# LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

# PILOT PHASE EVALUATION

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| CFS | Child Friendly Schools |
| DOE | District Office of Education |
| EFA | Education for all |
| ESG | Evaluation Stakeholder Group |
| LSS | Lower Secondary School |
| LSSDP | Lower Secondary School Development Program |
| MoEYS | Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport |
| POE | Provincial Office of Education |
| PRA | Participatory Rural Appraisal |
| SBM | School Based Management |
| SDP | School Development Plan |
| SSC | School Support Committee |
| TLC | This Life Cambodia |
| UNCRC | United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child |

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 ABOUT THIS REPORT

This is an evaluation of the pilot phase of This Life Cambodia's Lower Secondary School Development Program (LSSDP), spanning four years and two rural lower secondary schools, from 2009-2013.

> ❝Now I can see the change in my community. People are more understanding about education. I want to see more change, and I want to see all the students in this community be able to finish their study…I have done many things for the next generation and I am really happy. ❞
>
> - School Support Committee member, Chub Ta Trav

The evaluation highlights the overall success of the LSSDP in empowering communities to be involved with and support their local, government-run lower secondary school. Community engagement is a key element of both local and international education policies that work to increase access to and quality of education[1], seeing school communities as a source of resources for school development (i.e. through fundraising, volunteer activities, etc.) as well as student support (via increased community understanding of the value of education). The evidence presented by this evaluation positions the LSSDP as a good practice model for engaging community members in school development and enacting these policies at the grassroots level.

This evaluation has revealed a number of important findings for the LSSDP. Although the evaluation has also exposed some challenges and areas for improvement, these are far outweighed by the many significant outcomes for both Krabei Riel (KR) and Chub Ta Trav (CTT) school communities.

This evaluation has important implications for future LSSDP implementation. It also contributes to the education development policy space in Cambodia, particularly with regard to community involvement in education and school development.

## 1.2 OUTLINE

The report begins with an outline of the purpose of this evaluation, followed by background information, including the current situation of Lower Secondary School (LSS) education in Cambodia and the rationale for the LSSDP. The evaluation approach and methods used to conduct the evaluation are described, including the evaluation plan, ethical considerations, research evaluation samples, recruitment methods, data collection tools and methods, and systems used for data analysis.

Key findings are presented in three sections. The first section deals with the evolution of the program model over the course of the pilot phase. The second section relates to outcomes for School Support Committees (SSCs). The third section explores school community outcomes (including outcomes for students and teachers, for the broader community, and the school

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[1]Community involvement is highlighted in the Education For All policies, Child Friendly Schools framework and the Cambodian government's Education Strategic Plans 2009-2013 and 2014-2018.

environment). Each section represents an important theme uncovered by the evaluation. Positive outcomes and strengths are discussed alongside program gaps and challenges within each section.

Findings are presented together for KR and CTT for the most part, as results are very similar for each school community and this is an evaluation of the LSSDP model, rather than the two individual school programs. Evaluation findings are discussed with a particular focus on the evolution of the program model, capacity building and School Support Committees (SSCs), and the sustainability of the program model in Chub Ta Trav and Krabei Riel school communities.

Finally the report concludes with lessons learnt and recommendations for the future of the LSSDP Program.

# 1.3   PURPOSE OF EVALUATION

For TLC, evaluation is an important part of the program planning and development cycle, serving many purposes for the organisation. Rigorous evaluation of our programs helps us work out what difference we want to make in the communities we are working with, what we need to do in order to make a difference, and how we will know this has happened.

This report is an evaluation of the pilot phase of the LSSDP over 4 years, in two separate LSSDP cycles, in two schools. The purpose of this LSSDP Pilot Phase final evaluation is to:

*   Ensure TLC is being transparent and accountable to LSSDP donor organisations and individuals, and the communities LSSDP are working with
*   Determine whether the pilot LSSDP Program has achieved its intended aims and objectives
*   Determine strengths and weaknesses of the LSSDP Program model
*   Assess the outcomes (expected and unintended) of the LSSDP Program on Krabei Riel and Chub Ta Trav local school communities
*   Inform future LSSDP Programs in new communities
*   Build an evidence base for future funding

Our evaluation process starts at the beginning of a project, rather than being tacked on at the end. It is guided by the aim, objectives and activities of our programs, and adapts and adjusts to the needs of programs as they emerge and change. This evaluation report therefore, is influenced by 6-monthly and annual evaluations that have been conducted throughout the 4 years of the LSSDP pilot phase.

# 2  BACKGROUND

## 2.1  ABOUT EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA

Today only 35 per cent of Cambodian children make it to Grade 7. Of the students who do enroll in lower secondary school, 22 per cent drop out before completing a full basic education in Grade 9. Although the enrolment rate in primary schools in Cambodia is considered satisfactory at 96.4 per cent, (MoEYS 2011) completing school is a rare privilege for the lucky few. Many Cambodian children have begun dreaming about their next life—not this life.

One reason for the low access to and low quality of education in Cambodia is lack of community involvement in secondary schools. The short-term pressures of poverty make it difficult for many families to commit to the longer-term goal of a basic education for all of their children, and poverty drives the opportunity costs of education higher as children age and their potential to contribute to family income increases. In addition, the destruction of school buildings and murder of educated citizens during Pol Pot's totalitarian regime over three decades ago continues to riddle Cambodia with educational problems today. Teacher salaries are poor, and schools are badly under-resourced.

Government schools in Cambodia are expected to deliver a National Curriculum that is guided by the Child Friendly Schools Policy, a 'rights-based approach' to education that aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Child Friendly Schools Policy is built on the international 'Education for All' initiative. Child Friendly Schools are expected to be inclusive; effective for learning; healthy, safe and protective of children; gender sensitive and responsive; and have good participation from children, families and communities.

## 2.2  SCHOOL SUPPORT COMMITTEES & SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

In Cambodia, each primary and lower secondary school is required by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) to have a School Support Committee (SSC). The SSC mechanism is one of the Cambodian Government's decentralisation strategies, aiming to move more responsibility for decision-making to the district, commune, and village levels. The role of the SSC is to assist in School Based Management (SBM); a school development concept that is implemented around the world, encouraging school communities and local authorities to take responsibility for how the school is managed, how budgets are spent and how education is delivered.

In 2012, the Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) published Guidelines on Secondary School Support Committees, mandating SSCs as a strategy to ensure good leadership and management in schools, by involving community members as co-managing stakeholders. The Guidelines outline membership roles and duties, including monitoring data on attendance, to leading an information campaign on the advantages of education. This approach to school development is intended to work towards building transparency, accountability and effectiveness in school development, as well as involving the community in education.

The reality for most schools however, particularly those in rural areas, is that although they may have an official list of SSC members, they are unlikely to have the skills, knowledge, support and resources needed to carry out their role. Without training, good school management systems and support networks in place, many SSCs are almost entirely inactive.

Each school is also required to submit an annual School Development Plan (SDP). The general expectation is that SSCs will be involved in designing and implanting this plan, however for many schools this responsibility lies solely with the principal in practice. Within the LSSDP, the capacity building framework is built on the annual SDP cycle, so that SSCs are learning the skills they need to be engaged in the process each year.

## 2.3 LOGIC OF THE LSSDP

TLC believes that Cambodian communities are experts in their own development, and that education is key. The LSSDP is TLC's response to the structural problem of low access to and low quality of education at the lower secondary level. Using the tools of community organizing and group decision-making, the LSSDP helps community members develop the skills to identify their shared needs and to envision realistic solutions to educational priorities. At the conclusion of the three-year program, communities are empowered to participate in the education process and to collaboratively design strategies for school development. In addition, communities that are empowered to value education are more able to support children through the challenges of completing a basic education.

This Life Cambodia (TLC) established the Lower Secondary Development Program (LSSDP) in 2009. TLC is focused on providing opportunities for communities to develop the essential infrastructure, skills and knowledge to make positive change in their lives and break free from poverty. In line with the mission to listen to, engage with and advocate alongside communities to address human rights and education development issues, TLC developed the LSSDP model with the aim of supporting and resourcing SSCs to involve their community in school development to improve access to and quality of education in Cambodia.

## 2.4 LSSDP PILOT SCHOOLS

Krabei Riel (KR) commune is about 10km from Siem Reap town. There are 12 villages in the commune. Although the commune is relatively close to town, infrastructure and access to services is low. There is fair access to primary education, and one lower secondary school, which was only a year old when the LSSDP first began in this commune. The school was selected for the LSSDP following the School Selection Criteria, and because members of the community had approached TLC to help improve lower secondary education, hoping that TLC could help involve the community in the school.

Chub Ta Trav (CTT) is located in Angkor Thom district about 40km from Siem Reap town. It was the last commune in the district to receive a lower secondary school, and the LSSDP began working with this school in its first year. The commune is quite remote, with difficult road access especially during the rainy season. Because of this, income generation is a challenge for people in Chub Ta Trav. There was also very low educational attainment: only 9 students in the whole district had graduated from grade 12, none of them from Chub Ta Trav commune. The initial enrolment when the LSSDP began working with this school was only 39 students.

## 2.5 THE LSSDP MODEL

The LSSDP is a 3-year community driven model with two primary objectives; to build the capacity of the SSC to work with their school community to develop and implement a school development plan that will increase learning opportunities for students; and to provide support and resources to address the issues identified by the school community and the SSC.

The LSSDP model is different to many other school development programs, in that it is entirely needs driven, with all school development activities chosen and led by the community. It is a model that fits within the existing Education Department frameworks and systems, including the National

Curriculum, the Child Friendly Schools framework and the policies on SSCs, in order to ensure the sustainability of outcomes beyond program implementation.

The focus of the program is to put educational problem solving tools in the hands of the school community, represented by the SSC. This leaves the objectives of the LSSDP open to a diversity of outcomes determined by the community, and creates sustainable solutions beyond the three-year lifespan of the program.

## The 3-year Implementation Cycle

The LSSDP works closely with the SSC via an annual cyclic model, over a period of 3 years. The strategy supports SSCs to build their community organising skills, so they can design, administer and evaluate their own annual School Development Plans to guide sustainable school development into the future. To build the sustainability of the SSC, capacity building activities and support are reduced with each year of the program, as SSC members build their knowledge and skills to undertake the development, implementation and evaluation of the School Development Plan independently.

A Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is conducted in each year of the program. This is an essential element of the program, as it guides the LSSDP in identifying strong SSC members, gives a broad understanding of community needs beyond SSC members themselves, and demonstrates to SSCs how they could continue to consult their communities in the future. The SSC becomes more involved in the PRA process each year as their skills increase. The data from the PRA report is used in the planning process that takes place at the annual School Development Plan workshop.

## SSC Capacity Building

The LSSDP supports SSC members to learn the skills they need to drive the annual SDP cycle. Strong, supportive relationships between SSCs and the LSSDP team ensure that capacity building is a collaborative and creative process that includes practical learning opportunities as well as formal training. A training package covering 5 core skills areas is implemented annually. SSCs receive training annually in each area. In addition, by supporting and guiding SSCs through the processes of consulting with their community and developing, implementing and evaluating School Development Plans, SSCs develop the knowledge and skills to undertake the process themselves.

1. Community Needs Assessment - How to use Participatory Rural Appraisal and other tools to gather data from the community about current educational challenges, issues and priorities
2. School Development Plans - How to develop, administer and evaluate a realistic annual School Development Plan, which responds to community priorities and outlines resources, responsibilities and timeframes
3. Communication Skills – How to communicate more effectively amongst the SSC team, with the community, with district and provincial offices of education, and with potential funding donors
4. Fundraising – About ethics and accountability, fundraising within the community, and writing proposals for external donors
5. Monitoring and Evaluation – How to monitor progress and evaluate the progress of activities in the annual School Development Plan
6. Additional Training - Topics identified by SSCs (may include Personal Development, Child Rights, Teaching strategies)

In addition to the core training, SSCs participate in the following learning activities:

- School Exchange Visit - to learn about strategies for school development and student engagement from the SSC of another lower secondary school.
- Enrolment and Education Awareness campaigns
- LSSDP team building and reflection activities at training sessions.
- End of Year Evaluation Meeting

The LSSDP also provides technical advice, a limited amount of funding and other support for priorities identified through the annual School Development Plan that are otherwise unable to be sourced. These may include providing teaching and learning resources that meet annual shortfalls identified by teachers and the school Principal and supporting and encouraging action in the community that promotes the importance of education. Technical advice, funding and support may also be provided for strengthening relationships with the District and Provincial Offices of Education or facilitating connections with donors to locate funding for larger construction activities prioritised in the School Development Plan.

