



Indochina Starfish Foundation (ISF)

A Review for the Next Five Years

Summary

Our key strengths are these:

- a. We transform the lives of a small number of the most vulnerable children and families in Phnom Penh. We do this because the catch-up programme enables them to escape from poverty and from social, economic and educational exclusion.
- b. We have an effective board of trustees, who engage with a wide network of supporters.
- c. We have robust and transparent funding.
- d. We have committed and caring staff who deliver our programmes inside and outside our schools, with low staff turnover (less than 10% in the last three years) and good local knowledge and understanding.
- e. We have a responsive management team, willing to change and adapt.
- f. Our education and community development programmes are well integrated with each other.

The main things we need to do for the next five years are these.

- a. We need to improve teachers' skills, so that they are better able to meet the full range of students' needs, particularly those with learning difficulties.
- b. We need to include in our teaching programmes clear and measurable criteria by which their success can be judged. Priority should be given to the teaching of English (which is currently weak), to training designed to improve employability and to training in computer skills (which is currently rudimentary). But attention should also be given to the mainstream Khmer curriculum.
- c. We need to engage more with our students, their families and the community in order to promote the health, welfare, achievement and inclusion of the children whom we support.
- d. We need to improve classroom management, and widen our approaches to learning, in particular putting less emphasis on rote-learning.
- e. We need to develop our ability to monitor and evaluate our programmes, so as to be able to measure their impact on the lives of our students.

Context

Since its foundation in 2006, ISF has worked to transform the life chances and prospects of children and their families in Cambodia, who face some of the harshest of economic realities. It does so through its linked education, community development and football programmes.

The trustees asked ISF's management to conduct this review as a basis for planning for the next five years of ISF's activities. ISF has undoubtedly achieved a great deal to date, including by regularly refocusing its work in response to the needs of the children, families and communities which it supports. The ISF trustees now want to place particular focus on the quality of the outcomes of its programmes (in particular its education programme), so as to evaluate the impact which ISF is having on the lives of those whom it supports.

ISF bases its decisions on evidence and uses professional judgement in arriving at them. But it has prioritised action, not evaluation. This is because the children whom we help are at serious risk and need our help urgently. Our approach, perhaps unkindly dubbed "Ready, aim, fire", has not involved significant reflection on what we do, by the trustees or by management. Management has not found it easy to conduct a formal evaluative and reflective review of our education programme. Management lacks experience of conducting such a review. We collect data about our performance, but it is incomplete. We have sought the views of third parties (donors and employers for example), but have not gathered information from them formally or been able properly to check what they have told us against other evidence.

History and background

Education

ISF started operations in the Stung Meanchey area of Phnom Penh in 2006, with two teachers teaching basic English to 18 students in a small rented room. In 2007, the curriculum was expanded to include Khmer reading and writing, maths and drama. In 2008, the catch-up concept (under which we educate children to a standard which enables them to be integrated into the state education system) was conceived and implemented. Our first 22 catch-up students were integrated into the state system in 2008. We have integrated students from our Stung Meanchey school (which was opened in [year]) every year since then. The current education programme has not changed significantly since 2008, though there have been improvements in the computer, English and employment elements of it.

In 2012, we opened a second school, in the Chbar Ampov area of Phnom Penh. In 2013, the first 20 catch-up students from that school were integrated into the state system.

Community development

We maintain close and regular contact with all the families of our catch-up students. We support them with monthly food parcels, conditional on their children being absent from school no more than five times per month. The parcels help the families to replace the income lost by their children coming to school. Most of the families we work with have no formal education. In 2011, we started adult literacy classes for parents and older siblings of our catch up students. By the end of 2017, 59 people had attended these classes. We work in partnership with organisations that provide vocational training and employment opportunities for members of the families of our students. We help family members to earn money by making and selling handicrafts and provide a sewing course. By the end of 2017, 48 family members had received vocational training, 78 previously unemployed family members had found jobs (though 15 of them had quit) and 50 family members had completed the sewing course, with a further 11 in training.

Our social workers and nurses provide medical support, teach parenting and entrepreneurial skills, help with conflict resolution and provide links to training and job opportunities.

