near here, and shouting our slogans about environment and domestic violence and so on, and the elders appreciate us. They smile at us and say we are doing a good thing.”

*—Primary school girl, grade 6, Pa-av Primary School,
Batheay District Kampong Cham⁴³*

⁴² The evaluator and KAPE staff offered to take the teacher back to the provincial town after the lesson ended but the teacher declined the offer, not wanting to prevent the motorcycle taxi driver waiting for him under the shade of a tree in the village from getting the return fare for his passage back to Kampong Cham provincial town. Said Ms. Rith, “He understands that people are so poor that they cannot afford to wait and then not get the fare; that is how good a man he is.” The whole team was quite moved by the dedication of this instructor and the students obviously respected him. He is a singularly important human being in his preservation and teaching of Khmer dance and arts in Kampong Cham. His organization “Buddhism and Society Development Association (BSDS) Working to Save the Poorest of the Poor” in Kampong Cham provincial town works with 140 street kids who have contracted HIV/AIDS or who are AIDS orphans; it exists solely on community donations and projects run by himself and the 40 monks attached to a nearby temple. Interview with BSDS Monk Heng Seanghath, June 21, 2007, Kampong Cham. The evaluator strongly encourages OPTIONS to continue working with Professor Sokhon and to scope out opportunities to cooperate with the monks at BSDS.

⁴³ Informal interviews of primary school students during Life Skills activity visit, June 21, 2007. The evaluator talked to about 15 students and 4 teachers during the activity, and watched the students leave to march in rows down the road to the market with megaphones and placards.

2.5.6 Social Impact of Life Skills: Becoming a Whole Person

The popularity of LS lies beyond its curriculum benefits, although these by themselves are worthwhile. However, as the MOWA Provincial Representative for Prey Veng explained to the evaluator, “These children who went through the Life Skills and My Better Future are so good at presenting ideas in public. They are even better than village chiefs now.”⁴⁴ What is required is a refocus to include more boys according the government partners.

2.5.7 My Better Future

MBF is a program singularly implemented by WE in Prey Veng. It was developed in response to the livelihood needs of beneficiaries and designed with input from experts from Australia WE to provide capacity building to girls and to build hope with skills and, thus, to think positively about their futures.

The program structure is detailed, consisting of three time components spread over nearly two years, starting with literacy and post-literacy classes, and moving on to livelihood planning and a savings activity.

The savings activity is one of the components, and the evaluator was not able to spend sufficient time to assess its impact overall. The concept is worthwhile and the activities appear to be well thought out. What is missing perhaps is the issue of debt.

This debt reality as related to the MBF program was evident during the evaluator’s trip to the industrial sewing class for O/S youth, all female in Prey Veng. After six months of basic literacy, the students then enroll in eight months of post-literacy and livelihood preparation and then skills training. The sewing class the evaluator visited represented the last leg of the MBF.

All the girls thought the vocational sewing training was useful. Most said they would use the skills to leave the district and move to Phnom Penh to look for garment factory work. While some wanted to start a business, they did not have the US\$1,000 they estimated (with the help of their instructor) was needed to buy a machine, materials, and other inputs needed to work from home. When asked if two students could share the startup costs, they replied that they were all from different villages, so this was not possible. All the students asked if OPTIONS could think about providing money to start up their businesses as, otherwise, the training would not help develop their livelihoods. All women said their families were deep in debt, were landless for the most part, and had no hope of ever coming out of impoverishment.

In order for programs such as MBF to thrive and be sustained, there should be a component of welfare that pays for the beneficiaries’ expenses in health or other areas of high and crippling cost to them. Debts are what are keeping the MBF program from taking off. Small-scale investment programs such as pig farming, mushroom growing, or motorcycle maintenance and repair would likely bring in more income, provide nontraditional job skills to these women, and assist them to stay in their districts and outside the trafficking rings.

⁴⁴ Ms. Aem Phalla, director, Provincial Department of Women’s Affairs, Prey Veng.

The positive contribution of the MBF program is in its empowerment of young people to look into their own communities for their livelihoods, a concept that the partner ministries support very much, including MOLVT.

