THE BEACON SCHOOL INITIATIVE

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Presentation Overview

• Cambodian context
• Project overview
• Key challenges
  • Project buy in
  • Equity in the project
• Key successes
  • Risk taking
  • Equitable partnership
  • Innovative project tools
The Cambodian Context

- Cambodia consistently ranks low for education outcomes in South East Asia
- 65% of the youth population is under 30 years old

**ASEAN Secondary School Participation: Net Enrolment Ratios**

(%, 2008-2012)

Source: UNICEF, 2013. NB: Data unavailable for Singapore
The Beacon School Initiative Project

- KAPE developed the Beacon School Initiative (BSI) in 2010
- Oaktree, Australia’s largest youth-led development organisation, partnered with KAPE to fund BSI
The Beacon School Initiative Project

• BSI aimed to create a new model of schools in Cambodia by working to transform three public secondary schools in Kampong Cham

• At its heart was an overhaul of school management
A Project Champion

• The new Minister for Education, Youth and Sport had a mandate to reform the education sector

• The Minister decided to trial BSI as a *New Generation School* (NGS) in Phnom Penh

• NGS was signed into national Cambodian education policy in 2016
KEY CHALLENGES
Lack of Buy-In from Key Stakeholders

- One of the three pilot schools (Skon) struggled
- The school director was very resistant to the changes
- Rural location provided challenges
Lack of Equity

• BSI has been controversial as middle-income students are asked to volunteer to pay school fees.

• The schools require a certain level of resources to become an NGS school.
KEY SUCCESSES
Taking a Risk

- BSI was seen as high risk
- Oaktree shared this risk with KAPE
Equitable Partnership

“The relationship with Oaktree was incredibly equitable. In fact, we can safely say that of all our donors, Oaktree was absolutely the most equitable”
– Kurt Bredenberg, Senior Technical Advisor, KAPE (personal communication, 2017)
“Transparency with donors can be a slippery slope. [However] we feel very comfortable expressing what the challenges are and what the successes are [with Oaktree]. This is because Oaktree is very understanding. We feel very comfortable about being totally transparent”

– Kurt Bredenberg, Senior Technical Advisor, KAPE

(Oaktree 2016:17)
Equitable Partnership

- KAPE and Oaktree worked to build an equitable partnership
- Power of knowledge vs. power of money
- Oaktree minimised donor conditionality
Innovative Project Tools

• Top administrators, including Minister of Education asked to be included in social media apps

• Schools and local stakeholders set up social media pages

• These social media posts were shared through Ministry pages
Innovative Project Tools

• Developed professional learning communities for teachers and school principals using social media apps
• There has been a high level of use of these apps
WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?
Implications for the Sector

• Important to address the root cause of a development challenge (poor school governance and management)

• Local buy-in can be difficult, particularly in contexts with high corruption, and in rural areas

• There is a tension around ideals and pragmatism (equity)

• Have to work to build equitable partnerships
  • Prioritise local knowledge
  • Minimise donor conditionality
Implications for the Sector

• Use innovative project tools to allow for participation of stakeholders
• Important to have a strategic project champion
• It is important for donors to be willing to take, and share, risk
THANK YOU

For any questions, please feel free to contact:

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