Poverty contributes to poor hygiene practices. Since 2013, we have, with Eco-Soap Bank, distributed for free discarded bars of soap from hotels to members of the communities in which we operate, so helping to prevent disease. By the end of 2017, we had distributed approaching 130,000 bars of soap.

We operate static and mobile libraries for both children and adults. Since we started doing this in 2014, the libraries have had approaching 70,000 visits. They now have an average of 1,100 visits per month.

Football

We believe that all children should have the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of organised sport. To this end, we sponsor a network of football teams for disadvantaged children and youth. We started (in 2006) by sponsoring 60 players from other NGOs. In 2012, we started to sponsor players from underprivileged communities directly. In 2013, we started to include teams from state schools, most of which do not have a budget for sports. Our football programme now has almost 4,000 players aged from 7 to 18, 1,600 of them girls, from 69 organizations, schools and communities. In 2011, we included deaf and hearing impaired players. In 2013, we included players with intellectual disabilities. In 2017, we included blind and visually impaired players, wheelchair users and players with HIV/AIDS. We operate a league from November to April and four annual tournaments, in February, March, June and December.

Review of the education programme

Catch-up evaluation

ISF's Catch-up Programme focuses on children from the slums of Phnom Penh, who have never benefited from schooling or have had to drop out because of extreme poverty. These children lag behind their peers in literacy and numeracy skills and lack confidence and life skills. ISF's Catch-up Programme enables students to complete two years of standard education in one school year, so allowing them to catch up with their age peers in standard education. This enables them to join government schools. Afterwards, ISF provides them with education and welfare support during their education and into employment.

ISF currently supports 219 catch-up students. They follow the same curriculum as students in government schools, studying Khmer, social sciences, mathematics and science.

These are the objectives of the Catch-up Programme.

- a. To provide fast-track education to students aged between eight and eleven who have had little or no previous education so that they can join government schools.
- b. To teach English classes to catch-up students. English is a must for university entrance and useful for employment.
- c. To provide health care to catch up students. This includes vaccinations, check-ups, education in personal hygiene and assistance in cases of tuberculosis, HIV and other chronic illnesses.

These are the strengths of the catch-up programme.

- a. It meets its educational targets. In the years 2015-2017, 154 students achieved the expected academic levels for their ages. All of them joined government schools at the grades recommended by ISF.
- b. Reports from government school teachers indicate that catch-up students who join state schools can read and write better than their peers.
- c. Feedback from other third parties evidences the high regard in which the curriculum and the nutritional, healthcare and material support are held.
- d. Students can focus on their studies and parents do not have to worry about the cost.

Our success in integrating our students into government schools indicates that the catch up programme is working well. Management does not recommend significant changes to the programme. However, the following are areas for development and consideration.

- a. Approximately 15% (5% after extra tuition) of catch-up students are unable to catch up at the same rate as their classmates.
- b. Training for students and staff in how to improve students' personal hygiene (together with the more frequent provision of school uniforms).
- c. Training for staff in dealing with students with learning difficulties or with disabilities.
- d. Some catch-up students turn out to be too young or not (despite initial assessments) to be suffering from poverty. We need to review our selection criteria with a view to avoiding taking in such students.
- e. Third parties ask how we measure the quality of the programme and how well teachers are teaching, particularly as the programme is not overseen by an education specialist. Teachers and management have suggested recruiting such a specialist, who could teach our Khmer teachers.
- f. Performance targets are higher at the Chbar Ampov than at the Stung Meanchey school and the former achieves better results than the latter. We need to understand why this is the case.
- g. When giving them food parcels, we should stress to parents the importance of education to their children, the critical role of the parents' in ensuring that their children attend school regularly and do their homework and the availability of help for students who need support.

Government school programme evaluation

After being in the catch-up programme, students go to government schools. ISF continues to give them academic, social and financial assistance. They have access to English teaching, computer and employability training and healthcare. In 2017 89% of students who had gone to government schools returned to ISF for activities.

- a. 68% of students from Stung Meanchey and 89% of students from Chbar Ampov came back for English classes.
- b. 85% of students from Stung Meanchey and 42% of students from Chbar Ampov came back for computer classes.
- c. 45% of students from Stung Meanchey and 90% of students from Chbar Ampov come back for breakfast/lunch or to socialise after school.

