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Nearly two-thirds of children in Cambodia aged 3-5 are not in school greater investment is needed to improve early childhood education, says Save the Children

PHNOM PENH, May 29 - Cambodia has made significant progress in reducing the numbers of out-of-school children over the past twenty years. However, access to early childhood education remains a challenge, with a staggering 60% of children aged 3-5 not enrolled in any kind of formal education

Save the Children is sounding the alarm as we launch the third annual *Global Childhood Report: Changing Lives in our Lifetime*, in the lead up to International Children's Day on June 1st. The report examines data from 176 countries on a range of indicators related to childhood.

Cambodia has much to celebrate its score increasing 149 points, from 606 in 2000 to 755 in 2019. This is largely due to progress made in child survival, nutrition and school enrolment. But the percentage of out of school children of primary and secondary school-age is still high at 22.5%.

The index ranks countries according to where childhood is most or least threatened. Cambodia is 120th out of the 176 countries analysed. Regional neighbours ranked in the index include Thailand (86), Vietnam (95), Philippines (102), Indonesia (107), Malaysia (71) and China (36). Singapore is ranked at the very top in this year's index.

Elizabeth Pearce, Save the Children's Cambodia Country Director, said:

"We know there is much to celebrate in Cambodia, as the situation for some children has improved, but significant indicators—such as the low access to early childhood education still remains a challenge. In the 2018-2019 academic year, only 40% of children aged 3-5 were accessing any form of education."

"In 2017, only 0.3% of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport's budget was allocated to early childhood education. This is the smallest share of the Ministry's total recurrent budget when compared to other sub-sectors, such as primary education [3.6%], secondary education [4.0%], and higher education [1.7%]."

"Yet our research shows that early childhood education is one of the best investments a country can make to prepare children to learn and help them succeed later in life. Early education also makes the whole system more efficient by reducing repetition drop-outs – especially among girls and disadvantaged groups."

According to the Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey 2014, children living in urban areas (36%), are much more likely to attend an early childhood education program than children living in rural areas (11%). Only four percent of children under age five have at least three children's books. A higher percentage of urban children have access to three or more children's books, compared to their rural peers. A survey in 2017 showed that most of the books currently available in Khmer language are not suitable for young children aged 0-6 years.

Ms Pearce continued:

“Save the Children is urging the Cambodian government to increase spending on early childhood education at both the national and local levels across the country, prioritizing children living in rural, remote, and hard to reach areas, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, indigenous children, and children with disabilities.

“We ask the Cambodian government to increase resources and investment for development of age-appropriate reading and play materials for children aged 0-6 years, and especially to increase access to reading resources for young children in rural, remote, and hard to reach areas.”

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Editor’s notes on Save the Children’s global childhood report: *Changing Lives in our Lifetime*

In its third year, the Global Childhood Report includes a ranking of 176 countries where childhood is most or least threatened as a result of poor health, malnutrition, exclusion from education, child labour, child marriage, early pregnancy and extreme violence.

Singapore tops the rankings as the country that best protects and provides for its children, with eight Western European countries and South Korea also ranking in the top 10. The most dramatic progress was among some of the world’s poorest countries, with Sierra Leone making the biggest improvements since 2000, followed by Rwanda, Ethiopia and Niger. The Central Africa Republic ranks last, with Niger—despite recent progress—and Chad rounding out the bottom three countries where childhoods are most threatened.

The report also found that, globally there are:

- 4.4 million fewer child deaths per year
- 49 million fewer stunted children
- 130 million more children in school
- 94 million fewer child labors
- 11 million fewer girls forced into marriage or married early
- 3 million fewer teen births per year
- 12,00 fewer child homicides per year

Save the Children is calling on governments around the world to give every child the best possible start in life. Greater investment and more focus is needed if we are to see a world where every child can enjoy a safe, healthy and happy childhood.

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