According to OPTIONS, a written version of the methodology in Khmer was made and a translation of it in English is planned, but it was not available at the time that USDOL partner Hagar had expressed a wish to see it.⁴⁵ The evaluator did not see this written methodology in either Khmer or English, but it would be valuable to share with USDOL partners, such as Hagar and other NGOs once it is finalized.

2.5.8 Community Awareness and Involvement: LCSCs and CEFACs

The LCSCs and the CEFACs are commune-level organizations identified by OPTIONS as partners for collaboration and cooperation. The CEFACs in Kampong Cham and in Prey Veng were preexisting government-created structures that were provided with capacity building by OPTIONS, giving them skills to carry out EFA campaigns with thematic foci using a wide variety of mass media tools, such as video and role-play, on important dates such as International Children's Day.⁴⁶

OPTIONS collaboration has added value and focus to these organizations, based in commune councils, which receive their authority and budget from MOI. After commune council elections in 2002 and 2007, the commune councils have become the centerpiece of RGC's decentralization efforts, underway since 2002.⁴⁷ Members of LCSCs and CEFACs interviewed in FGDs in Kampong Cham reported that the KAPE-implemented OPTIONS program achieved good results because—

- Parents' budget for schools decreased
- Dropout rate for children had decreased
- More girls reached grade 6
- The new LSP was effective in vocational training

The difficulties that the LSCS in Kampong Cham reported were the following:

- Demands on their duties by OPTIONS increased while their time available to accomplish the work had not kept pace, so they felt overburdened and unable to meet the expectations of KAPE/OPTIONS.

⁴⁵ Evidently there was confusion with Hagar, as it understood the methodology had not been recorded. OPTIONS may wish to share now this methodology with Hagar and correct its misperception that it was never recorded.

⁴⁶ CEFAC interviews in Department of Education Office, Por Kanleng, Prey Veng, June 26; District Education Office, Batheay, Kampong Cham June 23, 2007; interview with Sue Gollifer, OPTIONS World Education.

⁴⁷ Khimm and Kinetz, (2007:17). Some US\$15,000 will be allocated to every commune and priority for spending is determined locally. CEFACs and LCSCs should be made aware of this budgeting windfall and advocate for some percentage of it to fund educational programs such as MBF in Prey Veng and Life Skills in Kampong Cham.

- LSCS do not have technical reporting skills. Could KAPE/OPTIONS provide these so that their work and beneficiaries results can be recorded and communicated to the district and provincial authorities and to local partners as well as LS as a policy and MOEYS?

2.6 SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT

Sustainability for the purposes of this project evaluation means how well the project can endure and continue when the WE budget stops and WE and its main partners end their main capacity building and program activities, owing to the end of the project and budget cycle in August 2007. Sustainability is a strategy that should be evident in the project design document and implemented through capacity-building efforts to the point where local stakeholders are self sufficient in every manner and can continue the project on their own after international staff and organizations implementing OPTIONS eventually pulls out. Sustainability is an outcome that comes about when the project design articulates a sustainability strategy put into place from the project's inception that, at a minimum—

1. Identifies and builds on preexisting systems, structures, policies, and practices that are in place in Cambodia, but which may be weak, fractured, dysfunctional, or not operational.
2. Solidifies or builds up networks across stakeholders at the community levels and connects these to horizontal authority structures of the state.

OPTIONS has worked within preexisting systems at all levels, from national to commune, with multiple ministry partners, supported the EFA policy of the MOEYS, and used creative ways to energize CEFACS to galvanize support for beneficiaries of the OPTIONS programs.

To its credit, the OPTIONS management team at national and provincial levels monitored program progress, identifying bottlenecks to progress and achievement of development goals through mechanisms of the PMT meetings, biannual PMP technical reports, STS established with assistance from USDOL technical services contracted out, internal reporting, and annual stakeholder workshops. It is not clear how the STS system could be transferred to local users if OPTIONS staff stops work and hands the project over to local authorities.