We would like all students who go to government schools to stay connected with ISF. We currently support 397 students at government schools.

Extra lessons, self-motivation and parental support are critical to the success of this programme. We provide extra lessons after school hours and during school holidays. We can provide more extra lessons. We work with government schools with a view to supporting the motivation of students to keep attending school.

These are the objectives of the government school programme.

- a. To support students in continuing their education to grade nine (a basic education) and ideally to grade 12 (a complete government education)
- b. To provide students with strong English and computer skills
- c. To give students a good understanding of sexual and reproductive health, providing them with the knowledge to make informed life choices, to protect themselves and to seek help where they need it.

These are the strengths of the programme.

- a. Our social workers regularly check attendance at government schools and contact the students themselves or their parents when the students are absent from school.
- b. Our extra classes, skills training, sports activities and other events enable us to continue to influence students in the right direction.
- c. For each of the last five years, a government school has singled out our students as the best (in terms of performance and attitude) from among those who have received education from eight NGOs.

Our government school programme is in general acceptable (including as evidenced by feedback from third parties) but we need to improve coordination between ourselves and government schools and to work more closely with students, parents and government school teachers. In addition, the following are areas for development and consideration:

- a. Some students lose motivation and require a lot of follow up from our social workers with government school teachers and parents. We need to build more and better capacity in this area, so as to improve the quantity and quality of our engagement with teachers and parents.
- b. The behaviour of some students deteriorates and some of them do not attend school regularly.
- c. Students drop out if their families move from Phnom Penh.
- d. We should consider hiring competent teachers from government schools to teach additional classes (in English and computer skills for example, with content and delivery being under our control) at our schools.
- e. We should encourage government schools to schedule classes on a consistent basis only in the mornings or only in the afternoons, so as to make it easier to schedule extra classes at our schools.
- f. We should build the capacity of our social workers to support teenage students and to motivate them to study
- g. We should consider employing members of students' families so as reduce the incentive to drop out of school.

General health programme evaluation

ISF believes that only happy and healthy children are able to learn effectively. As part of its holistic educational approach, ISF provides services necessary to support the health and wellbeing of its students.

ISF provides every student with vaccinations against ten illnesses (hepatitis A, hepatitis B, pneumococcal, typhoid, tetanus, meningococcus, rabies, measles, polio and Japanese encephalitis). Students with hepatitis B are given six monthly blood tests to check the progress of the disease. Children with HIV/AIDs are referred to Angkor Hospital for Children.

ISF provides optical care, dental care, regular check-ups and basic health and hygiene education. It provides toothbrushes and toothpaste, deworming treatment, shampoo and soap. Mental and emotional health problems are addressed by our nurses, if necessary with outside support.

We encourage parents to take students with serious health conditions to hospitals. We do not want create dependency on ISF.

The strengths of the general health programme are these:

- a. In general, the programme is meeting students' healthcare needs and part of their families' healthcare needs. Students' health improves. They have fewer infections and better eyesight. They visit our nurses less after they have been with us for one year and look healthier.
- b. The Angkor Hospital for Children provides extra training to our nurses, consultations on more serious cases and advice on care for students with hepatitis B, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis.
- c. Older students are generally cleaner, better nourished and healthier than younger students, indicating the success of the programme.
- d. The programme is accessible and covers most of our students' basic health needs.

These are the areas for development and consideration.

- a. Catch-up students, particularly new arrivals, need to improve their personal hygiene.
- b. We need a digital system to track students' health.
- c. We should consider extending the programme so that it covers children before they join the catch up programme.
- d. We should consider an outreach programme for early dental health intervention.

Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) programme evaluation

A SRH course is given to all students aged 13 or more. It covers human rights and gender equality, puberty, the reproductive system, contraception, sexually transmitted

diseases, pregnancy, abortion, safe sexual behaviour, sexual abuse, sex trafficking and pornography. Since the programme started in 2012, the course has been given to 184 students.

