Q&A with KIM DARA, Country Director for World Education Cambodia

Kim Dara, talks to the EGL Working Group about how World Education has transformed their portfolio of work from their own early learning ‘projects’ to a portfolio that is entirely focused on supporting the MoEYS in its roll-out of Komar Rien Komar Cheh.

Q: Can you tell us about how this shift from having your own projects to supporting the MoEYS with their program came about?

A: At the end of 2016 we heard about plans for MoEYS to develop a new EGR package for teachers. This was at the same time as we were starting on our new Food for Education program, funded by the US Department of Agriculture. In this project we were supposed to be designing and conducting trainings for Grades 1-3 teachers on EGR. What we really wanted was to be able to use new MoEYS package, but, of course, it had not even begun to be developed at that point. So, instead we had to make our own teacher training curriculum under FFE. But even back then we made it very clear to MoEYS, USAID and GPE, that as soon as the MoEYS EGR package was ready we would shift to using that. And that is what we did.

Q: So, when was that?

A: From the 2018-2019 school year we stopped training Grade 1 teachers using our training curriculum. And we diverted those project funds to help provide the new EGR teaching and learning materials to FFE target schools. The FFE project trainers also worked alongside the ACR team to conduct the new MoEYS G1 training in project areas, and their time was covered by FFE.

At the same time, we were supporting MoEYS in many other ways. From 2017 we have had our technical staff working full time with RTI and MoEYS on developing the materials, and since 2018 we have been doing the piloting of the new package across Kampong Thom and now also Kampot.

Our entire portfolio in Cambodia is now shaped around this - helping with the roll out in 799 schools, working with over 2,300 teachers, hiring 100 full time coaches to support teachers. It’s at a massive scale.

But, it has also helped to generate new funds from other donors too. From 2020 we will be expanding to yet another province to implement the EGR roll out for Grade 1 and 2, and continuing to support MoEYS at central level through till 2023 as they take the roll out to national scale.

Q: What do you think the future looks like for World Ed?

A: We’ll continue in the same way. I think the Ministry needs to take a leading role in coordinating the NGOs. We can see they are doing this already. They have more capacity to do this now for themselves. World Ed’s role here in Cambodia is to support MoEYS in its own policies and reforms. It also makes us more cost-effective, have greater impact and far more attractive to other donors. The results are much better with a harmonized approach where MoEYS and NGOs pull together to improve reading. This should be implemented nationwide rather than each NGO trying its own approach.

Q: Do you have any advice or final comments for other NGOs?

A: Our staff have learnt a lot through the process. They’ve learnt from other organizations and I think other organizations have learnt from us. I think the most important thing we’ve all learnt is to work together. Greater results will happen when we are sharing more and working together more.