To USDOL, “sustainability is linked to project impact and the ability of individuals, communities, and a nation to ensure that the activities or changes implemented by a project endure. A project's impact is manifested at the level of individuals, organizations, and systems. For individual children and their families this would mean a positive and enduring change in their life conditions as a result of project interventions. At the level of organizations and systems, sustained impact would involve continued commitment and ability (including financial commitment and policy change) by project partners to continue the actions generated by the project, including enforcement of existing policies that target child labor and schooling.”

The evaluation has commented that it is still too early to note an enduring impact at the individual level, although beneficiaries, parents, and teachers are highly positive in their view that the good impacts will be long lasting on student attitudes and, hopefully, behavioral choices. Continued commitment by project partners at the government level is not clear, as funding priorities may not

favor the OPTIONS bundle of programs over other ministry initiatives. However, as some of the programs have been taken over by MOEYS, as noted in the report by OPTIONS, this is a positive outcome.

USDOL and OPTIONS face three main additional challenges in ensuring sustainability. First, educational programs in and of themselves are not sustainable, as they require inputs of human resources (teachers, trainers) and materials (texts, lesson preparation manuals), and the outputs cannot be used to sustain the programs.

Second, sustaining numbers of beneficiaries receiving scholarships, material support, and nutritional/food supplement support for families is possible if RGC has budgeted for these items after OPTIONS closure and can coordinate with the WFP successfully. So, too, CEFACs comprise community members who are mostly poor or very poor, with a few lower middleclass. Without involvement of wealthy members of the district, there will no means to ensure distribution of wealth within the province or district to benefit students in need of scholarships, home stays during upper secondary schooling, and food and material assistance to family members of beneficiaries loath to let potential labor and income supply leave for school.

Third, USDOL needs to build in future funding for livelihoods programs with income generation, as these are essential to education programs such as OPTIONS becoming locally sustainable projects when the funding cycle ends. OPTIONS made this realization late in the project cycle, as it was not part of the original development plan. Livelihood training, but not income generation, has begun in one site only (Prey Veng). This is to OPTIONS' credit, and it is an issue that USDOL may wish to view, not just for OPTIONS, but for all of the education projects it funds.

Interview information suggests that the impact of the OPTIONS basket of programs has provided new possibilities for girls and some boys to go to school for an additional year or two, and to convince the community of parents and educators of the need to raise awareness of the need to continue this initiative.

The impact of OPTIONS is also in the area of educational quality, whereby teachers and students are learning together about their environments and what the dangers are in economic, social, and labor areas.

Finally, the impact of OPTIONS has been to empower girls and boys to think critically and positively to protect themselves and the members of their own communities against a range of issues, such as domestic violence, environmental degradation and pollution, and protection in labor sites.

OPTIONS has enabled children to present themselves to the community as valuable citizens, with positive ideas to help all, and especially with regard to their own generation that is at risk and vulnerable to trafficking, commercial exploitation, and a future without education and job prospects. As detailed in other sections of the report, the students of OPTIONS are highly regarded by government officials when they have been observed presenting information in public meetings. Their abilities to verbally express issues and ideas, participate meaningfully in community discussions, and understand the larger social and economic context of their lives in their own communities is a powerful impact and one that will be long lasting.

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III BEST PRACTICES, LESSONS LEARNED

OPTIONS as a project has no shortage of best practices and lessons learned gleaned over its lifespan. Particularly best practice regards how WE has conscientiously used such practices and lessons learned through regular stakeholder dialogue at all levels and national-level workshops and then (with consensus from key organization partners, the Cambodian government, NGOs, and beneficiary stakeholders) has fed best practices and lessons learned back into the management and administration of program implementation in respective provincial sites.

OPTIONS has been a project of tweaking and turning par excellence from 2003 to 2007, at times to the point of the exasperation of its collaborators, who viewed the complexity of OPTIONS as unnecessary for achieving results and as unsuitable to the Cambodian social and educational development context.