# 3 METHODS

## 3.1 EVALUATION STAKEHOLDER GROUP

An Evaluation Stakeholder Group (ESG) was established to ensure the evaluation process was transparent, participatory and meeting the needs of the LSSDP key stakeholders and program beneficiaries. The ESG was made up of members with a vested interest in the evaluation, including the TLC CRCP evaluation team and LSSDP staff. The ESG were involved throughout the planning and implementation of the evaluation, including helping to recruit participants, promoting participation of beneficiaries in the evaluation, helping with data collection and in particular determining and prioritizing key evaluation questions.

LSSDP Evaluation Stakeholder Group members:

- Chea Borany - LSSDP Program Coordinator
- Seng Sorachana - LSSDP Senior Program Officer
- Robin McNaughton - LSSDP Program Development Officer (AusAID funded)
- Mono Tuot – CRCP Coordinator (current)
- Pisseth Hang – CRCP Coordinator (previous)
- Kimsorn Ngam – CRCP Officer
- Shelley Walker – CRCP Research Evaluation Officer (AusAID funded)

Prior to undertaking the evaluation, a program mapping exercise and document review was undertaken, which led to the development of evaluation work plans, which were established in consultation with the LSSDP ESG. The work plans provided a map of the LSSDP program areas and beneficiaries, areas of inquiry for the evaluation, potential data samples, impact and outcome indicators and finally evaluation methods and tools for gathering data.

## 3.2 ETHICAL ISSUES

The conduct of this evaluation was based on a number of guiding principles that placed the rights and respect of program beneficiaries at the forefront of the evaluation. These principals are as follows:

- Evaluation processes need to be relevant and meaningful to the needs of program beneficiaries.
- The process of evaluation should be transparent and findings should be presented back to the community where the evaluation was conducted.
- Evaluation findings should be translated into actions for positive change.
- Evaluation processes need to take account of the cultural context and literacy levels of participants.

Based on these principals, a number of strategies were used to prevent exposure to potential risk for any participants engaged in the evaluation. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, evaluation data has been de-identified. To ensure individuals did not feel obliged or coerced to participate, 'Free Prior Informed Consent' (The NGO Forum on Cambodia 2012) was obtained, which is an international concept to acknowledge people's legitimate decision-making authority. This meant that participants were 'FREE' to withdraw consent at any time, without coercion; that the decision to consent was given PRIOR to the conduct of interviews, surveys and focus groups, and that participants were INFORMED with accurate clear information about what it would mean to be involved in the research; before being required to consent to participate. Most of the adult beneficiaries are illiterate or have low literacy skills; therefore voice signature (verbal) consent was obtained.

*Table 1: Evaluation questions*

<table>
<tr><td>**Evaluation questions**</td></tr>
<tr><td>

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the LSSDP?
- What new strategies are good for using in other school communities?
- Are school communities more involved than before?
- Did SSCs learn the skills we expected them to?
- Have there been unexpected outcomes? What are they?
- Do SSCs feel confident to fulfil their role?
- Have we provided support & resources to SSCs in a sustainable way?
- Where can improvements be made for the new future programs?
- Is there any evidence that school opportunities/access have improved?
- What environmental/political/factors have impacted on implementation?
- Are the resources available being used effectively?
- Do program workers have sufficient resources/skills/support to deliver program?
- Can we still find donors for LSSDP?
- What is our capacity to expand to other schools?
- Do exit strategies work so we can exit from schools?

</td></tr>
</table>

# 3.3   MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Given the focus of the LSSDP is to build the capacity of the SSC to identify and address their own school development issues and needs, measures of success relate to the level of confidence and ability of SSC members to undertake their role in school development, for now and into the future. Other measures of success consider outcomes for students, such as rates of dropout and school retention, but also the connectedness of students to their school community and environment. Finally success of the LSSDP is measured by outcomes for the school environment, including infrastructure development, provision of resources and capacity building of teaching staff.

*Table 2: Evaluation plan*

| Data Sample | Evaluation Methods | Evaluation Indicators | Expected Outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|
| •LSSDP program staff<br>•Non-SSC members (Teachers, Students, Parents)<br>•SSC members<br>•School principals<br>•LSSDP documents<br>•Previous evaluation & donor reports<br>•School Development Plan<br>•PRA report/s<br>•DOE representatives<br>•Commune Council representatives | •Individual face-to-face interviews with LSSDP team<br>•Focus group with SSCs<br>•Individual interviews with Commune Council & DOE representatives<br>•Interviews with school teacher/s<br>•Focus Groups with school students | •PRA reports & data<br>•School Development Plans<br>•Training attendance & satisfaction data<br>•CRCP evaluation reports<br>•Photos<br>•Notes from meetings & consultation with key stakeholders<br>•SSC meeting minutes & attendance data<br>•Annual Donor Reports & Updates<br>•LSSDP Activity Reports | •SSCs have increased skills, confidence & capacity to undertake school development activities<br>•Parents more aware of importance of education<br>•Whole school community involved in identifying priorities for school development<br>•School Development Plans developed by SSC<br>•PRAs conducted by SSCs |

# 3.4  EVALUATION SAMPLE

The sample used for this evaluation included LSSDP staff and key stakeholders and LSSDP beneficiaries from both Krabei Riel and Chub Ta Trav school communities. As previously noted, some data is sourced from previous annual and 6-monthly LSSDP evaluations conducted by CRCP.

The sample included LSSDP staff, including the LSSDP Coordinator, Senior Program Officer and the Program Development Officer. Key stakeholders included representatives from the Department of Education at the Provincial and District levels, program partners, and organisations with a vested interest in the program.

The program beneficiary evaluation sample included SSC members from Krabei Riel (KR) and Chub Ta Trav (CTT) school communities [KR n=6; CTT n=4], including school teachers, principals, parents, villagers and leaders in the community such as village and commune chiefs. Focus groups and individual interviews were conducted with SSC members. Villagers, teachers and parents who were non-SSC members were also involved in the evaluation sample via individual interviews and focus groups. Finally, students from each school were also involved in focus groups interviews, including 17 students from Chub Ta Trav LSS (2 x focus groups), and 11 from Krabei Riel (1 focus group).

*Table 3: Evaluation sample - Chub Ta Trav & Krabei Riel*

| | CTT sample | KR sample | Data collection method |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Department of Education** | 1 | | Individual Interview |
| **School Principal** | 1 | 1 | Individual Interview |
| **Commune Council** | 1 | 1 | Individual Interview |
| **Teachers** | 2 | 2 | Individual Interview |
| **SSC** | 4 (3 female) | 6 (1 female) | Focus Group |
| **Students** | 17 (12 females) | 11 (5 female) | Focus Group |

# 3.5  INSTRUMENT DESIGN

All evaluation tools used were developed following consultation with LSSDP Evaluation Working Group. A range of culturally sensitive and appropriate research tools (taking account of low literacy levels), were designed to gather meaningful data from a range of key stakeholders and beneficiaries of the LKC program; a range of different techniques were used, involving qualitative and quantitative methods.

All research tools were designed in English, however most interviews and focus groups were conducted in Khmer. Focus group and individual interview schedules for program beneficiaries were simple, and involved both open and closed questions, to capture a breadth of information. Individual interview schedules for LSSDP staff and key stakeholders served more as guides to prompt discussion with open-ended questions.

Final data collection for this evaluation was completed in August 2013. The LSSDP Evaluation Working Group helped the evaluation team source appropriate documents and information and an

appropriate sample of key stakeholders and program beneficiaries. All program beneficiary data has been de-identified. All program beneficiaries and key stakeholders were happy and enthusiastic to be interviewed.

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with LSSDP program staff about their views of the program. They were invited to share their perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of the program, biggest challenges for themselves and the program and the programs biggest achievements. SSC members, via a focus group, were invited to share proud moments and achievements for the SSC, how members of the community view education, and how they feel about the future for the SSC and their school community. Students via a focus group were asked to share their views on the involvement of their community (including parents and other adults) in school development, how they feel about their school and their own futures. Interviews with teachers explored knowledge and understandings of the role of the SSC, changes they have noticed in the school in the last 3 years, ideas for increasing community involvement in school development, concerns for their school community and ideas for improvement. Finally, a representative of the Department of Education was interviewed about their view of the LSSDP model, including issues, strengths and recommendations of the program, and views about education in Krabei Riel and Chub Ta Trav communities in general, since the implementation of LSSDP.

Most interviews and focus groups lasted from 1-1.5 hours and were conducted in the offices of TLC or in places of most convenience to program beneficiaries and key stakeholders. Most were conducted in Krabei Riel and Chub Ta Trav Lower Secondary Schools.

# 3.6 EVALUATION LIMITATIONS

A limitation of this evaluation is that not enough baseline data was collected at the beginning of the LSSDP in Krabei Riel or Chub Ta Trav, in particular data on SSCs' confidence and skills in the target areas of LSSDP capacity building. Hence some data is not able to be compared across the entire duration of the program. It is therefore recommended for the future of the LSSDP, that a more comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation plan include baseline data collected in the first year of the program in each school, to ensure evaluators can determine improvements in skills, knowledge and capacities of SSCs.

# 3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Most interviews and focus groups were conducted in Khmer, and translated into English. Simple field reporting forms were used to manage data collection. Once all data was gathered and cleaned to ensure accuracy, it was translated into useable formats for analysis, via spreadsheets, tables and transcripts. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic coding. Individual and focus group interview and open-ended survey questions were compiled into MS Word tables, and answers were grouped into major themes, counted and ranked by frequency. This report includes minority views as well as majority views, so that a wide range of opinions is represented. Quantitative survey data was interpreted and statistically analysed via excel spreadsheets. Quantitative data was entered into databases and are presented in graph or table format. Evaluators discussed findings and recommendations before this report was submitted.

# 4 RESULTS

## 4.1 EVOLUTION OF THE LSSDP MODEL

The LSSDP model has been refined and has evolved over the 4-year pilot phase, in response to 6 monthly and annual evaluation findings. The model is flexible and adaptable, so that it has been possible to implement in each of the school community contexts in ways that meet each community's specific needs. This flexibility stems from the basic principles of the model that are consistent across the program for each school.

One evidence-based output of the pilot phase is the new set of operations materials currently in the final stages of development. These materials will be tested and evaluated in the first year of the next LSSDP implementation cycle in new schools. An LSSDP Handbook will provide an operations resource for LSSDP staff, covering the philosophy of the LSSDP as well as practical guidance on implementation. An SSC Capacity Framework has also been developed, which outlines target skills for SSCs as a team over 3 years. This is designed to guide the LSSDP team in monitoring SSC progress each year. In addition, materials have been developed specifically for SSCs for use while participating in the action learning cycle and learning activities of the LSSDP, as well as into the future.

### 4.1.1 School Selection

Each LSSDP begins with school selection. Evaluation findings highlight that this initial step in the program cycle has been key in ensuring the program's success, in terms of choosing the right school communities; first that schools were clear about expectations of involvement, second that schools showed a need for development, and finally that schools demonstrated community and local governance enthusiasm to participate in the program.

***Pre-selection process***

The process of school selection is very thorough, involving many meetings and discussions with key stakeholders and other community members before schools are selected.  At the time of this evaluation, the LSSDP team was undertaking the school selection process for two new LSSDP schools to begin the program in the 2013-2014 school year. First, discussions with the Provincial Office of Education (POE) occur to obtain support and recommendations for potential schools or districts (in this case 11 districts). Next, LSSDP staff narrow the list of districts based on what is logistically possible, and meet with the directors of each of the recommended District Offices of Education (DOE) (in this case, the team met with 4 districts). LSSDP staff then collaborate with the DOE to make a shortlist of between 5 and 10 schools, based on the LSSDP selection criteria.

The next stage involves many meetings and discussions with key stakeholders in the shortlisted school communities. Meetings are held with school directors, Commune and Village Chiefs, other recognized community leaders, and SSC members (if an SSC already exists), to gauge community perceptions of value of education, and to determine the level of community cohesion, as well as to assess the level of enthusiasm and commitment to the principles of the program.