The objective of the SRH programme is to give students a good understanding of sexual and reproductive health, providing them with the knowledge to make informed life choices, to protect themselves and to seek help where they need it.

The strength of the SRH programme is welcomed by and relevant to students. It helps them to make informed decisions about their bodies, to protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies and to seek help where they need for the protection of their health.

These are the matters for development and consideration.

- a. The curriculum (which was developed in 2012) needs to be reviewed in the light of the increasing age of students being supported and the way in which social media are affecting students' sexual principles and decisions.
- b. We need to train more staff to deliver the programme, particularly at Chbar Ampov.

Computer programme evaluation

There are three computer courses, each lasting approximately 60 hours. On the first course, students learn how to navigate [the internet, Windows and] Microsoft Word, type in English and Khmer, create a new document, use the cut, copy and paste commands, and insert pictures. On the second course, students learn to manipulate and enhance text, to create and use tabs and tables, and to embellish documents with clip art and pictures. On the third course, students learn to create and modify PowerPoint presentations.

75% of students who have taken the courses at Stung Meanchey and 92% of students who have taken the courses at Chbar Ampov have completed them and passed the final course tests. The remainder dropped out or failed the test.

The objectives of the computer programme are these.

- a. to provide students with a basic understanding of computers [and the internet] and to enable them to use core Microsoft Office programs, in each case so as to improve their academic and employment prospects.
- b. To provide more advanced computer courses to students with the requisite desire and ability to benefit from them, so as to improve their chances of obtaining office or technology related employment.

The strength of the computer programme is that it does make students more employable and more likely to be able to go on to higher education.

These are the areas for development and consideration.

- a. The curriculum and teaching materials need to be reviewed.

- b. Consideration should be given to the establishment of a formal qualification.
- c. Evaluation of the programme should be facilitated by progress reporting using clearly defined indicators of progress.
- d. We should focus more on IT skills and less on typing.
- e. We need to consider whether to teach coding and programming.
- f. We need to clarify what IT skills and whether the programme is consistent with them.
- g. There should be more and more engaging applications.
- h. Classes should be scheduled so as not to conflict with classes at government schools.

English programme evaluation

Learning English makes our students more employable. This is why we have our normal English programme. Without extra tuition, ISF students who complete high school cannot go to university because they do not know enough English. ISF therefore offers, in addition to the normal English programme, a pre-university English course to its students. An outside provider runs the course. It is intended to bring it in house.

Some donors and trustees believe that not every student will be able to learn English or go on to do a job which requires English. They think that the education programme should not be assessed by reference to its success in teaching English and point out that the Khmer curriculum enables students to give up rubbish-collecting and improves their chances of post school employment. But employers of ISF students point out that basic English skills (reading and writing, even if the job does not involve speaking) are often necessary. They think that the English programme is vital (albeit currently weak).

In July 2017, ISF hired a programme head and one full-time and one part-time native English speaker.

The objectives of the English programme are these.

- a. To provide our students with the desire and ability to use English for employment purposes.
- b. To give our students who are otherwise capable of going on to university sufficient English skills to enable them to do so.

The strengths of the English programme are these.

- a. All students in the catch-up programme and all government school students at Chbar Ampov regularly attend English classes.
- b. Students' confidence in English has improved since the recruitment of native English-speaking teachers.
- c. Government school students who attend our English classes think that their teachers are caring and attentive, like the class sizes and study materials,

and find that the class times are sufficiently flexible to fit in with their other school obligations.

The areas for development and consideration are these:

- a. There are no clear objectives for the whole curriculum, for any level of the curriculum or for any student group participating in the programme.
- b. Some teachers are not familiar with the curriculum and some courses have no course books to guide teachers.
- c. Lesson plans do not include clear teaching techniques or lesson objectives. Some teachers do not plan lessons.
- d. Lessons are dull. They lack creativity and variety. There is little student participation.
- e. Some teachers pronounce English poorly.
- f. It is not clear whether what is taught matches students' needs.
- g. Students usually speak Khmer in English classes, including when responding to teachers. Teachers themselves rarely speak English.
- h. Most students cannot express themselves in basic English.
- i. We should consider inviting an English Schools Foundation volunteer teacher to work with the programme head in order to develop new teaching skills and materials.