3.1 BEST PRACTICES

- **Building Good Partnerships:** OPTIONS has worked hard over the past four years to identify and build lasting and mutually respectful relationships with the Cambodian government and NGO partners, by either drawing upon existing networks or, in the main, creating innovative new networks for partners to cohere and participate in the program meaningfully. Examples are LCSCs, CEPAC, GCs, and provincial ministry networks.
- **Added Value to Government Education Policy and Curriculum:** OPTIONS has added value to government policy and programs, such as the MOEYS EFA policy and the LS program, which has been formally adopted with a policy paper and is in the process of being integrated into the Cambodian government school curriculum. MOEYS, in particular, has enthusiastically supported the OPTIONS innovations in curriculum development and student-centered approaches to learning and is in the process of adopting the LS curriculum in 14 provinces with plans to scale up countrywide.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** OPTIONS has continually monitored its programs and implementations to fine-tune them, ensure that they fit local capacities and local needs, and respond to stakeholder opinions and input. The STS was a valuable tool, and one that could be adapted by OPTIONS to better capture the complex subpopulations of beneficiaries by age group, program component—NFE, formal primary, lower and upper secondary, O/S youth, the MBF, and LS—with sex-disaggregated indicators.
- **Educating Locally to Preempt Exploitation Globally:** Global here refers to the wider Southeast Asian region, where trafficking networks and child labor migrants tend to take root. While a majority of Cambodia’s child laborers are exploited in commercial ventures in their own communities (mainly in the agricultural sector, but also in brick and construction ventures), increasing numbers of young males in Prey Veng and Kampong Cham (and most likely Banteay Meanchey) are taking off for more distant shores, particularly Thailand, to become coolie laborers on construction sites. Young females from OPTIONS sites tend to view Phnom Penh as a final destination and are educated through the LSP to make careful choices.

3.2 LESSONS LEARNED

“This question of whether sustainability was built into the design of OPTIONS is a very good question. I am glad you asked that. How can OPTIONS use the existing resources of MOEYS and how can MOEYS learn from successes and practices? Sustainability means from handover to takeover. Sustainability means from partnership to ownership. I think OPTIONS has ignored this.”

—*MOEYS national level*

“I wonder if OPTIONS standard of excellence is too high to replicate at local levels and so not suitable to Cambodian context. The gold standard of OPTIONS is too high. Are there silver or bronze standards that OPTIONS could help develop so Cambodian institutions could replicate good projects but without all the complicated programs and partners?”

—*UNICEF*

- **Sustainability can only come from welfare and income-generation programs for beneficiaries in combination with a handover plan to Cambodian counterparts to implement the programs.** Sustainability must include income generation for beneficiaries so that poverty and debt do not strangle them out of the project when the OPTIONS project budget and program cycle ends. Beneficiaries in Kampong Cham and Prey Veng have stated their undesired intent to quit the project even if the project continues, owing to the pressing need to generate income for themselves and their families for daily foodstuffs.
- **The choice to concentrate on LSS is at the expense of those girls and boys in USS who may finish to year 12 with OPTIONS support.** Without a significant percentage of Cambodian students graduating with high school diplomas, there cannot be a surge of semiskilled workers entering the labor market and demanding a living wage. The OPTIONS project has assisted several thousand students to stay in school to grade 9, as per the MOEYS EFA target. However, this target is faulty in and of itself, because graduates with nine years of education cannot obtain work with a living wage and will be compelled to undertake manual labor on farms for the wealthy farmers in their districts or, as is more likely the case, will be compelled to leave their province for urban centers for substandard wage work in commercially exploitive industries. Wages for seasonal farming work do not increase according to grade school levels obtained. Poverty rates will stay the same and likely increase because the poorest of the poor have either sold their land or will sell it to pay for medical costs. Their debt loads last a lifetime and their children and children’s children will ultimately be vectors in the category of the worst forms of child labor.
- **Livelihood programming came too little too late to affect sustainability in a positive way.** While WE is “first and foremost an education organization,” it is working in a developing country whose poverty levels are deepening among the poorest of the poor.