With experience, LSSDP staff are now very clear about the selection criteria, as well as how to assess the community level characteristics that make for a successful LSSDP. They are also able to clearly and effectively describe the program to key stakeholders and school communities. One LSSDP Program staff member stated,

> **❝** It can be difficult to explain the model, especially to donors. But a strength of the program is that LSSDP staff are now very good at explaining to principals, commune officials and community members why the LSSDP uses a capacity building approach… Staff can talk about community led development with confidence, because they have actually been doing it in other communities. Communities who are new to the program are receptive to this confidence. **❞**

That right from the very beginning LSSDP staff are able to ensure schools understand the mission, vision and core values of the program, and what exactly it means for them to be involved, including that the central theme of the program is based on community involvement and community accountability, means that schools selected in the future will be more likely to succeed in meeting program objectives sustainably.

**Clearer LSSDP model = recruiting the right school = more chance of success**

***Selection criteria***

***Figure 1: LSSDP selection criteria***



Schools must meet the following criteria in order to be selected:

1. School indicators must show that a need for development is required. Preference is given to schools with:
   • Lower than district or provincial average enrolment rates
   • Higher than district or provincial average dropout rates
   • Higher than district or provincial average repeat rates
   • Lower than district or provincial average completion rates
2. The school needs to be accessible for LSSDP staff, with clear access to roads for a good proportion, if not all, of the year. If the school is not close to TLC, there needs to be at least suitable facilities for over-night or multi-day visits.

3. The school should preferably not have any other NGO support, as lack of support is an indicator of greater need. If there is NGO support, it is imperative that the work of the NGO matches with the philosophy and vision of the LSSDP.
4. Community commitment and support from the ground up is required (including from parents, students, teachers, principals, Village and Commune Chiefs, the DOE, the POE, and the District Governor), for the school to be selected.

### 4.1.2  Balancing infrastructure construction with capacity building

In the first year of the LSSDP, program time and resources were shared across two priority areas, including capacity building of the SSC and improving the physical environment of the school, which involved mostly school building construction activities undertaken by visiting volunteer groups.

In the beginning, the rationale for undertaking construction projects for LSSDP schools was that this would help create a better learning environment and in turn increase quality of education in line with the Child Friendly Schools framework. Funding for many of the construction projects came from international volunteer organizations organised by LSSDP staff, and included activities such as sports fields, toilet blocks, fences and wells. International volunteer support for construction projects provided a financial benefit for the LSSDP, with construction costs being taken up by third-party organisations.

*Table 4: Construction & school ground activities for KR & CTT*

| Krabei Riel | Chub Ta Trav |
| --- | --- |
| School library upgrade | New school Fence (100 mtr) |
| Extension of toilet block | New school yard paving (864 sq mtr) |
| Renovated bike parking area | New school gate |
| New Life Skills classroom building | New teacher dormitory |
| | New vegetable garden |

An evaluation in the second year of the program highlighted that many SSC members viewed the LSSDP, among other things, as a program that helped the school develop in material ways (Brehm, TLC, 2012). Concerned about an over-emphasis on construction projects leading to trading short-term successes (i.e. new buildings) for long-term inequality (i.e. dependency on TLC), which went against the ethos of TLC, a shift occurred to re-focus the program more extensively on capacity building of the SSC to follow an action learning approach for implementing their annual School Development Plans.

Improving the school environment (often through construction) is a very important component of the government-mandated Child Friendly Schools framework for quality schools, especially for rural schools with minimal resources, and TLC expects to see future LSSDP schools prioritise construction activities, particularly in LSSDP year 1. However the LSSDP program model has evolved so that construction and school environment activities are now clearly framed within School Development Plans, among activities that focus on the other dimensions of Child Friendly Schools also. The newly developed SSC Capacity Building Framework (Appendix 1) focuses on capacity building of the SSC to design strong school development plans that reflect a balance in CFS dimensions. As such, construction activities are conceptualised as community-implemented projects, alongside others such as providing awards to successful students, all of which improve the school, while serving as learning opportunities for the SSC.

*Figure 2: Program direction from 2009-2013*
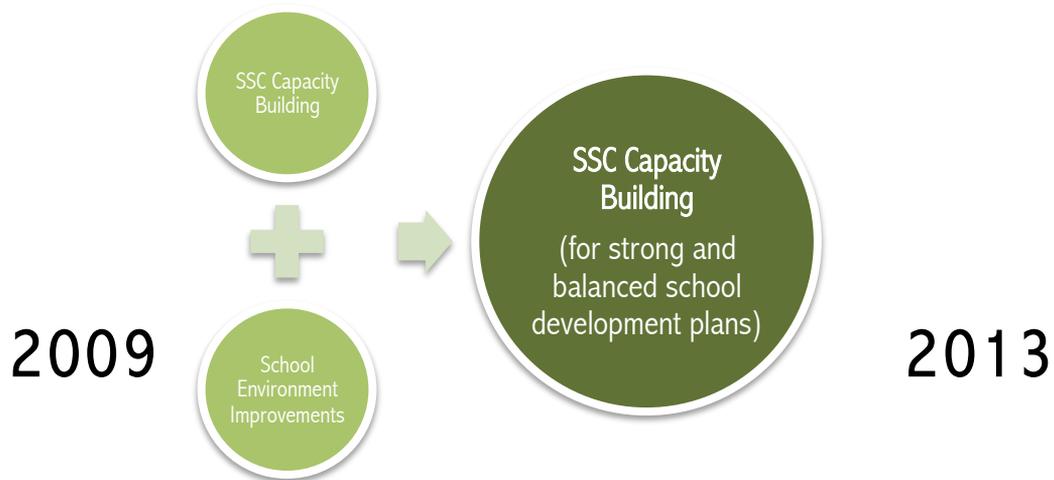


### 4.1.3 Visiting volunteer groups

Construction projects had a clear benefit for the schools, and outcomes were very positive in the short term, however the approach of carrying out these construction projects as international volunteer projects was not contributing enough to long-term sustainable capacity building of SSC members themselves. Furthermore, planning and coordinating with third party volunteer organisations was time consuming, leaving little time for direct SSC training or other capacity building activities.

On the other hand, members of KR and CTT school communities were very grateful and have fond memories of the volunteers, the money and time they contributed and the relationships they developed with the school communities. Community members in both KR and CTT have talked about the schools having been made more attractive and enjoyable places for students to be in, as a result of many of the construction activities.

Although critical for the long-term sustainability of the LSSDP, unfortunately, this shift away from involving volunteers in securing funds and helping with construction projects has not been viewed as a positive change by one of the school principals, who has suggested that LSSDP should explore ways this can be addressed in the future. The principal animatedly discussed the positive outcomes for the school in terms of the physical environment, but also the social benefits and positive relationships that resulted from the cultural exchange between the international volunteers and the local community members.

> ❝Volunteers helped the school so much. They built really good relationships with school families, as well as helping with funding and doing building work. For example, school paving was a real issue for the school and volunteers were able to raise funds and work with us to make this happen. It was a good experience for the volunteers to get to know villagers and school staff, and find out about our community, but it was also good for the school to have the personal connection with volunteers. On the final day of the project community members came to farewell the volunteers with a party. It was very memorable for the community, and we even have contact with some of the volunteers through Facebook and we know that more want to come. ❞

Furthermore, a number of representatives of the school communities in each school highlighted a number of infrastructure needs that will require funds to obtain or complete. A rubbish incinerator to remove unwanted rubbish from one school, drainage pipes and agricultural tools to bring water to the grounds of one school that is establishing a vegetable garden, solar power to provide cheap regular energy for the school, and a new football ground were amongst some of the resources and needs expressed by members of each school. It is recommended that the LSSDP continue to look for ways to connect LSSDP school communities with sources of support overseas.

### 4.1.4 Away from curriculum development

Originally, one of the objectives of the LSSDP was to "assess the specialized teacher training and curriculum development needs of each school", using the Basic Education and Teacher Training system (a curriculum development system developed for Cambodia with support from Belgium).

While consulting with communities in the first year of the pilot, the LSSDP Coordinator quickly discovered that the immediate needs of the school were more basic and grassroots than providing curriculum development support. A higher priority was to first build the capacity of each community, where there were very low levels of education, to be involved in the education process at all. In line with TLC's philosophy of working with existing structures rather than creating parallel and potentially unsustainable systems, it was also felt that responsibility for assessing curriculum development should continue to rest within the public education system and the many development partners already working in this area.

The LSSDP relates instead to building the skills of the community to respond to and engage with the government guidelines and policies. This philosophy is articulated well by the LSSDP program coordinator,

> 🙶 With the LSSDP we want to build the capacity of the community from the grassroots level, to come up to meet and engage with the government education policies that come down from the top 🙵

Government policies clearly articulate a role for SSCs in school development, and so the LSSDP takes hold of this opportunity by motivating SSCs to advocate for their schools within the framework of government policies, now and into the future. Future needs may include curriculum development activities, but community engagement through the SSC is the first step[2].

### 4.1.5 Refined Goal & Objectives

In 2012, the program goal and objectives were adjusted to accommodate the changes previously mentioned, with more of a focus on capacity building of the SSC for community ownership and sustainability, and less on construction and curriculum development activities. LSSDP staff do however recognise that construction activities and/or teacher training and school curriculum development activities may continue to be a part of the program, but only if they are prioritised and led by the SSC. This was the case for example in CTT LSS, where funds were sought by the school to build accommodation for the teachers, where they selected the contractor and monitored the

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[2] The key policies that have been built into the newly designed SSC Capacity Building Framework include the Child Friendly Schools Framework as well as the government Guidelines on SSCs at the lower secondary school level. The LSSDP team also keep abreast of new policy developments in the school development space, for example, the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program being rolled out by the government this year, so that skills gained through the LSSDP also facilitate access to government funding and support opportunities.

project themselves. Teacher training in teaching pedagogies has been provided for teachers at both schools, because this was a need identified by schools in their School Development Plans.

The other priority for the LSSDP has been in working towards creating a more empowered community where education is spoken about more regularly and where the whole community feels that the school belongs to them. Research (UNESCO, 2006) shows that a more involved school community is more likely to motivate students to study, as students achieve better at school when their parents and communities are involved in their learning.

New M&E frameworks have been developed to better monitor progress against these objectives. In addition, the LSSDP team have developed a third objective, in line with the vision of the Program Coordinator and her team, to share the evidence and learning from the LSSDP in development practice and policy discussions, so that the concept of community involvement in education gains further traction in Cambodia.

### *Figure 3: LSSDP Goal and Objectives*

| GOAL: For communities to be involved in school development so that access to and quality of secondary education in Cambodia is increased | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1: To build the capacity of School Support Committees to work with their school community to design and implement an annual school development plan. | 2: To provide support and resources over 3 years that respond to school community priorities. | 3: To promote the good practice of the LSSDP and seek opportunities for growth of the program. |

## 4.1.6 The action learning cycle

The LSSDP is implemented via an annual program cycle, which is repeated with each school for each year of the program. During the 4 years of the LSSDP pilot, an action learning cycle for SSCs has been developed, following the implementation cycle. This helps build SSC capacity to undertake annual school development planning once the LSSDP program period ceases. That is, the program is based on a 'learning by doing' model, which this evaluation has proven to be an important and very successful component of the LSSDP.

The annual cycle involves first conducting a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) to determine school community problems, root causes, and possible solutions. Data gathered through this process is then used to prioritize school development objectives and actions for the year ahead, which are written into the School Development Plan (SDP). The SDP becomes an annual working document for the SSC, including priority areas/activities, resources required to undertake initiatives (including funding, material and people resources), and a time schedule and indicators for measuring success. Throughout the year regular monitoring of activities occurs with the SSC, which culminates into an end-of-year evaluation, which ideally helps inform future directions for the school for the following year, combined with a new PRA. And so the LSSDP annual cycle continues.

The skills needed to carry out this process are defined in the 5 capacity areas shown below. Training is provided once per year in line with the SSC Capacity Building Framework (Appendix 1) and skills are practiced through implementing the SDP each year.

