

Community Impact Case Study FY21

## Teach For Cambodia – Growing a critical mass of leaders within the education system so that a new generation can shape the future of Cambodia

*Now placing its fourth cohort, Teach For Cambodia is aiming to support the younger generation of Cambodians to build a new future for the country. TFC recruits fellows who share the low-income background of their students, nurtures a deep sense of trust and connection between those fellows during the two year programme, and invests in building the capacity of fellows to understand the problems of the Cambodian system and how they might be solved. Several alumni from the first two cohorts are already working in key roles within the system shaping and implementing nationwide education policies.*



### The Basics

Teach For Cambodia's hope for the younger generation to shape the future of Cambodia is a response to the shared history and trauma of the genocide that touched the lives of all Cambodians. While the hope for the younger generation is widely shared, young people face significant challenges. Many boys and girls live in poverty and are forced into labouring jobs or migrating to find even subsistence-level work. The education system is similarly challenged. In schools, TFC fellows are typically responsible for teaching 250 students, with one fellow responsible for 1300 students. In 2013, Cambodia spent around USD 3,087 per student, which is a fraction of Thailand's USD 25,000 per student. In addition, 85% of teachers don't have degrees. While international agencies such as the World Bank

and ADB make investments in curriculum reform or higher education, there has been little positive effect on learning due to the systemic issues affecting basic education.

## The Approach

Teach For Cambodia now has 40 Participants and 60 Alumni working in 20 schools in Kampong Chnang, Kandal and Phnom Penh. Moni Shiv, CEO of Teach For Cambodia, feels pain at seeing the struggles of children across the country, but chooses to tell a story of hope for the younger generation, that they can become the engineers and doctors who will stay in Cambodia and shape the future of the country.

90% of TFC fellows come from the same tough and challenging low-income backgrounds as the students they teach. Some fellows have experienced homelessness, domestic violence, malnutrition growing up and one is the first woman in her district to go to higher education. This means fellows are resilient, humble and have empathy for the students and communities they serve. Fellows become representatives of the girls and boys that they work with in schools and are committed to the mission to rebuild the nation through younger generations.

During the two year teaching experience, fellows participate in a two-year Masters programme with the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), in which they have the opportunity to reflect on the systemic challenges they encounter in Cambodian education and reflect on how to resolve them.

There is also a focus within the two-year programme on nurturing trust and working through trauma among the fellows. Moni has close personal relationships with and knows the story of all of the fellows, and the two program managers who support fellows use practices of conscious leadership in order to support the fellows in reflecting on their leadership and working through their own trauma. This is further nurtured through an annual convening and an in-person retreat for all fellows; one of the most powerful activities is called the Circle of Trust, in which everyone shares their most traumatic experience and fear. This generates real intimacy and emotion, which TFC sees as one of the most important elements of trust.

## The Choices

1

**Mobilising people and strengthening institutions** - Teach For Cambodia is developing a nuanced understanding of how change happens in Cambodia. On the one hand, they frame their work as a shared movement towards nation-building for a younger generation. On the other, Teach For Cambodia also situates itself as an organisation that is building capacity for the education system – and particularly the ministry – through a public-private partnership model. This understanding of two ways of framing change is reflected in their wider approach.

2

**Trust is the key** - In a project to rebuild a nation and its institutions, Teach For Cambodia believes that trust is the key. In a society in which people have come from war and genocide, they have learned to mistrust, and the system is characterised by a culture of blame. In response, Moni models

---

trust in the government – that it has the right intentions, and is creating good plans – and deliberately nurtures trust among fellows, and with students and communities.

---

3

**Lived experience** - the majority of TFC's fellows and alumni come from the same backgrounds as their students. In addition to this focus on trust, TFC explicitly centres equity in its work, with many reflections among TFC staff, fellows and board members focusing on the deep negative impact of inequity on people of all backgrounds, whether privileged or underprivileged.

---

4

**Conscious leadership development** - TFC also seeks to support fellows and others to work through trauma, recognizing that the healing process is the foundation on which trust and equity can be established as norms. Repairing trust, working through trauma and orienting towards equity are intended to create the systemic conditions in which shared actions can achieve shared goals.

---

5

**Critical mass of alumni** - The second pillar of TFC's approach is to build a critical mass of leaders within the education system who have both lived experience of the system's failures and are committed to the mission of nation-building, and at the same time have learned about the systemic issues facing the younger generation in Cambodia and have reflected on how to overcome them.

---

## The Impact

Historically reforms in Cambodia have been well-designed by national government and international agencies, but they have often struggled in the implementation stage due to the lack of local leadership and ownership. TFC alumni are now showing how to bridge this gap. Several alumni are working on a Secondary School Improvement Project, a World Bank funded initiative that involves a partnership between the government and a Cambodia NGO supporting 100 pilot community schools that are experimenting with devolving some autonomy to the school level, and involving parents more clearly in school decision-making. This is now being scaled to 130 schools, reaching several thousand students, with the aim of scaling to 500+ in the years ahead with talent supplied by TFC.

Other alumni are working at the level of the national ministry to bring greater coherence to the government's reform plans, carry out research into global best practices, and bring the practical insight from their experience in classrooms and communities about how to achieve reform successfully. As representatives of the boys and girls they taught, they bring an empathy and understanding of the real barriers to reform, and as former teachers a sense of what it really takes to implement policies well. Further alumni are providing leadership training to both school leaders and teachers, such as with a Peer Learning Community Initiative (PLC) coordinated and supported by alumni Borath. The power of these reforms is that they are for Cambodia, by Cambodia. The ability of alumni to navigate the cultural and social norms of the system is the difference between progress and an imitation of progress.