Development projects that do not generate income for beneficiaries cannot be sustained, because the project impact will end as soon as the project ends. No Cambodian can afford to continue in the programs without some financial inputs. OPTIONS wisely saw the benefit of including some vocational skills training, but this cannot work without a welfare component for beneficiaries as well as an income-generation plan to follow the vocational programming. The poorest of the poor in Cambodia need to reduce their expenditures with welfare assistance, particularly for health care, the single most crippling cost to the poor in Cambodia. Added to this, an income-generation scheme to increase earnings will help somewhat, but may be a drop in the bucket, owing to the large debt loads of most of the beneficiary families. Income earned goes to pay debt and not to invest in family assets needed for income generation.

- **Vocational training without livelihood generation funds to O/S youth, mainly female, without provision of business investment funds will not ensure sustainability of OPTIONS impacts.** While beneficiaries want to put their skills to work, they cannot afford the startup costs to begin a small home agro or sewing business. Beneficiaries stated they would likely leave the provinces for Phnom Penh to work in the garment industry or work on the farms of the wealthy. Substandard wages are obtained in both cases. Health costs will ensure that the debt loads they now carry will be maintained for their lives and the lives of their children unless there are interventions to relieve them of debt, a solution beyond the financial scope of OPTIONS.
- **There is gender stereotyping by teachers in LS programming.** Girls want and need to learn how to repair bicycles and boys should be encouraged to try out cooking classes. As adults, whether married or living together as work colleagues, all can benefit from a broad range of skills learned.
- **Statistical tracking indicators of beneficiaries.** The STS developed for OPTIONS with USDOL technical assistance was useful, as it did track male and female beneficiaries throughout the component parts, could not capture dropouts as permanent, repeat, or periodic, and did not capture numbers and ratios of beneficiaries who did engage in child labor while enrolled in the OPTIONS programs. According to OPTIONS, “defining and managing periodic dropout is very difficult, and not particularly helpful from a long-term data analysis perspective. The STS can track labor status of a child, but this aspect of the database was not used by OPTIONS, because the majority of OPTIONS beneficiaries were enrolled as children at risk, rather than child laborers. Additionally, as shared with the evaluator, the program team did experience a significant learning curve with the STS, and it was felt that having accurate enrollment and retention data with our population of at-risk children was a priority over tracking work status. This would be something that we would track in the future.”⁴⁸
- **Sometimes no amount of remedial advice and intervention can save a failing partner.** The policy/advocacy strategy of OPTIONS at national level never took off;

⁴⁸ See OPTIONS comments on draft report.

although, in the end, this did not negatively affect the provincial projects from achieving their short-term policy objectives. However, strategic influence in policy/advocacy at the national level fell flat, owing in the main to the fact that, instead of cutting TAF loose, WE with TAF HQ tried to “salvage” the dysfunctional policy/advocacy component with a great input of time and personal resources midway through Year 3 of OPTIONS. Overall, TAF was a drag on the OPTIONS program management energies and strategic operations. Year 4 has not seen a significant breakthrough in policy inputs or impacts, as could be expected in so short a time remaining. It would not be advisable for OPTIONS II to continue with the current setup for advocacy and policy.

- **OPTIONS’ gold standard of education is beyond the reach of Cambodia’s capacity to embrace just barely a bronze standard of education.** Arguments in favor of implementing the highest standards, regardless of local conditions, are difficult to maintain because while “the best education for children is what a developing country deserves” is noble, it ultimately confronts the challenge of local ownership and sustainability, and the highest standards are usually beyond the reach of what the local environment can imbibe.

IV CONCLUSIONS

The start of this evaluation is the end of OPTIONS, after four years of operation. Without the benefit of hindsight, this evaluation assumes that the OPTIONS team embarked in 2003 with some key unknown issues of importance, which had an effect on the overall relevance and efficacy of the OPTIONS development goals and the programs designed to meet those goals over the four-year project time span. For these reasons, the relevance and impact of OPTIONS program is understood in the context of the development goals and social economic situation that pertained in 2003 and that were used to express the project design and development goals.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that OPTIONS was a unique project that introduced quality education and innovative methods to be implemented by local counterparts that were supported by the Cambodian government, local communities, and students. The management and administration was effective in monitoring the implementation of programs to check efficacy issues. The policy arm of OPTIONS via TAF was the weak link throughout the project's four-year lifespan and recognized as such by WE.