*Figure 4: Annual LSSDP action cycle*
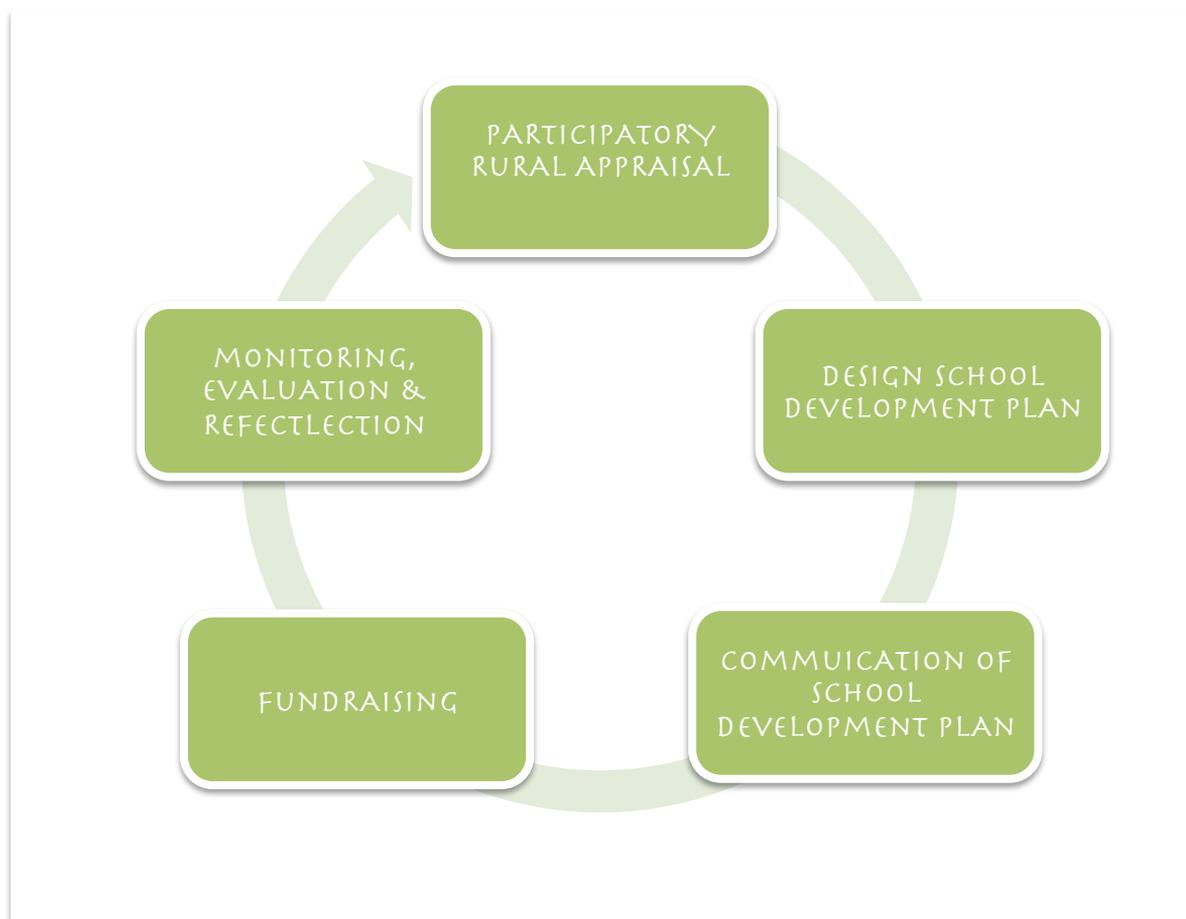


## 4.1.7 Staffing

As previously mentioned, aspects of the LSSDP have changed since it was first established, due to previous evaluation findings. Staff members have increased from one staff member in 2009 to 3 staff members in 2013.

*Figure 5: Staff members per year of LSSDP*



| 2009 1 staff member | 2011 2 staff members | 2012 3 staff members |

The LSSDP team currently consist of two program staff (Program Coordinator and Senior Project Officer) and one volunteer (Program Development Officer), which works well when the LSSDP is operating in two schools. Learning from the pilot phase has also helped to reinforce the staffing skillset necessary for a successful LSSDP. The LSSDP requires experienced community development professionals, who demonstrate flexibility and creativity. According to the current LSSDP team, a balanced LSSDP team requires a high degree of flexibility and is most effective with the following skills:

- experience running a PRA process
- on the ground community and rural development experience
- training and workshop facilitation and design (technical topics as well as soft skills such as team building).

# 4.2 OUTCOMES FOR SSCS

Building the capacity of the SSC is at the core of the LSSDP. It is the cornerstone for ensuring community ownership so that community-level outcomes are sustainable beyond the 3-year program period. SSC capacity building is where a majority of the LSSDP resources are currently utilised; as previously mentioned, this however was not always the case. The following sections describe outcomes for SSC members from their perspectives, comment on SSC capacity development in each of the 5 action learning areas, and highlight areas for future improvement.

## 4.2.1  SSC role & membership

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) defines the SSC's role as assisting in the decentralised management of the school, which includes monitoring student progress, drop out and repetition rates, and participating in budget-related decision-making. Furthermore, the LSSDP has defined the role as helping to raise the profile and value of education in the community, in order to meet its objective of increasing access to and quality of education in each LSS. The LSSDP have designed a number of templates and instruction sheets (all in Khmer) for the SSC, to make their task easier. SSC members in the final years of the program appear clearer about their role in school development. As one SSC member said,

> ❞❞ We (the SSC) are the facilitator of school development, and it is our role to find ways to help develop the school by connecting the community to the school, and the school to the community. ❞❞

The LSSDP team carefully engages the community in identifying SSC members who can best represent the school community as active members. In the first year of the program, this was a component of the PRA process. In consecutive years, the LSSDP supported the SSC to review their membership before each school year began, as per MoEYS SSC Guidelines.

The school principals at both KR and CTT Lower Secondary Schools have played a key role in seeking members for their SSCs, and although the MoEYS Guidelines outline specific roles for SSC members, in TLC's experience, the most active members have not necessarily been those with the highest authority or those with a specific role. Thus, the LSSDP team has supported SSCs to learn to select not only people with obvious authority in the community (e.g. village chiefs), but also those with influence and strong relationships (e.g. women who are often asked for advice on family struggles).

Although sourcing and maintaining appropriate members for the SSC is an ongoing challenge for the LSSDP, both KR and CTT currently have a large very committed, active and passionate SSC membership. Unfortunately membership of women, however, is lower than the recommended minimum of 50% for each SSC. For CTT, currently 5 out of 15 members are female, and similarly for KR, 4 out of 15 members are female. It should be noted however that the female SSC members in both school communities are some of the most active (See 4.2.4 SSC meetings).

*Figure 6: SSC membership*



CTT SSC 2013
15 members
5 females

Commune Chief
2 x Teachers
LSS Principal
Primary School Principal
6 x Parents
4 x Village Chiefs

KR SSC 2013
15 members
4 females

Commune Chief
2 x Commune Council member
LSS Principal
LSS Assistant Principal
3 x Pagoda members
3 x Parents
4 x Village Chiefs
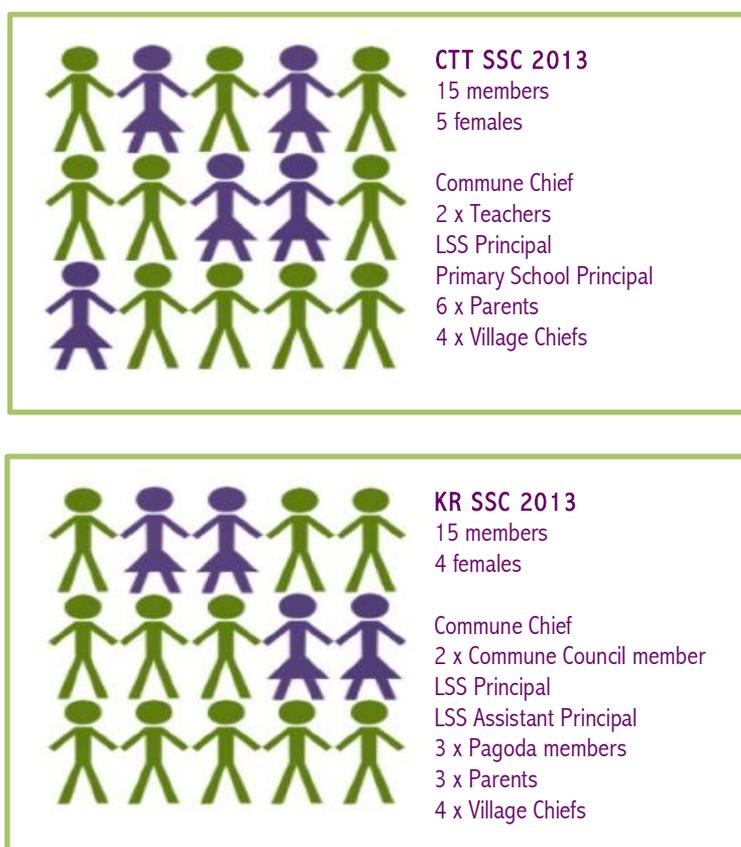
External factors have had a direct impact on the involvement of SSC members throughout the program. Given many SSC members have been from poor families themselves, with busy work lives and family commitments, getting along to meetings has been at times, a real challenge for many. As one SSC member stated,

> ❝ Some of the SSC members are old and too busy working in other areas of their lives, so they lack the time to dedicate to SSC work. Also, when it's the rainy season, planting and harvesting [of rice] needs to happen, so many members are busy and cannot come. ❞

Another issue that some SSC members and LSSDP staff members talked about was finding extra time to build up the skills of new members as they come on board. A new Principal has started at one school, so it has taken time to build up his capacity and skills in the work of the LSSDP. He is now very active and supportive of SSC work. A few SSC members at each school also expressed a feeling that it would be useful for SSC members to have defined roles.

As the program has progressed, the skills and capacities of SSC members have evolved and grown, which has meant that they have been more equipped to select appropriate and more representative new members when other members have resigned. One principal spoke very positively about the future for the SSC at their school, feeling they will continue well once LSSDP support has withdrawn.

> ❝ We have a really big SSC with lots of members who are really committed and enthusiastic to change things for the school. They've been really successful at raising funds for some big projects and are very connected to what is going on in the community … I think the future of the SSC is dependent on who is leading it, and we have a really good Chairperson so I feel really really positive about our future. ❞

### 4.2.2  Need for more teacher involvement

An issue raised by many teachers who were interviewed was that they did not feel that they were involved enough in SSC discussions and decision-making. Although SSCs typically include at least two teacher representatives in addition to the school Principal, a common feeling among teachers who were not SSC members was that they could be more involved with the right support.

A few teachers acknowledged that the Principal had expressed that he was keen to have their input, but because he was so busy he sometimes forgot to ask them about their ideas, or to pass on information about SSC activities. The Principal of this school, when interviewed, did acknowledge that there was a need for more teacher involvement, but did talk about the difficulty of making this happen given the shortage of teachers at the school and thus the difficulty in finding time for them to be involved.

One teacher however expressed a strong view that teacher input should be a priority for the SSC, and although teachers are busy, they should be supported by the Principal to attend the occasional meeting.

> ❝ Teachers have issues we want to raise, and sometimes we don't have time to tell the principal or he forgets to raise them because he is so busy… Meetings are not every day, just once a month, and not all teachers have to attend, but at least we could have some representatives at meetings. ❞

Another teacher stated

> ❝ Teachers work closely with students - they know better about who is absent, who is struggling academically, and so they can help the SSC to know which students and families to visit to provide support. ❞

Even students discussed a feeling that teachers should be more connected to the SSC, with one student suggesting that every 3 months teachers could attend meetings (with parents as well) to talk about student issues, as it is parents and teachers that know more about what is going on for students.

Therefore it needs to be a priority of the LSSDP to explore ways that stronger relationships can be built between SSCs and teachers, whether by ensuring more SSC members are teachers, or by allocating certain SSC meetings to times when teachers can attend, or even just by improving mechanisms for communication between the SSCs and teachers.

### 4.2.3 Strength in broad community representation

An ongoing issue for SSCs is that some members are illiterate, which makes it very difficult for these members, particularly when conducting PRAs and designing SDPs. Exploring ways to conduct PRAs or community needs assessments without having to note take is an ongoing challenge. Pairing up literate and illiterate members with each other when conducting these activities has been suggested.

