



Board and Senior Management response to Needs Assessment and Impact Evaluation

In the first half of 2012, PEPY conducted two surveys with stakeholders to better understand how current programming was addressing the needs of beneficiaries, and to gain a deeper insight as to how to improve ongoing programs and what other areas might be appropriate for new program design.

The first survey was a Needs Assessment of the young people in Chanleas Dai commune (appendix A) conducted by consultant Phany Tum with the assistance of PEPY staff members. The second survey was an Impact Evaluation of PEPY's current programs (appendix B) conducted by consultant Sokheng Suong.

After reviewing these two documents PEPY's Board and Senior Management Team (SMT) wanted to share their thoughts and opinions on the conclusions stated.

To begin with, the Board and SMT would like to restate the reasoning behind decisions made in August 2011 with regards to refocusing PEPY's vision and mission and transitioning away from certain types of programming.

During a strategic planning session in August 2011, it was agreed that PEPY's projects were too wide-ranging to be a) manageable and b) as effective as possible. Moreover, programs were not integrated around cohesive values, vision, and goals. Some programs focused on small-scale change through advocacy and sustainability through working within government systems, whereas others gave larger amounts of resources and training without the same required community resources. After defining our core values, our strengths, and where we thought it was possible to effect the most change, we agreed on the following streamlined vision and mission:

Vision: All young Cambodians empowered to achieve their dream

Mission: To invest time and resources in young people in Cambodia, working with them to connect them to the skills, systems, and inspiration necessary to achieve their goals, raise standards of living, and improve the quality of education in their communities

PEPY's target group was identified as young people under the age of 25. The reasons behind this were as follows:

- PEPY has a young staff and as such works very well with young people. It is however more challenging for our young staff members to work with older teachers, principals and figures in authority due to the different levels of respect given to age in Cambodian culture.
- Working with schools and teachers involves many challenges that are beyond PEPY's control. For instance, no matter how much a teacher may be interested in receiving training from PEPY, it is not realistic to deliver that training when the teacher has to try and teach two classes simultaneously due to a lack of teachers in rural schools. PEPY's strengths were not at policy level advocacy, and our core values around investing in people not things and sustainability made these external challenges particularly problematic.
- PEPY projects having the most impact were the ones in which we worked directly with young people, our staff often acting as mentors as well as educators.
- We believed we could be most effective at creating change in Cambodia through working directly with young people. By doing so, PEPY is investing time and resources in the next generation of adults. If the young people of today believe in education and are motivated to take action in their own communities then PEPY, or organizations like us, won't be needed tomorrow.

As a result of these discussions and decisions it was decided to transition out PEPY programs that worked with schools and teachers and focus on those programs through which we invest directly in young people.

The Board and SMT still believes in and stands by these decisions made in August of last year as the most positive course of action for PEPY over the next few years.

With regards to the two reports, the Board and SMT agree with many of the recommendations made by Phany Tum and Sokheng Suong, and disagrees with others. In particular we agree on the importance of the following areas, which were all identified as current areas for growth:

- Identifying the life cycle of each project and planning new projects with inbuilt sustainability of exit strategies
- Drafting logical frameworks for each project (both existing and new)
- Involving stakeholders in project design – especially young people. We realize however that involving stakeholders can be challenging due to the demands on their time and also being clear as to whether their interest is due to potential financial benefits rather than passion for change.
- Ensuring all PEPY staff have a clear understanding of PEPY's core values, goal, vision, mission and project goals and methods of implementation
- Monitoring tools developed for each project with training for project staff, as well as an ongoing evaluation process
- Building staff capacity to consistently develop and challenge the PEPY team

- Aligning projects where possible with national policies – especially in regards to youth development. However we are also mindful that we do not want to lose sight of our own vision and mission.
- Improving communication with Community Development Program and schools so that PEPY team can share information on students at risk of dropping out and the school can be aware of the additional skills and activities young people are developing outside of their school
- Considering designing programs that work with parents, to the extent there is an established need to do so and we can be effective in this role.

The Board and SMT has reservations about the following recommendations. In some cases, we disagree because we believe the suggestions/observations are not based on adequate research. In other cases we believe the suggestions do not reflect PEPY's core values, new vision or mission, or need further debate and discussion before being considered as viable future options.

In particular, through this experience we have recognized the challenges of having short-term external consultants evaluate programs, as they may not devote adequate time to critically evaluate programs, or may not share PEPY's core values. One major lesson learned from this process is that external evaluators are not always preferable to internal evaluations and may not be worth the significant cost.

Specifically, we disagree with the following recommendations:

- **Restarting or expanding Library project and Classroom Libraries.**
For the reasons stated above, PEPY decided to move away from teacher training models. In addition, the PEPY Library in Chanleas Dai Junior High School was always intended to be transitioned over the school at some point. If a school or the District Office of Education is interested in developing a library project then of course PEPY would consider this but we feel they must include a long-term sustainability plan so they can be run by the school. We are also keen to share our methodology and lessons learned from these projects with other organizations.
- **Drop-out Prevention program.**
Many of PEPY's current and potential future programs address some aspect of student drop out, either by offering extra skills or providing role models. However we disagree that these programs should explicitly discourage migration. Migration to Thailand is caused by a variety of environmental, social and economic factors. . As such, we don't believe that it would make sense to design a project specifically aimed at reducing student drop out as a result of migration as there are too many external factors that PEPY has no control over. In addition, we see the value in considering introducing a "safe migration" part of the curriculum in each project so that young people are connected to the appropriate information

and resources so they can make the best decision for themselves regarding this issue.

- **Income generation.**

While the Board and SMT recognize that income generation projects may be beneficial for the young people of Chanleas Dai, we do not believe a Cow Bank is necessarily the right choice. The report doesn't offer a range of choices about income generation and this seemed like a one-off suggestion that was not adequately researched. There is little grass in Chanleas Dai to make this feasible, cow-rearing requires a lot of work and therefore draws young people away from their studies, and many of the community have experimented with this before and ended up selling their cows because they did not experience much benefit and preferred their children to spend time on their studies. We would however be interested in considering the potential of other income generation projects.

- **Spending more time training government teachers to implement PEPY projects rather than having external PEPY staff facilitate these projects.**

The concern here was that PEPY won't be "sustainable" if PEPY staff implement projects. However, we believe that we are still having a "sustainable" impact as we are building the capacity of young people to be able to take action in their own lives. We do value this recommendation as an option for a potential exit strategy for our projects but don't believe it is the only option, or something that has to be a part of every single project.