Programs were effectively designed to meet the learning needs of the educators and the students. The programs did not sufficiently address the poverty environment and therefore could not “see outside the box” of the education sector. This was the main design weakness of OPTIONS: It did not factor in a poverty reduction element into the programs via livelihood/income-generation activities for the bulk of the beneficiaries; neither did it consider how to interface with the Cambodian social/economic context to frame a handover of operations so that local communities could take responsibility for financing the costs of student scholarships, home-stays, and even program expenses for MBF and the LSP.

Hence, development goals were reached within the lifespan of the project, but cannot be sustained beyond it owing to—

- High debt burdens of beneficiaries who dip in and out of child labor practices to make ends meet; students in grade 9 will largely drop out before completing grade 10, owing to poverty.
- Absence of an applied livelihood program for majority of beneficiaries/their families supplemented with welfare support to diminish burden of expenditures.
- Costs of running the individual programs that have not been picked up by the local authorities and committees due to the lack of handover planning by OPTIONS in its project design.

What are the options for OPTIONS' future?

There was unanimous support for the continuation of OPTIONS when stakeholders were asked the question, “Should OPTIONS continue, and if so, in what form?” Their recommendations will feed into the following section.

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V RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 STRATEGY AND PROGRAM DESIGN

5.1.1 Strategic Planning

There needs to be some realignment of strategic planning to meaningfully connect national government decisionmakers with local government stakeholders of OPTIONS in order to—

- Advocate for government’s acknowledgement at the highest levels, including Council of Ministers and the MEF, of the growing poverty in the OPTIONS targeted districts using poverty profiles and data collected from stakeholders.
- Build responsibility into roles of national government ministry partners (MOEYS, MOLVT, MOSAVY, MOWA) for the establishment of a coordinated advocacy strategy on EFA with a new goal of EFA up to grade 12, in order to demonstrate that EFA to grade 9 is not a sufficient target to preempt trafficking and commercial exploitation of children in Cambodia, nor to reduce poverty and achieve the CMDGs by 2015.
- Advocate with OPTIONS government stakeholders at provincial level and with Ministry of Health for free health care in areas where beneficiaries should receive the government-approved Health Equity Funds/advocate government partners to coordinate health equity funds in all OPTIONS areas where they do not currently exist.
- Provide for inclusion of welfare and income-generation programs for all beneficiaries and reduce the targeted number of beneficiaries to those that can be lifted out of poverty in order to sustain OPTIONS to completion of grade 12.
- Reorient target of beneficiaries from grades 8–9 to grades 9–12.
- Maintain target beneficiaries in grades 5 and 6.
- Achieve a gender balance for beneficiaries, because boys and girls suffer equally as members of the poorest of the poor and are equally vulnerable to commercial exploitation and human trafficking.

Advocacy/Policy Strategy

This should focus on MEF/MOEYS dedicated budget support plan in place when OPTIONS ends to ensure sustainability of outcomes for student beneficiaries; students will drop out of the program without budget support.

OPTIONS II should consider the efficacy of advocating with the MOEYS to extend the EFA target beyond grade 9 to grade 12 over the next decade as the EFA is linked to the CMDGs goals for 2010. The current NSDP will end in 2010, hence the need for foresight into education targets in upper secondary beyond the current target of grade 9. As the interview data from the FGDs

shows using the TST tool, all the beneficiaries are in the poorest of the poor socioeconomic category in their districts/communes and having a grade 9 education will not lift them out of that category, because they cannot command the wages with this level of education. A grade 12 diploma, however, does lift them into another category of laborer and with the skills provided by OPTIONS programs such as the LSP and MBF, the beneficiaries would have a much better opportunity to seek paid labor that is not as commercially exploitive as the farm labor they carry out making half-a-dollar a day, excluding expenses for meals, water, and transportation.