It is important however to note that the very broad skill levels and traits of members in each committee are also what contribute to some of the program's success. A major strength of the program is the fact that mothers, commune and village chiefs, grandfathers, pagoda committee members, teachers and Principals (among others) all with very different backgrounds, literacy levels and skill sets are all coming together to discuss and address school development issues. The broad community representation on the SSCs helps to ensure wider community consultation and involvement in school development issues. One of the LSSDP staff members stated,

> One of the best things about the LSSDP is that it has confidence in and values SSC members who have low education levels … it is really good that the Principals value this as well.

One SSC member said,

> Before, I did not focus on any activities of school development, I just stayed at home and looked after children and family. I didn't know how to solve challenges and now I can identify and solve challenges myself.

### 4.2.4 SSC meetings

In the first year of the program, monthly meetings were led by the LSSDP team, but as the program has progressed, the SSCs have required less support to arrange and facilitate these meetings for themselves. At these meetings SSC members discuss the progress of School Development Plan activities, fundraising and finance issues and other issues that arise about school development, education and community involvement.

Attendance at SSC meetings has been similar for both KR and CTT, although slightly fewer CTT members on average attend monthly meetings. For CTT, an average of 55% (n=8) of members attend monthly meetings; sometimes only 4 members attend, but sometimes up to 14 members attend. For annual meetings an average of 10 members attend (66%). An average of 4 out of 5 women attend monthly CTT meetings, and for KR, an average of 59% (n=9) attend monthly SSC meetings, with around 53% of women attending regularly, and 74% (n=11) of all KR SSC members attending annual SSC meetings. Although only about one third of SSC members in both KR & CTT have been female for each year of program, attendance for women has been more regular, with average rates of around 80% attendance for monthly SSC meetings.

**Figure 7: Female membership of SSCs**

Around 3 out of 5 (60%) female SSC members regularly attend monthly meetings

**Figure 8: SSC meeting attendance (KR & CTT)**

Around 9 out of 15 (59%) SSC members regularly attend monthly meetings

Around 10 out of 15 (66%) SSC members attend annual meetings

### 4.2.5 SSC networks

A key component of making the LSSDP outcomes sustainable has been supporting SSCs to build their own networks of resources and support, which they can draw on after the conclusion of the program. A number of training sessions and LSSDP activities provide opportunities for SSCs to build networks with the trainers, SSC members from other schools and other key stakeholders. Sometimes SSC trainings for each school have been run together, as have the School Exchange Visits.  One priority is to build a network between SSCs, education professionals and NGOs.

Evaluation findings have highlighted that very positive relationships have been established between LSSDP staff and SSCs from both Krabei Riel and Chub Ta Trav LSSs, and that this has contributed to the success of the program in both schools. SSC members from both schools spoke very fondly of LSSDP staff, sharing their appreciation of their ongoing commitment, encouragement and support. LSSDP staff acknowledged how important it had been to get to know the SSC members on a personal level, and that understanding more about what was going on in their personal lives, including their family, work and community commitments, helped them to be more effective in supporting the SSC. LSSDP staff did feel frustrated and challenged at times when things did not

necessarily go to plan or as expected, but having an understanding of the personal commitments and lives of the SSC members, helped LSSDP staff to be patient and flexible. LSSDP staff also shared a view that having been honest and realistic about what could be achieved, and always following through with intentions and promises to the SSC and the community, had helped build the trust of the SSC, which led to a more functioning SSC.

KR and CTT SSCs now know each other well, and are connected through trainings provided together and at the end of year evaluation meetings. This has been a very valuable outcome of the program for SSCs. A future goal of the current LSSDP team is to broaden the opportunities for SSCs to connect with others. For example the program team plans to connect KR and CTT SSCs with the SSCs in future LSSDP schools.

### 4.2.6 SSC capacity in the 5 key areas

The Lower Secondary School Development Program (LSSDP) is based on an experiential learning model, with School Support Committee (SSC) members gaining technical knowledge and skills through experience. An SSC action learning cycle, involving 5 key capacity areas, sits parallel to the LSSDP annual program cycle. This action learning cycle model was defined in 2012.

I hear, I know.
I see, I remember.
I do, I understand.

*CONFUCIUS*
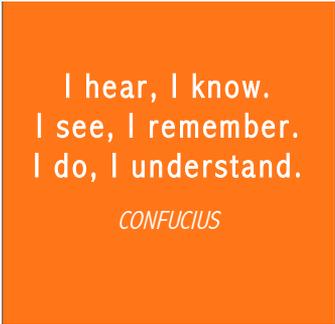
In the first ever year of the LSSDP, only one training workshop was conducted; the 3-day workshop was focused on the development of the School Development Plan, including information on Human Rights and Child Friendly Schools. In the second year of the pilot the LSSDP Coordinator identified that further capacities were needed for SSCs to be successful, so training workshops in fundraising and monitoring and evaluation were added. Further evaluation revealed that SSCs did not feel equipped to undertake their role in the areas of communication and consulting their communities, so training was then designed and delivered for SCCs in these areas also.

Now five training areas are described as capacities of an action learning cycle for the SSC; community needs assessment, SDP design, communication, fundraising, and monitoring and evaluation. The intention of the SSC is that with the right skills, SSCs can continue to apply the implementation cycle to their work in school development in a way that is sustainable, specific to their community and in line with government policies. The training and learning experiences provided through the LSSDP are designed to empower SSCs to continue this implementation cycle into the future. The SSC is expected to take on more and more responsibility for leading the school development process as their skills develop. Therefore, each of the five training areas is also an activity within the annual LSSDP cycle, so SSC members participate in the training but also learn these skills by participating in the activities with the support of the LSSDP team. As one of the LSSDP staff members has stated,

> ❝Just because training happened, doesn't mean the capacity is built.❞

The LSSDP team facilitates some of the training sessions themselves, while external facilitators deliver others, which increases networking opportunities for SSC members. Although many members of Krabei Riel and Chub Ta Trav SSCs have fulfilled many of the expected outcomes for the final years of the program, some members have not. Part of the reason for this, is due to the fact that membership has changed during the course of the program, so that some new members have come on board in years 2 and 3, and so have missed previous learning opportunities, an aspect that has been unavoidable.

***Table 5: SSC training attendance***

| 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
|---|---|---|
| **12 KR SSC members** | **12 KR SSC members** | **15 KR SSC members** |
| • Effective Communication (9 SSC members) | • Effective teaching & learning (8 teachers)<br>• Proposal Writing 1 (9 SSC members)<br>• M&E (10 SSC members)<br>• Creating Teaching Materials (9 teachers)<br>• Personal Development (9 SSC members)<br>• Proposal Writing 2 (11 SSC members) | • Effective Communication (9 SSC members)<br>• Proposal Writing (10 SSC members)<br>• Train the Trainer (6 teachers)<br>• Conflict Resolution (9 SSC members)<br>• M&E (7 SSC members) |

The LSSDP has developed an SSC Capacity Building Framework that details the target skills for SSC members to learn for each year of the program. In the new program cycles, beginning with new schools in the 2013-2014 school year, the LSSDP team will use this framework as a checklist, to be sure that the SSC is on track for when the program phases out at the end of year 3 (Appendix 1).

SSC members also talked about potential topics for additional capacity building training. Topics included:

• Strategies for preventing and addressing school drop-outs
• Motivational training for SSC members
• How to raise fish and grow vegetables in the school grounds, so the community can earn money for the school
• Basic computer skills - Word and Excel
• Administration skills - file management, accounts

***Participatory Rural Appraisals***

A Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is a method that has been used in community development work around the world since the 1980s, for involving whole communities in defining their own needs and making decisions about how to address these. The PRA is the first component of the annual LSSDP cycle, involving focus groups in each village of the commune where the LSSDP is based, to gather data that will contribute to the School Development Plan. The process takes 2 to 3 days and is usually conducted in September.

In the first year of the LSSDP, the PRA process was viewed purely as a method to collect data for the School Development Plan; it was not considered a capacity area for the SSC to learn how to conduct PRA themselves. As with other aspects of the annual LSSDP cycle, PRAs are now considered both a method used to inform activities for school development, as well as a capacity for the SSC to learn, over the entirety of the program. SSCs are taught to use PRA tools so that they can continue involving their community in school development beyond the LSSDP funding period.

In the first year, the LSSDP conducts the PRA, working closely with the commune authorities to organize participants, locations and scheduling of focus groups. SSC members participate as observers in the process, and become increasingly involved in the process, taking on more and more responsibility in each year of the program. In the second year of the LSSDP, SSC members are observers on the SSC team, and in the third year, some SSC members join the PRA team as note takers, facilitators, and observers. Although SSC members learn about PRA by participating in the process, they also receive training in how to plan for and conduct a PRA.

The SSC PRA training workshop runs over 2 days and is conducted once a year, at the end of a school year (usually August), in preparation for conducting the PRA at the beginning of the following school year.

***Table 6: PRA activities***

| PARTICIPATORY RURAL APPRAISALS |
| --- |
| • Method for helping community make collaborative decisions about development action |
| • Involves whole community in thinking about shared needs & planning for sustainable solutions |
| • Data collected provides a description of the reality of daily life in the community |
| • Involves broad representation of community views to determine common and shared understandings of community issues and solutions |
| • Development planning comes up from within the community rather than being done to communities by NGOs or others outside the community |
| • PRA data is used to inform the annual School Development Plan |
| • SSCs learn how to conduct PRAs by doing it alongside LSSDP staff and by participating in PRA training workshops |

Although SSC members feel they have learnt a great deal about PRAs, unfortunately most don't feel completely confident to conduct a PRA independently without LSSDP support yet. Some SSCs discussed the difficulties of retaining skills for conducting a PRA, as they are performed so infrequently, so members found it difficult to remember the PRA techniques and procedures they had learnt.

> ❝ Without TLC support, I feel only 50% confident to collect information [from the community] by using PRA. I need more training to make sure that I can talk to community members in an easily understandable way. ❞

One SSC member talked very proudly about now being able to draw a map of her village, knowing how many people in the community are living with HIV, knowing how many houses there are in the village, how many people and how many females.

***School Development Plans***

The annual School Development Plan (SDP) is a document that details the school development activities the SSC chooses to undertake throughout the school year. The plan is based on information collected from the community during the PRA process.

The SDP is developed during a 2-3 day workshop facilitated by LSSDP staff and school Principals. Like the PRA process, in the first year of the program LSSDP staff lead the process, with the SSC and school principal encouraged to take increasing responsibility for writing the report in each year of the program.

The SDP outlines key activities, including who is responsible for leading the activity, where funding will come from, how the community will be involved and timelines. Although the SSC is responsible for leading the implementation of activities in the SDP, it is intended that school community stakeholders will work together with the SSC to see them through, as a primary objective of the

school development work plan process is to create and enhance community involvement in the school.

Once drafted, the SSC is required to submit the SDP to the District Office of Education (DOE) at the beginning of each school year. The plan is also communicated to community members including Village and Commune Chiefs, teachers, school administrative staff, parents, students and other key stakeholders.

Developing the required skills to create an SDP has been difficult for SSCs, and although in the final year of the program some SSC members still do not feel they have the skills to plan for and write the SDP, the combined skills of each SSC, including the support of the Principals at KR and CTT, do have the capacity to undertake this role. LSSDP staff have however needed to deliberately step back during SDP workshops in the final years of the project, to ensure SSCs will take more responsibility. An SSC member said,

> I feel 70% that I can use the information we gathered in the PRA from the community to develop the plan without the help from TLC, because I participated in and practiced doing a PRA.

Another barrier for getting the SDP's completed each year, by the SSC is a clash with rice harvesting and other SSC member commitments, which has required LSSDP staff to be very patient. Because the SDP must be submitted to the DOE at the beginning of each school year in October (though in reality it is often later), the overlap with the harvest season is somewhat unavoidable, but the LSSDP team can anticipate this challenge, and therefore will continue to follow up regularly.

The experience of the LSSDP has been that SSCs and their school communities (both in KR and CTT) have wanted to prioritise construction and infrastructure projects for their SDPs. Although understanding that construction projects do make a big difference to the appearance of the school and its safety for students, and they are a source of pride for the SCC and the community (as previously mentioned), LSSDP staff have persisted in encouraging SSCs to look beyond these kinds of projects. For example, in the final year, both SDPs have included activities such as a new monthly students club and school gardens in both schools that are run by students and SSC members. SSC members in both schools also regularly discuss strategies for reaching out to students who have dropped out of school by visiting their families.