Employment programme evaluation

The employment programme aims to prepare our students for working life, to help them to reach their potential by obtaining employment which matches their skills, abilities and interests and which provides them with an adequate income, opportunities for progression and job satisfaction. The programme is in its early stages. Its three elements are soft skills training, vocational training and engagement with employers. 82 students have participated in the programme. Eight have dropped out or lost contact.

These are the objectives of the employment programme:

- a. To give to the students the soft skills necessary for them to attain and maintain appropriate employment.
- b. To give (with other NGOs and training organisations) vocational training in occupations such as catering, being a mechanic, plumbing, being an electrician, carpentry and tailoring.
- c. To build strong and sustainable relationships with employers so as to provide opportunities for our students to be employed by them.

These are the strengths of the employment programme:

- a. The programme staff know and understand the programme well.

- b. There is a good understanding of the gap between the skills which participants have and those which they need in order to obtain employment.
- c. There are good relationships with vocational training schools and employers.

These are the areas for development and consideration.

- a. The soft skills curriculum is unstructured and underdeveloped.
- b. Criteria for success are not clearly defined.
- c. Selection criteria for programme participants are needed.
- d. We lack tools to monitor the progress of participants.
- e. We need to develop the three components of the programme. Each of them needs a significant overhaul. We should consider commissioning an outside review of the soft skills curriculum. We need to identify high quality vocational training schools. There are not enough employment partners. Large local or multinational partners are needed in particular. We need to select employment partners by reference to their ability to provide appropriate training and ultimate job prospects.
- f. We should consider hiring a head of the programme and more training for staff.

Costs

Implementing improvements to the employment programme is estimated to bring its cost to US\$86,000 in the first year (from US\$21,000 currently) and to US\$80,000 per annum thereafter. The other improvements envisaged by the review are estimated to cost no more than US\$20,000 per annum.

Action plan

Area development for	Action	When	Cost
Catch-up programme	highlight to parents the importance of their children's education	done and on-going	None
	provide training to Khmer teachers on how to teach children with learning disabilities.	quarter 2 (Q2) 2018	none
	nurse to provide more training to catch-up children on hygiene	done 2017	none
	request board to consider providing up to four uniforms per year instead of two		\$8.10 each
	review selection criteria for catch-up students	done 2017	none
	request board to consider hiring part time staff to oversee the Khmer teacher training		researching
	review the different success criteria for both schools and why results differ	Q1, 2018	none
Government school programme	hire state school teachers (part time) to teach state school students in ISF school	Q1, 2018	researching
	highlight to parents the importance of their children's	done and on-going	none

	education		
	try to re-organise students' government school schedules	Q1, 2018	researching
	raining social workers	Q2, 2018	US\$5000
	develop plan to provide further employment assistance to more parents	Q2-Q4, 2018	researching
General health programme	research availability of digital systems for recording students medical and health data	Q2 and Q 3, 2018	researching
	discuss with the board whether we would like to expand work with dental care in the communities	no more action needed	-----
Sexual and reproductive health programme	research whether the programme needs to be updated	Q2, 2018	US\$3000
	training staff	Q3, 2018	US\$1000
Computer programme	review teaching materials	Q 1 & 2, 2018	none
	investigate issuing formal certificates	Q1- 2, 2018	none
	further discussion with the board with regards to coding programme	Q1, 2018	researching
English programme	implement the short-term plan (attached)	will review in Q3, 2018	cost agreed by the board in March 2017
	implement the 5 year strategic plan (attached)		
	volunteer from ESF for three months	Q1, 2018	

	(already confirmed)		
Employment programme	recruit head of programme.	Q1, 2018	US\$65,000
	review the current soft-skill curriculum.	Q2-Q4, 2018	
	Train staff.	Q2 and onward	
	identify high quality vocational training schools.	Q3 and onward	
	identify organisations that we would like students to get work placements with.	Q3 and onward	
Other key actions	set clear success criteria for each programme.	Q1 & 2, 2018	no cost
	improve the Monitoring and Evaluation system for each programme and staff's ability to use the system	Q1 & 2, 2018	US\$2000