Grade 12 should be a new target (EFA upgrade from grade 9), with OPTIONS advocacy message calling for a critical mass of grade 12 graduates as a precondition for sustained, equitable economic growth in Cambodia and poverty reduction among the poorest of the poor.

Advocate for budget support through the commune council funds, and via MEF for MOEYS PAP budget funds for use at provincial and district levels. MEF may be very receptive to this proposal, because the MOEYS is one of three priority ministries that will be selected by the MEF for program based budgeting support using PAP funds starting 2007.⁴⁹

5.1.2 For Mainstreaming and Sustainability

Choice elements of OPTIONS structure and programming could be usefully extracted by MOEYS and scaled up. This could be part of the project design for OPTIONS II if MOEYS is brought into the equation with this target early on. The MBF and LSP are two recommended programs and supporting structures that MOEYS could extract coherently with CEPAC and CSLCs, as supporting structures already in place locally, and with the government ministry offices of the DOE, DOSAVY, and USDOL and, to a limited extent DoWA, already cooperating and knowledgeable and supportive of MBF and LSP. Commune councils are on board already.

MOEYS could induct the MBF and LSPs into the pre-service and in-service teacher training with curricula development by the MOEYS' Pedagogical Research Department, so that both programs can be used throughout the country's district education offices and selected schools with community concurrence, support, follow-up, and participation by relevant partner ministries, such as MOLVT and MOSAVY at national, provincial, and district levels.

5.1.3 Program Design

Handover Mechanism Built into Phase II Design

MOEYS clearly wants to see a handover mechanism in the design of OPTIONS II. It is advisable for WE to discuss this matter in depth if it has not already done so, rather than design the second phase of OPTIONS with the same gold standards of OPTIONS I that cannot fit the local development context.

⁴⁹ Personal communication from H.E. Hang Chuon Naron, Secretary General, Ministry of Economy and Finance, May 2006.

Rather than scale up or expand, OPTIONS II should consider putting resources into reaching a preselected target number of boys and girls reaching grade 12 through a four-year period in a reduced number of districts if the funding ceilings remain as they were for the OPTIONS' first round. This may mean a reduction in districts or schools within districts.

5.2 PARTNERSHIPS AND COORDINATION

“We are listeners at OPTIONS-convened meetings but what do we do with the reports that are read out to us by WorldEd at the WG meetings?”

—*Ministry Advisory Working Group*

- Add MOLVT at central level and get input into design of OPTIONS II.
- Coordinate with MOLVT regarding beneficiaries entering technical colleges to learn trades and with ILO to monitor entrants of OPTIONS beneficiaries to the factories.
- Coordinate with MOLVT on entrants for girls in nontraditional job training, such as motorcycle repair and carpentry to expand skills sets beyond industrial sewing and factory work that can be used in local areas, offset pull factors in migration, and reduce dangers of trafficking and CSW. While these nontraditional skills would be a culturally innovative approach, with careful NGO support and coordination, there could be beneficial employment prospects for them.
- Mechanisms for dispute resolution should be developed in advance so that impartial and neutral stakeholders can assist partners to air views and proposals for resolution of conflicts in ways that are mutually respectful and amicable. CEFACs could ensure membership has community volunteers from wealthy strata of the district so that scholarships and home stays can be offered and arranged through local resources instead of via KAPE/OPTIONS. Possibilities exist for Ponhea Krek, as there is a wealthy class, which is a significant portion of district population. Communes of Cheung Prey, Tang Krasang are too poor to assist their students and will need to look to the district or provincial level to find wealthy members of their communities involved in CEPAC work and taking on scholarships/home stays and so forth.
- Quarterly technical reports in Khmer language prepared by CEPACs, CLSCs, and other committees could be based on a matrix model to be filled in by handwritten reporter or computer (if accessible) with clearly defined indicators cross-referenced to development goals at district level for OPTIONS programs. Font should be unicode, as this is the international standard font to be adopted by RGC for its electronic and regular computerized correspondence. Training in UNICODE is available free throughout Cambodia.

- Mechanisms for responding back down from national to provincial, district levels on matrix technical reports should be developed by the national advisory committee members themselves, in Khmer language; with copying of reports and answers to key partners, including OPTIONS HQ; MOWA, MOLVT, MOEYS, and MOSAVY.