The LSSDP has proved flexible enough to respond to the needs of the individual school communities they are working with, so that communities are defining their own needs and issues and being involved in creating the solutions. It is this aspect of the program however that poses some of the greatest challenges for TLC and the program workers, as it makes it difficult to plan activities and budgets, and apply for funds because it is up to the school to decide what activities will go in the School Development Plan. Although this flexibility is one of the greatest challenges in practice, it is also one of the LSSDP's greatest strengths.

### *Communication*

Having effective communication skills has been identified as critical for SSC members to undertake their role effectively. Being able to explain what a PRA is, and how it is conducted, and being able to participate and eventually undertake the PRA process, including undertaking roles in note-taking and facilitation, require good communication skills. Furthermore, communication skills are essential to an effective SSC team, who consult with families about their children's attendance at school, engage with their community about the value of education, liaise with the school administration and Offices of Education, and seek funding support for school development initiatives from NGOs and donors. It

is important that each SSC member feels empowered to speak up, to ask questions, and to encourage other members of their community to be involved in school development.

Each year, communication training is conducted with SSC members at each school. The focus of the training is to build the confidence and skills of SSC members to enable them to communicate better with each other, and with important stakeholders, including TLC staff members, the school principal, local authorities and community members.

This evaluation has highlighted that some SSC members still do not feel entirely comfortable in their communication with some key stakeholders in their communities, including in particular members of the education departments.

On the other hand, an increase in communication skills has been observed in members as part of the SSC team. Many have reported feeling more confident to discuss issues with 'important people in the community'. Some SSC members talked about their gained confidence in speaking up in ceremonies, their ability to advocate for more funding or gain support from NGOs or donor organisations, something they previously felt unable to do. The Principal of one school said,

> We have no budget for installing a water irrigation system, so I went to discuss this issue of no funding with the Commune Chief, which is something I would not have done before…

Another SSC member proudly stated,

> Now I'm not worried about speaking with the Provincial Governor - when he came to inaugrate a temple in my community, I talked with him fluently and confidently.

Others talked of now being able to confidently convince villagers about the importance of education for their children. One SSC member discussed how important the communication training was in giving them the confidence to talk with other community members about school related issues,

> I know my communication is sometimes awkward, but if I hadn't attended the [communication] training with LSSDP, I would not dare to speak up – now I feel like I can talk with people in my community that I would not have talked to before.

### *Fundraising*

One of the key capacity areas for developing SSC skills is in fundraising from a variety of sources. As one LSSDP staff member said,

> We only have a small budget, but what we can do is help the community to find other resources themselves.

Training is conducted once a year in fundraising for each school community. Training provided to SSCs moves from a focus in the first year on methods for sourcing funds from within the local community, to strategies for sourcing funds from the District and Provincial Offices of Education, and from NGOs or donors outside of the local community. An emphasis is placed on the need for building networks and relationships with key stakeholders, both from within and outside the local community.

Building the capacity of SSC members in sourcing funding for school development issues has been very challenging. Accessing funds for development projects is difficult enough for NGOs who have workers skilled in sourcing funding, thus it is not surprising SSC members find it difficult too. One issue has been that some SSC members are illiterate, which means they find it difficult to make sense of report guidelines and are unable to write reports.

Some SSC members talked about the challenge of raising funds from within the local community, because of the level of poverty. In contrast, one school has been very successful in raising roughly $3000 in the final year of the program to pay off a debt from land levelling. The SSC used traditional fundraising methods, which involved collecting funds from the local community via a celebration called Bon Phka Prak. An initial $2000 from within the community was supplemented with a donation from a local politician, who was impressed with the SSC's fundraising efforts. Given the success of this fundraising event for the school, SSC members now feel that villagers will be more willing to help with fundraising in the future, as they are now able to see for themselves the results of their efforts.

Some SSC members are feeling confident, and feel they have gained useful skills that they will be able to put to practice and source funds. One Commune Chief who is a member of an SSC reported a real confidence in fundraising from donors outside the community. He reported,

> I met with a wealthy member of parliament, foreign tourist donors, and a private company, to source funds for the devleopment of the commune. I feel I can be of help to the SSC now because of this.

Furthermore another SSC member reported,

> Previously I had never worked on a budget and I did not know how to write a report, but now I can do both these things.

Although SSC members have had opportunities to write practice proposals to NGOs as part of the training process, they report not having had the chance to prepare and submit a real submission. Furthermore, although many SSC members feel they have gained some knowledge about how to prepare funding submissions, they still feel they lack the connections to funding bodes, NGOS and philanthropic organisations that are needed to source funds[3].

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[3] A new component planned for implementation in future program schools is the Community Collaboration Fund. The concept, modelled on international local government community 'matching grants', is that community groups receive small amounts of funding that match the resources they are able to contribute (including material or financial resources and volunteer time). This model encourages community groups to value volunteer time and clearly documents community contributions to development. The Community Collaboration Fund will also provide SSCs with the opportunity to submit a real grant proposal, even if only to TLC. Part of the current LSSDP team's vision is that, if successful, this model could somehow be made available to other SSCs in Cambodia.

Finally, one issue that was raised a number of times by Principals, some SSC members and a commune council member was the need for the SSC to be more financially accountable to the PoE and MoEYS, regarding LSSDP activities. In addition, some SSC members reported that they felt some villagers do not trust how the SSC has been spending their money, and so it was recommended that precise detailed budgets should be provided by SSCs to easily show how the money raised is being spent.

### *Monitoring & Evaluation*

Although monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is an important component of community development work, organisations often lack the knowledge, skills and resources to undertake good monitoring and evaluation. When conducted effectively however, M&E can support program planning and implementation, it can help determine program outcomes and achievements, it can help identify challenges and program gaps, and ultimately it can help plan for the future. As essentially a small-scale community development organisation, training is provided in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) for SSCs, so that members have the capacity to monitor their activities and measure the success of activities in the School Development Plan. The LSSDP team helps the SSC for example, reflect on their experience of what worked well and why, what can be done next time the community prioritises a school development activity that requires external funding, what other contacts and networks can the SSC use in the future.

At end of school year, the SSC and the LSSDP hold an annual evaluation meeting combined with a special lunch, which is used as an opportunity for SSCs to celebrate achievements and reflect on the challenges and successes of the previous year. In the final year of the program LSSDP combined the annual evaluation meetings for KR and CTT schools, which created an opportunity for SSCs to learn from the successes and ideas of each other.

Some SSC members reported having gained skills in M&E, that were really useful for the work they were doing particularly in relation to construction work, and in making sure they were 'keeping on track' for projects. For example, an SSC member at one school reported,

> ❝ We [the SSC members] often visited the construction site of the teacher dormitory, to make sure things happened as planned. Without the knowledge gained from the training, I feel this activity may not have happened. And it was good to see the construction work happening and be a part of that. ❞

Skills developed in monitoring and evaluation have also been put to practice by the SSC to monitor student attendance, student academic results and student dropouts. SSC members are now using this data to follow up with visits to parents to find out why students are not attending classes, or have dropped out, so they can support them to encourage these students back to school.

## 4.2.7  School Community Learning Events

Three additional learning activity events are essential components of the LSSDP model; an enrolment campaign, an education awareness campaign and a school exchange visit.

Once a year, LSSDP organises a School Exchange Visit for SSC members to learn about teaching, learning and management strategies in other schools, and to discuss ideas for student support and community involvement. In the first few years of the LSSDP, School Exchange Visits were conducted with schools close to the local communities of the LSSDP schools. Last year however, a School Exchange Visit was conducted with a school out of the local community, which required SSCs and

LSSDP staff to travel together and stay overnight in Kampong Cham. The benefits of visiting schools that were further away were considered much greater. Exchange visits have been an extremely successful strategy of the LSSDP, not only in enthusing and motivating SSC members with possibilities for the development of their school, but also in creating an important opportunity for team building amongst SSC members and also with LSSDP staff. SSC members from both KR and CTT schools particularly enjoyed the overnight stay at the school outside their local community, as they had lots of opportunities to talk about school development without interruption. One SSC member even stated,

> After the school exchange visit I came to fully understand my role as an SSC member.

Each School Exchange Visit throughout the program generated new ideas for SSCs, many of which have been implemented since these visits. SSC members shared that they had learnt about school administration, including filing systems and information technology and about how to make classrooms and school grounds more beautiful for students. SSC members reported having been inspired by teaching and learning approaches in others schools, for example, during one school exchange visit host students demonstrated science experiments to the visiting SSC members, and one SSC were so impressed that new science materials were prioritised in the next school development work plan. After one School Exchange Visit, SSC members returned with ideas about setting up a student council, that would create opportunities for students to be involved in school environment issues and supporting other students who are at risk of dropping out of school. Another School Exchange Visit generated ideas about fundraising, involving a vegetable garden, and digging a pond to raise fish. Neither of these ideas have come to fruition yet, however these ideas will go into the new SDPs for this coming year.

An issue that was raised by SSC members and school Principals however was a concern that the SSC will not have the funds to undertake the School Exchange Visits in the future. They are keen to explore ways to make it happen however, given the huge benefits and successes that have come from these annual visits. One principal said,

> It is impossible for us to conduct the School Exchange Visits on our own, but we will try to do it. Now we are searching for donors through District and Provincial Offices of Education.

***Campaign days***

Both the School Enrolment and Education Awareness Campaigns were events that were conducted by the LSSDP for the SSCs and their school communities in the first years of the program. These events are now conducted as learning events for the SSCs to practice organising their own school community events, with the LSSDP team providing technical support and a small amount of funding for materials for the campaigns.

For Krabei Riel LSS, 280 people, including students, parents, teachers and other community members attended the 2013 Education Awareness Campaign. Furthermore, TLC supported the KR SCC to conduct a Migration Awareness Workshop in the community, in response to a concern about increasing numbers of students and families migrating to Thailand, preventing children from attending school. Police and Commune Chiefs were invited to this workshop. A highly successful Education Awareness Campaign conducted in CTT in the final year saw parents speak about their pride in sending their children to school and students express their feelings about the pressures they face, such as migration and young marriage, through drama performances.

### 4.2.8 Future for SSCs

The findings of this evaluation suggest that both SSCs are able and motivated to continue their work in school development. Most SSC members felt optimistic about the future for their school communities, however some members did express their concern about losing the support of TLC;

> ❝Please do not cut off your program soon – stay and support the teachers in teaching pedagogy techniques or consult with SSC at least once a year to ensure we are sustainbale to run the school development ourselves … the SSC should invite TLC to join us to share ideas about school development.❞

The LSSDP will be following up informally with both KR and CTT regularly. One strategy for keeping connected with previous schools when formal programming activities have been concluded is to encourage networks between SSCs for example through School Exchange Visits to previous LSSDP schools. Given the strong relationships built between school principals, SSCs and LSSDP staff, it is expected that they will continue to serve as resources for each other.

# 4.3  OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS & THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Success of the LSSDP is measured firstly in terms of evidence of increased community involvement in the school and improved skills on the part of SSC members. However, outcomes for students are, of course the end goal. This evaluation has evidenced real outcomes for a strengthened school community, which have translated into impact for students.

### 4.3.1 Improvements in enrolment and drop out rates

Given one of the selection criteria for LSSDP schools is a higher than average district dropout rate, the fact that the total number of Chub Ta Trav students who dropped-out reduced from 16 (40% of students) in 2010-2011, to 8 (11% of students) in 2011-2012, is of real significance.

