



In rural Cambodia, nearly

50%

of girls are laborers instead of students.



Our Presence in Cambodia



Country Overview

Cambodia is a country that has seen many dark days. When the Khmer Rouge seized power in 1975, it attempted to violently restructure the country as a communal agrarian society by abolishing private property and currency, sending city-dwellers to work in rural fields and killing educated Cambodians. During the Khmer Rouge's nearly four-year reign, over 1.8 million Cambodians died of torture, execution, disease, exhaustion and starvation.

Despite this complicated history and continued political turbulence, Cambodia has had success in lifting its citizens out of poverty. In 2009, it achieved the Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty. The World Bank reports that from 2007 to 2014 the poverty rate dropped from 47.8 percent to 13.5 percent. It also became a lower middle-income country in 2015. However, maintaining this level of growth will be a challenge for Cambodia. The World Bank has cautioned that it's unlikely that Cambodia will achieve its goal of upper-middle-income status by 2030.

Even with these advancements, 35 percent of Cambodians are still living in poverty. That figure is even higher for the rural population and children and adolescents under 19 years old. The latter group accounts for around 45 percent of those living in poverty, and an additional 21 percent at risk of falling into poverty.

Country Information

Population	16 million
Land area	181,035 km ²
Languages of instruction	Khmer
Launch of operations	2002
Room to Read office	Phnom Penh

Educational Landscape

Nearly all educated Cambodians were executed during the Khmer Rouge's brutal regime. By 1978, there were almost no surviving teachers, writers or scientists in the country, and an entire generation of literate role models had been eliminated.

Today, the Cambodian government has taken steps to prioritize improvements to the education system. The annual education budget increased by 24 percent in 2018 and the government is working towards making nine years of education available for all. Since 2000, net enrollment in primary schools has jumped from 83 percent to 97.7 percent. However, high dropout and low completion rates in lower secondary school are affecting access to upper levels of schooling. Secondary school dropout rates are partially due to widespread child labor including farming, scavenging, garment manufacturing, sexual exploitation, fishing and construction. Cambodia also has the second lowest literacy rate out of all ASEAN countries, with around 29 percent of the population lacking basic reading and writing skills. An indicator of the roots of illiteracy, nearly 25 percent of children in grade three cannot write a single word in a dictation test. Additionally, learning assessments conducted in the past few years have revealed that children are not learning sufficiently, and that greater emphasis on the quality of education is still needed.

For girls in Cambodia, additional educational barriers exist. Cambodia is ranked at 116 out of 160 countries in the 2017 Gender Inequality Index. Many families continue to see no value in educating their daughters. Instead, girls are expected to help in the home, contribute to the family income or marry early. As a result, only 15 percent of adult women have reached at least a secondary level of education.



History and Results

Room to Read Cambodia was founded in 2002 with a commitment to help the country rebuild its educational system through a partnership with the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS). In partnership with the MoEYS, Room to Read's Literacy Program currently operates in government schools in four provinces.

We have found one of the greatest needs to be affordable Khmer-language books for young readers. With that in mind, publishing local language children's books has been a priority since the early days of our operations. We establish child-friendly libraries where primary school children can explore books, read for pleasure, and borrow books to read at home. In 2020, the Minister of Education agreed to form a national library partnership with Room to Read to develop and scale a national primary school library package.

Our Literacy Program has had an impact on student reading outcomes. 2018 Grade 2 results indicate that children benefiting from the program can, on average, read more than twice as fluently and with more comprehension than children who did not benefit from the program. Similarly, 2019 Grade 1 results indicate that children benefiting from the program experienced 1-year gains in reading skills that were higher than children who did not benefit from the program.

We have also had great success with our Girls' Education Program in Cambodia, which has received international attention. In March 2015, the First Lady of the United States and the First Lady of Cambodia visited one of our Girls' Education Program sites in Siem Reap where they met with our program participants. Additionally, 2019 was the third year that girls from the program graduated from Grade 12. We are proud to share that our pass rate is 17 percent higher than the national pass rate of 69 percent.

Our Results in Cambodia

Literacy Program

New children benefited in 2018	106,569
Children benefited cumulatively	1,598,931
New schools in 2018	55
Schools cumulatively	1,929
New children's book titles published in 2018	8
Books distributed cumulatively	3,369,471

Girls' Education Program

New participants in 2018	1,342
Number of participants cumulatively	14,990
New secondary school graduates in 2018	199
Secondary school graduates cumulatively	933

Give with confidence. Room to Read has achieved 13 fourstar ratings from Charity Navigator since 2007, an achievement that less than 1% of charities can claim.

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