5.3 MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET ISSUES

There is a need to develop plans for local Cambodian staff to take up senior-level positions in OPTIONS as advisors, so a handover can be done when WE is finished.

There are no specific recommendations for budget issues, as international organizations such as WE must seek funds from a range of donors and foundations, each with their own strategic visions and criteria for program interventions. If possible, reducing the number of donors to report to would be the ideal, but not realistic.

5.4 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND OUTPUTS

- Research processes and results should be documented so that best practices and lessons learned can be shared by program partners in Kampong Cham and Banteay Meanchey and by Cambodian partners in government and among NGOs.
- LS and MBF subjects, manuals, and program lessons should be written and copied so they can be used by the next cohort of community educators, teachers, and students.
- Project programs are too complex to replicate as currently designed. Simplify and design for local-level importation over project lifespan with target takes for transfer and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) role by WE over a two-year period for mentoring and inputs. It is recommended that the gender aspects of community teaching the LSP be addressed by OPTIONS with both the teachers and the students so that opportunities are presented to both boys and girls in all the classes, regardless of giggles and heckling by students. Without exception, the provincial, district, commune stakeholders want to see gender parity in OPTIONS programs as beneficiaries are the poorest of the poor and both sexes suffer equally, if in different ways, from this status. Students, both boys and girls, also expressed this wish. It is also the case that boys and girls face dangers from migration, including trafficking and commercial sex work, and this risk will increase for boys over the next decade, as is has in neighboring countries. Moreover, boys and girls need to learn about issues such as domestic violence, gender equity, safety in the work place, sewing, and cooking classes, if they are to pair in harmony in the future.

5.4.1 Specific requests made by the students/stakeholders for OPTIONS II

- Repair kits for bicycles and repair lessons for all the students, taught by the students to one another.

- Rice/supper supplements for OPTIONS beneficiaries in Prey Veng (15 kg is not enough for one family).
- Guaranteed meals/rice to continue in Kampong Cham. If the WFP support ends, “none of the students will come to school, and neither will the teachers” (Ponhea Krek FGD).
- LS Manuals provided or printouts of materials that community educators themselves produce so that they can be used in later years.
- Girls want to learn bike repair in the LSP—need for teachers to be gender sensitive.
- Boys want to learn cooking and sewing in the LSP—need for teachers to be gender sensitive.
- CEPACs want to learn how to write two-page technical reports that can be sent up to the relevant levels including national.

5.5 SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACTS

- Transfer WE-implemented programs of LS and MBF to local grassroots groups or organizations to ensure sustainability after program ends.
- A transfer plan from WE to local Cambodian groups, either government or nongovernmental structures, should be part of the strategic plan and built into programming from the first to fourth year.
- Members of the wealthy social/economic class in each district where OPTIONS is operating should be invited to participate in one or several of the local school committees, the LSPs, and CEPACs. Strategies for local-level support for girls and boys should be sought from Cambodian community rather than depending on WE/KAPE and government budgets.
- Income generation is essential for sustainability of educational access and continuation of beneficiaries in OPTIONS programs. A greater portion of OPTIONS resources should be spent on livelihood programs that are small scale, suitable for local environment and market conditions, and require minimum investment. Examples include pig raising, mushroom growing in Kampong Cham and Prey Veng; Banteay Meanchey sewing programs for O/S youth are not sustainable, because they do not include budget for young women to buy machines and establish home-based businesses.
- Media is a channel to advertise achievements and coordinate advocacy efforts, and it should be used. There could be TV and radio presentations of OPTIONS work, leaflets, media interviews, and roundtable discussions on Khmer Women’s Voice radio (FM 102) as well as Sombok Khmum (Beehive Radio) station. OPTIONS achievements should be known through Khmer and English print media.

- **OPTIONS** achievements need better exposure through regular presentations of outputs and activities at strategically chosen RGC poverty reduction working groups and at high-level donor forums (two meetings every six months or so, followed up by media exposure).

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