*Figure 9: CTT student dropouts*
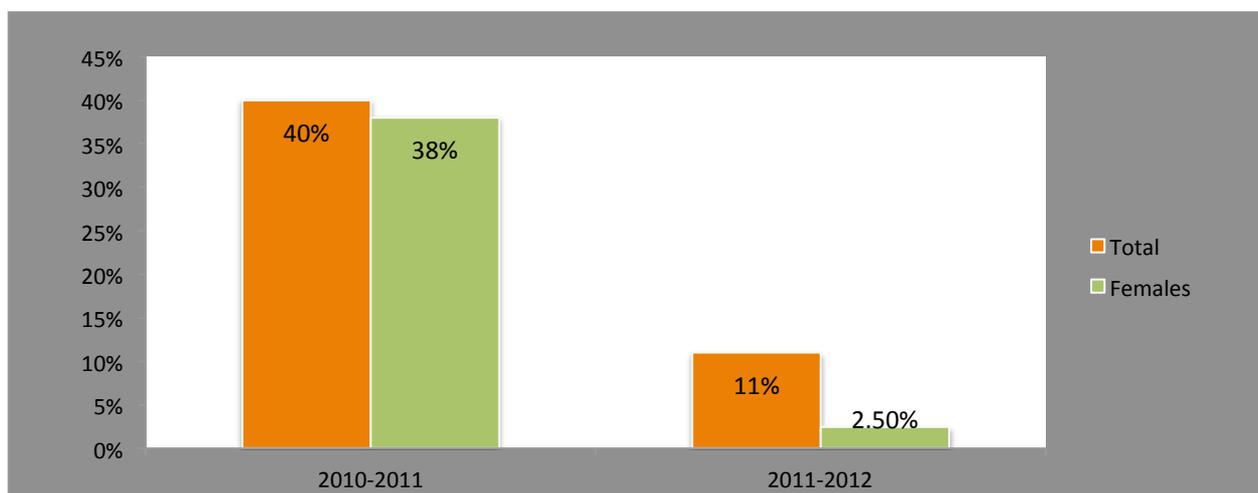
The principal at KR LSS also talked very positively about the dropout rates having reduced considerably (from 121 in the previous year to 100) at their school from 2012-2013. He did however also share a view that 'many public schools don't report the real dropout statistics' within their schools because they are worried about how they will be perceived by the PoE. This same Principal also proudly shared how some students from their school had graduated to university and how important this was for role modeling for other students in the school.

Given many families in KR and CTT communities are living in poverty, it is however not surprising that students are still dropping out. A commune council member stated,

> ❝ Some students parents are very poor, and this affects their studies, because they have to work for their families so that they have food to eat – the food becomes the first choice for them. ❞

A female SSC member talked about a disabled boy in her village who had dropped out of school because she believes his parents did not understand the value of education for their son.

There have been hopeful cases as well. An SSC member said,

> ❝ Since he became friends with my children, he is now going back to school – this boy is 20 years old, but now he is studying in year 9 – he is a clever boy with big dreams for his future – he wants to be a doctor. ❞

A number of SSC members and teachers talked about having noticed increasing numbers of enrolments in their school. For CTT, student enrolments increased each year of the program, from 41 in 2010, 51% (n=21) of whom were female, to 126 in 2012; 55% (n=69) were female.

*Figure 10: CTT student enrolments*
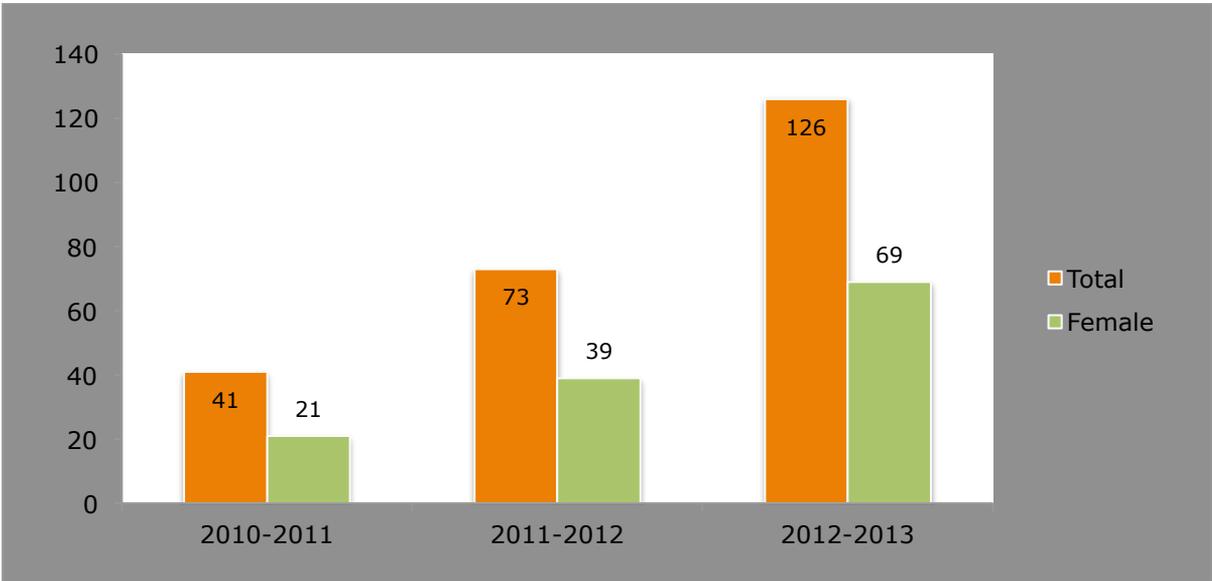
The Commune Chief at one school talked about enrolments in their school.

> ❞❞ Education in the community has grown dramatically – the number of children enrolling in the school is increasing. More children are going to Lower Secondary School as well as Upper Secondary School. Lately some children in our community have even passed grade 12 … however the number of dropouts is still remaining, but we are working hard to address this issue. ❞❞

Migration of families and students to Thailand for employment was also considered a reason for student dropouts. One LSSDP staff member stated,

> ❞❞ Migration is a big issue – it impacts every family and community … but its not that people migrate because they don't care about school, its because they need more immediate options. ❞❞

For all of the above reasons, it is important for future LSSDP programs to explore strategies that focus on dropout prevention, and to collect strong baseline data that enables the program to better measure the impact in new schools.

One LSSDP staff member suggested there should be a greater link between the TLC Scholarship Project and the LSSDP, so that TLC scholarships could support children who drop out to get back to school.

A group of students talked about wanting to start a students club to help other students who are not able to attend private tutoring. This highlights that for future LSSDP schools, strategies should be explored for enhancing the involvement of students in school development issues, including supporting struggling peers.

## 4.3.2 Teaching & Learning Resources

The majority of schools in Cambodia still routinely face a shortfall in resources for everyday functioning of the school. In addition, there is limited opportunity for in-service training, especially for new teachers, on how to creatively use teaching resources to maximise student-centred learning. These are needs that may not often be raised by SSC, particularly in years 1 and 2 of the program. Many SSC members may not have had access to quality education themselves, and so have had little exposure to what 'quality' education could mean in practice. In addition, Cambodian tradition holds teachers in high esteem; questioning teaching methods can be considered disrespectful. For these and other reasons, improvements to teaching strategies (including use of quality resources), may not often be prioritised in PRA or the SDP.

To balance this, LSSDP provides direct support to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools that cannot be fully provided by government. LSSDP allocates a specific budget amount to the provision of teaching and learning resources, which may be identified through the PRA and creation of the SDP, but are more likely to be identified separately by the school principal and teachers. The following comment by a Principal at one of the LSSDP schools supports this view,

> ❞❞ To improve the quality of education in our school, we need to keep our eyes on learning materials for students. ❞❞

The most common example of resources requested through this budget have been student textbooks. At KR LSS, 640 textbooks were distributed to students in grades 8 and 9, which will be kept at the school for students in the following years. The school also received new desks for classrooms. The Principal at this school reported,

> ❝ Providing books for the school relieved a finacnial burden on families who couldn't afford to purchase their own books, and students welcomed the new desks, because it makes it more comfortable to study. ❞

Many teachers and students reported how grateful they were for teaching and learning resources provided as a result of involvement in the LSSDP. Textbooks have helped save teachers time, as they no longer have to write everything up on the board for students to read – now they only have to write up difficult terms. Textbooks help with students reading skills too. Another teacher added,

> ❝ Students can use textbooks to read at home, and read lessons that are not yet learned in advance, and if they don't understand something from their text book, they can ask teachers when they come to school the next day. ❞

Before the LSSDP provides materials to the school, a formal letter of request needs to be sent from the school to the DOE or POE (depending on the request), and if the request is approved, the school principal then forwards the request to the LSSDP team, who provide whatever materials are possible within their current budget.

Unfortunately teachers did however discuss their continued requirement of a number of resources that would greatly improve their teaching and learning. These included simple teaching resources such as transparent protractors and rulers, and science materials, including small-scale experimental tools (medical thermometers, voltage meters, magnets, Ph. indicator paper). Teachers, SSCs, Principals and students talked about these resources being useful for improving both teaching and learning processes.

Each 6-monthly and annual evaluation of the LSSDP has highlighted that a never-ending list of resources are always desired for each school. A number of curricular resources are lacking in both schools, including for example, books of all sorts, stationary, materials for art, science and home economic classes including new painting materials and sewing machines. A number of teacher resources are desired in both schools also, including for example, meeting tables, an ink printer and document cabinets. Some resources have also been identified as making the experience for students and teachers more comfortable, including for example better desks, and beds for the teacher dormitory so teachers do not have to sleep on the floor. Other resources that have been identified by teachers include basic items like brooms that are currently paid for by funds collected from students, and water filters for each classroom so students don't have to go to the teacher's rooms for these. As one teacher stated,

> ❝ With these materials, teachers can do a better job of teaching, we can spend more time on relating practice to theory, and students will have more opportunities to learn activities. ❞

*Table 7: Resources required*

| Teacher resources | • Ink printer<br>• Document cabinets<br>• Meeting tables<br>• Beds for teacher dormitory |
|---|---|
| Curricular resources | • Stationary supplies, whiteboard markers, ink<br>• Materials for teaching art, science and home economic subjects (including sewing machines, paints)<br>• Books – history, literature, Khmer, stories, recipes, English<br>• Computer lab<br>• Science laboratory and equipment<br>• Gifts for 'good' students at the end of the year |
| Classroom resources | • Brooms<br>• Dust bins for each class<br>• A water filter for each class – many cannot afford to buy water – there is a filter in teachers room, but too far for students to walk<br>• Pictures for hanging in the classrooms (World and Cambodia maps, no smoking sign, no drug abuse sign) |

A small part of the SSC capacity building budget is used for in-service training for teachers (usually one training session per year) in topics identified by them. Training was provided for teachers of KR and CTT schools in collaboration with the Provincial Teacher Training College in Siem Reap, in teaching methodologies such as the student centred approach. Teachers who were interviewed reported a real appreciation for these training sessions. One teacher stated,

> ❝Learning about teaching methodologies, such as the student centred approach helped me feel better equipped to produce my own teaching materials, which make it easier for my students to learn. ❞

Some of the teachers who were interviewed also talked about wanting more training in teaching methodologies in the future, and a LSSDP staff member suggested it may be useful for SSC members to participate in some personal empowerment/motivational training.

### 4.3.3 Student involvement in school development

Most students felt proud with their school and the SSCs, who they viewed as being committed to supporting the school. Although many students at one school did not know what the SSC stood for, they all knew people who were active in school development, who were in fact members of the SSC.

At the other school however, most students knew who the SSC was and their role, although there were some students who were not entirely clear about their role. They did however talk about seeing SSC members coming into the school and being involved in school development activities.

Most students expressed that they were appreciative of the work the SSC was doing and were able to connect these activities to the benefits for themselves. One male student said,

> ❝ I would love to know about the [SSC] meeting my parents attend at school, but I thought to myself that it is inappropriate to hear old people chatting. ❞

Some students talked about having had the opportunity to express to the SSC their ideas and suggestions for improvements in the school. Seeing their suggestions for change come to fruition was observed to build their confidence in the consultation process with the SSC.

> ❝ The SSC has made things better for the school. They helped us to build a shade in front of the classroom so that when we have a break now we can relax and read a book with fresh air. ❞

A number of students did however talk about wanting to know more about the SSC, and wanting to be involved if they could. An LSSDP staff member suggested that for future programs, it would be good to encourage schools to find strategies to involve students in the first years of the program. One boy said,

> ❝ SSC members, the Commune Chief and Police need to work together to find solutions for developing the school. If we want to ensure our school is good and children are getting a good education, we need to work together for good solutions. ❞

### 4.3.4 Community Participation

LSSDP staff have observed an increase in community participation in both schools, with more parents contributing money to school activities, more parents observed to be participating in opening ceremonies for schooling years, and more parents involved in school building and property maintenance. Furthermore, importantly, there was real recognition by SSC members that good cooperation between the school members is important for school development. One member said,

> ❝ I never thought the SSC could improve the school, but it has … it is because of good cooperation between the SSC and TLC – I am only a new member of the SSC, but I am very proud of the achievements of the SSC. ❞

Even the Director of Angkor Thom DoE talked about the increased participation of community members he had observed in one of the schools, since the LSSDP began. He stated,

> ❝ Involvement in school development has increased since working with TLC. For example, a lot of villagers participatied in the inauguration of the teacher building, and also contributed food for the ceremony ... the SSC is more involved too. I think the community participates because they trust TLC. ❞

Some students reported having noticed SSC members visiting homes to try and encourage students who were at risk of dropping out, were frequently absent, or who had already dropped out, to come back to school; they thought this was a very important task of the SSC. Some SSC members discussed really enjoying this role.

As a result of the LSSDP, students at one school talked about being aware that they should report any education issues to teachers, however, they did report that they would like to be more involved in education issues than they currently are. Some students talked about the role they are also now playing in helping their classmates who may be dropping out of school, to stay at school. But they did suggest it would be useful to do training on this so they can do it more effectively.

> ❝ I want to learn to help and encourage my classmates who have dropped out, or who are considering dropping out, to come back to school. ❞

Students talked about wanting a high school closer to home, so they will not have to travel large distances. Students talked about things they want for the school, for example they want to have grades 10-12, they want a separate library so it is easy for them to read whenever they can, they want sewing machines for home economics, and they want more encouragement to students.

## 4.3.5 Community Ownership

Parents in both schools helped with garden projects, tree planting, paving, building the teacher dormitory, and clearing the school grounds. Of significance, was that SSC members were able to make a link between this community involvement and participation in school activities, and an increased feeling of ownership of the school amongst community villagers.

One SSC member stated,

> ❝ Community involvement in the school is important because it helps to make a better school. Children are happier to come to school now that we have better school grounds, and now they will be more educated, and when children are well educated, the community will develop as well. ❞

Some SSC members were even able to acknowledge the long-term benefits of their participation in activities that have improved the school. As one member said,

> ❝ Because parents have been involved in school activities, they now feel the school is the property of everyone, not just the teachers and the school principal— as a result they are now more involved in maintencance activities, the school infrastructure, expecially those who live close to the school. ❞

A commune council member spoke passionately about wanting to find a way to help to reduce school dropout rates. He spoke animatedly about a model that would involve parents, Commune Council and students working together. He talked about needing to develop more teamwork among teachers, parents and the commune to make this happen. He suggested that when a student is absent, the teacher should call the parents and then the parent should report to the Commune

Council to investigate where the student is and why they dropped out. He believes parents should be reimbursed for phone calls to the Commune Council. This discussion highlighted a huge commitment of the school community to work together for the benefits of students.

### 4.3.6 A community valuing education

An important role for the SSCs is in motivating and encouraging the community to value education. This evaluation has highlighted that there is an increased understanding in the community of the importance of education. Some of the ways they have been doing this include conducting outreach to individual families where children are at risk of dropping out, organising enrolment campaigns, and sourcing external scholarship support for the poorest students who are at risk of dropping out (sometimes funded via the Student Assistance Program of TLC). Involved parents, either through encouraging learning at home or instilling positive attitudes about schooling, contribute to the personal growth of children as well as their academic success. Given research shows that quality education increases when families are more involved in the education of their children (Epstein, 1995), an important outcome of the LSSDP program that has been highlighted by this, and previous evaluations, is the high level of connection SSC members have to families in the community. A survey conducted in 2012 (see LSSDP sustainability report 2012) that asked SSC members to rate how confident they felt speaking about education to community members, showed members scored an average of 3.4 on a scale of 5.

The LSSDP has been able to get individual households more involved with their children's education, not just by contributing more money to a fundraising campaign or by attending a meeting inside the school, but by strengthening connections between school and home, so that parents are actually engaging their children about school issues at home. These community conversations about the values and purposes of education have the real potential to increase the quality of education, by having more engaged students. The SSC members are now able to have informal and formal conversations and discussions with families though the village and commune, about and values of education, so that the 'communities [have become] deeply involved and interested in the education of their children and their neighbours children' (Brehm, TLC, 2012).

The Commune Chief at one of the schools spoke very highly of the work of the LSSDP and the SSC.

> ❝ The SSC is going very well – they help to connect the school to the community, and they still have more plans and projects for implementing in the future. The SSC has been good at following up students issues and convincing both families and students to come to school. ❞

Some SSC members reported enjoying having the opportunity to talk with students about issues they feel are important – being able to tell students to study hard, and to have solidarity with each other. The following comment highlights a villager's new understanding of the importance of education to provide long-term benefits by addressing poverty and community safety. One SSC member said,

> ❝ One family did not understand how important it is for their children to go to school, and when I encouraged them to send their children to school, they did not listen, but now the family understand that education is important and are sending their younger children to school. ❞

A parent talked about how important she now thought her child's education was, recalling what she had said to her child.

> ❝ I said to my child "Please go to school, so you can gain more knowledge. My generation did not have a chance to study, so I was not able to travel abroad." My child now has a chance to study, so they can travel far like others. ❞

A teacher talked about more parents being interested in how their children are performing at school, with parents asking about difficulties their children may be having at school, but also checking up on their behaviour.

### 4.3.7  Construction & school environment activities

As previously mentioned, some very significant construction projects have been conducted in both Krabei Riel and Chub Ta Trav Lower Secondary Schools, which have had huge positive implications for students attending these schools.

At one school that was having difficulty recruiting school teachers because it is based in an isolated community that has poor road access, the construction of a teacher dormitory has not only meant that they have been able to attract teachers to work there, but it has also meant that teachers can get to classes on time (because they are not having to travel on poor or flooded roads), and teachers now have a space to meet with students after school if they are having difficulties with study. A number of SSC members, teachers and parents talked about the huge benefits that the construction of the teacher dormitory had brought for the school.

> ❝ A new teachers room means we have a place to talk to students after classes, and we have a place to share knowledge with each other. ❞

> ❝ The [teachers living in the dorminatory] now have a safe space to live and can now come to school punctually and regularly – they don't need to rent a house – and now they just want to teach. ❞

The upgrade of the school library in one of the schools has increased the number of students visiting the library to read books, and now students are also able to take books home to read, which they are really enjoying being able to do. One SSC member even spoke about borrowing books himself to take home and read. New shading for a bike park at one school, now means fewer students have bicycles with flat tyres. New school gardens or improvements to existing gardens have meant in one school that students can now read books in the shade. A new 100-metre fence built around one school, means that students are more likely to stay at school (as some students were taking time off study, by leaving the school through the back fence). The constructing of a Life Skills building in one school means students can now study home economics, cooking and sewing. A particularly important activity conducted at one school, was the building of a new toilet block, where there was only one toilet for all the students in the school. At this school, some girls were not attending because of this, and boys were sometimes urinating on the school grounds. The creation of a new toilet block in this school has had enormous benefits for the school community. One teacher said,

> ❝ The toilet blocks have made the school more hygienic, and this will improve students health … new toilets means no accidents, embarrassment or discomfort for studnets, which all disrupt study. ❞

Also, one commune council member stated,

> ❝ Before TLC came to our school, there was no fence, toilets, school garden, or Life Skill Center – now we have many infrastructures in the school, which are attracting students to enrol – and more female students are coming to school now that we have proper toilets for them. ❞

# 5 CONCLUSION

Findings of this evaluation have highlighted that the LSSDP has been a highly successful program in terms of meeting intended objectives for students and their school communities.

The program has successfully provided ongoing support and resourcing to SSCs at Krabei Riel and Chub Ta Trav Lower Secondary Schools that have created many positive outcomes for each of these school communities. SSC members are now meeting regularly. They are more confident to communicate with their local school community, but also with those in leadership roles and those outside the school community. They know how to conduct PRAs, write School Development Plans, and evaluate these processes, and they have gained skills in fund raising. Although SSCs have recognised that they need more practice in each of these capacity areas, they also recognise that they have come a very long way in terms of developing their skills and expertise in helping to drive participatory school development.

This evaluation has however also highlighted a number of challenges for SSCs, and the schools where the programs are being implemented. Sourcing ongoing funding is a particular issue and a constant struggle, even though some members of SSCs in each school believe they have the skills to seek funding. SSCs in both schools have identified many ongoing issues that require funds, including the need for more resources for classrooms, including curricular materials and resources to make the school a more comfortable and enjoyable space for both students and teachers. Other initiatives that have been identified in School Development Plans, such as School Exchange Visits and additional training for SSC members and teachers also require funds that SSCs do not have. The proposed 'Collaboration Grants' project of LSSDP however, will hopefully be a first step on this issue.

Since the LSSDP began, there have been enormous achievements in terms of construction activities and improvements to the school grounds, including the building of toilet blocks that are encouraging more girls to come to school, the provision of textbooks that children can now take home, improved libraries so children have more books to read, beautiful gardens so students can sit and read outside in the shade, and a teacher dormitory so the school has a safe space for teachers to live and for students to discuss schooling issues, to name just a few.

Furthermore, findings show that as a result of the LSSDP, KR and CCT community members and parents are more aware of the importance of their children's education and understand that the future of the community will be developed through well-educational children. Unfortunately, the challenges of poverty persist and remain a barrier for access to education, including the continuing challenge for the LSSDP of maintaining consistent membership on the SSCs, given the workload and family commitments of some of the members. The LSSDP will continue to work with SSCs and other community members to identify innovative strategies to respond to these socio-economic pressures.

An important finding of this evaluation is the need for finding more strategies for involving students and teachers in school development. That students were concerned about other students who were struggling both academically or had families that were struggling financially, and they were keen to be involved in helping these students, highlights the need for more of their involvement in finding strategies to deal with students who are at risk of dropping out. Interviews with teachers have highlighted that they feel they have much more to contribute to school development, but do not have the opportunities to share this knowledge or expertise, pointing also to the need to find ways to involve them in SSC meetings whether as members or at least attending regular meetings.

Many development projects are designed and delivered using a combination of participatory techniques, including Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), to uncover local problems, resource constraints, deficiencies and unmet basic needs. These approaches encourage participation, emphasize the importance of local knowledge and address real problems, but they often fail to sustain community participation after the implementing organisation withdraws (International

Institute for Sustainable Development [ISSD], 2000). Although Participatory Rural Appraisals usually generate volumes of data about the issues and needs of communities, and although consultation with communities about potential interventions to address these issues and needs usually occurs, it is often the development organisations, rather than the communities themselves, who develop the interventions to address the problems. This approach can lead to local people viewing their community as a place full of problems and needs, most of which require the help of outsiders to overcome. In these cases, the development workers become the agents of change in the community, rather than the community members themselves (IISD 2000), creating a sense of dependency in the community. This evaluation has proven that the Lower Secondary School Development Program has been successful in moving away from this problem-oriented model.

By building on existing strengths and local skills in the community, and engaging with local people, LSSDP has helped two school communities create a shared vision of an equitable and sustainable future for their school community, with both school communities now moving towards their vision through locally initiated and managed project initiatives. Furthermore, by combining the community driven approach of the Lower Secondary School Program with capacity-building initiatives at the village and school level, community members are able to successfully measure progress toward their vision and to modify their strategies as local circumstances change.

# 6 Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on evaluation findings, and are proposed to enhance outcomes for future LSSDP schools.

## LSSDP sustainability

- Explore mechanisms for supporting schools in a minimal capacity beyond the 3-4 years, to ensure a smooth transition from being supported to working autonomously.
- Support and resource SSCs to promote the committee in the school community (who they are, their role, how members can be involved).

## SSC capacity building

- Continue to reflect on what particular skills are needed for SSC members, and how to nurture and encourage SSC members to retain this capacity in the longer term.
- Explore potential to conduct personal development training for SSC members.
- For new LSSDP schools, collect baseline evaluation data for comparing SSC capacity and skill development.

## SSC membership

- Continue to develop strategies for responding to the effects of socioeconomic pressures on the SSC, which limit recruiting members for the committee.
- Explore strategies to involve students in the SSC – for example setting up a student group, with mechanisms for communicating to and from the SSC.
- Explore strategies for involving teachers in the SSC – for example having more teacher representatives on the SSC or involving teachers in more activities.

## Funding & accessing resources

- Continue to seek funds to implement and evaluate the new Collaboration Fund initiative.
- Explore ways to enhance the capacity and skills of SSC members in fundraising.
- Encourage SSCs to place importance on the provision of teaching and learning resources in School Development Plans.
- Develop a mechanism for ensuring schools and SSCs can be financially accountable to the Provincial and District education departments.
- Explore potential for the TLC Student Assistance Project to support students in LSSDP schools

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